

Perseverance in Prayer

Bible Background • LUKE 11:1-13

Printed Text • LUKE 11:5-13 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 13

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **DISCOVER** the meaning of Jesus' exhortation to ask, seek, and knock; **DESIRE** God to give the Holy Spirit the greatest possible gift; and **DEDICATE** ourselves to praying daily as a vital aspect of our lives.

In Focus

Kenny could not understand why, after five years on the job, he had not been promoted. He showed up on time, he did his job properly, and he was always upbeat and positive; he had even trained some of the people who moved up the ladder ahead of him. What was the problem? Troubled by this situation, he began to share his frustrations with a friend one evening while attending mid-week Bible study.

"I don't get it, man. What am I doing wrong? I like my job. I like the company, but they just won't give me a break. I apply for new and better positions, but I can't seem to move up. I'm qualified; I've got the skills; I just don't get it," Kenny told his friend Brad. "Um," replied Brad. "How's your prayer life?"

"You know what? Initially, I prayed for God to lead me to the right employer and He did, but after I got the job, I stopped praying about it."

"Well, I think it's time you started praying about it. There are three of us who get together every morning at 6:30 on a conference call for prayer. Join us."

"That's a good idea. I think I will join all of you brothers. Let me get your number."

In today's text, Jesus teaches that persistent prayer helps through life's many twists and turns. He taught we have a loving Heavenly Father to whom we can persistently bring our needs in prayer. How often do you actually bring your needs to Him?

Keep in Mind

"And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9, NLT).

Words You Should Know

Decapolis. de-KA-poe-liss.

Say It Correctly

A. Friend (v. 5) *philos* (Gk.) — A loved one, a dear and friendly person, associate, or neighbor

B. Ask (v. 9) *aiteo* (Gk.) — To request in a way that suggests the petitioner is lower in position than the one to whom the petition is made

KJV

Luke 11:5 And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;

6 For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?

7 And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.

8 I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

9 And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

10 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

11 If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?

12 Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

13 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

NLT

Luke 11:5 Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story: “Suppose you went to a friend’s house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him,

6 ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’

7 And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can’t help you.’

8 But I tell you this—though he won’t do it for friendship’s sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.

9 And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.

10 For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

11 You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead?

12 Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not!

13 So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

The People, Places, and Times

Hospitality. The virtue of hospitality was mandatory in ancient Jewish and Mediterranean cultures. It is commanded and commended throughout the Bible. Moses spoke about it in Exodus 22:21 and Deuteronomy 14:28–29. Abraham was hospitable to three strangers and discovered that he had entertained the Lord and two angels (Genesis 18, Hebrews 13:2). When we share with others, we share with Christ (Matthew 25:35, 43). Jesus enjoyed hospitality when He was on earth and so did the apostles (see Acts 18;17; Philippians 2:2). Christ shows us the epitome of hospitality by receiving us into His kingdom and preparing a place for us (John 14:2–3). A believer’s hospitality to others is a reflection of God’s hospitality to us (Luke 14:16 ff.).

Background

The Scriptures reveal how important prayer was to Jesus’ earthly existence. Time alone with His Father reflected His pre-incarnate existence, and Jesus’ prayer showed His total dependence on His Father (John 5:19, 30). The outcome of His prayer life was marked with unexplainable wisdom and power (Luke 4:18, Acts 10:38). Jesus’ disciples asked that He teach them to pray as John the Baptist taught his disciples. (Luke 11:1–4; cf. Matthew 6:9–15). What we know as the “Lord’s Prayer” serves as a model for approaching God in prayer as

Father who is holy. In every prayer recorded in the Gospels, Jesus addressed God as Father, which was groundbreaking. Jesus shared a new norm in approaching God as Father and through prayer made the relationship and conversation personal. Jesus made access to the Father attainable by changing the perspective on what it means to pray without lofty, pious words (Matthew 6:5-7). He also radically changed who was able to approach God by inviting everyone who believes in Him to call God Father (Matthew 23:9).

How do you view God, and how does it affect how you approach God in prayer?

At-A-Glance

1. The Picture of Perseverance (Luke 11:5–8)
2. The Results of Perseverance (vv. 9–10)
3. The Response to Perseverance (vv. 11–13)

In Depth

1. The Picture of Perseverance (Luke 11:5–8)

Jesus uses an illustration to underscore His point in teaching on God as Father. He shares with His audience an example that places them in the scenario. Jesus asks His listeners to suppose that a friend comes by at an inconvenient hour to ask a favor. At the heart of this is the issue of hospitality. In Jewish culture, hospitality was an important custom because it speaks of the love modeled by God toward Israel and is replicated by all members of the community.

Jesus' parable presents quite a problem for the listeners. A friend who has a visitor of his own is unprepared to show hospitality and so requests help for his situation. However, when he knocks on his neighbor's door, the person approached does not open the door. Instead, he sends his friend away, saying that he and his family have retired to bed. What Jesus makes apparent is that the untimely visitor kept knocking on the door to receive a response. It is also important to note that the man was not asking for himself. He was asking in order to help someone else. Jesus ends the parable with the words, "I say to you" meaning that Jesus is about to tell the point of the parable. Despite the friendship of the two men, the door was answered—not out of an obligation as a friend—but because of the person's persistence, his relentless pursuit of a resolution to his situation. His perseverance led to his receiving what he asked for.

How are we persistent in prayer on behalf of others?

2. The Results of Perseverance (vv. 9–10)

Jesus then clarifies the focal point of His teaching. He instructs His audience to keep pursuing God by asking, seeking and knocking. To ask is more than just politely making a request. Jesus is telling us to earnestly beg the Lord for what we need. Second, we are to seek God. This implies looking with the expectation of finding a solution to our situation. Finally, we are to knock. Knocking cannot be done from across the street or in the next suburb! Knocking requires that you go directly to the person's door. Our knocking then means stepping into the presence of the Lord so that our request can be made known. Notice that as we ask, seek, and knock, we are getting closer in a relationship with the person we are asking to help. So it is with God.

Jesus always placed emphasis on going after God and pursuing fellowship with Him. Everything needed in life is found in Him (Matthew 6:33). The outcome of such a prayer life is to live in the will of the Father who always gives us what is best for us because that accomplishes His purpose in us. As a result of an ongoing pursuit of God through prayer, believers have what they need (Psalm 37:3–5, Matthew 6:6, 25–26).

Does asking, seeking, and knocking give us a blank check to ask God for whatever we want? Does it obligate God to give it to us?

3. The Response to Perseverance (vv. 11–13)

Jesus shared another relatable illustration with His disciples to show the goodness of God and His response to the one who pursues Him. In short, Jesus said that if human fathers provide for their children and take the time to listen, then believers should expect that their heavenly Father will do the same. God’s response to our pursuit of Him in prayer is that He will give us His Holy Spirit who is our unlimited power supply. The Holy Spirit is not given to us for selfish pursuit or gain, but to keep us connected to the Father and to trust His purpose. Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give and be gracious to us (Psalm 84:11, Luke 12:32, James 1:17).

Why should we approach God as a trustworthy Father?

Search the Scriptures

1. Describe the two illustrations Jesus used to display how to approach God and how He responds to prayer? (Luke 11:5–8, 11–12)
2. What will God give to us freely if we ask in prayer? (Luke 11:13)
3. What three approaches to asking does Jesus give us?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why does Jesus end this discourse on being persistent in prayer (ask, seek, knock) with God’s good gift of the Holy Spirit?
2. Why is it important to keep the focus of our pursuit of God?
3. Is it ever appropriate to ask God to meet our wants and desires, or are we only to ask about our physical needs?

Liberating Lesson

We are able to pursue God in prayer and trust Him for what we need, but when we ask, seek, and knock, it should not be for selfish gain. The body of Christ is set apart to be salt and light in the earth. When we ask, seek, and knock in our pursuit of God, we can expect that God will answer prayer. But we should also be mindful of how what we ask, seek, and knock for can bless others.

The church should bear witness of the Father’s willingness to hear and answer prayer and serve as a testimony to lead others to Christ. We should ask, seek, and knock for God to use us in the earth to bring His will on earth as it is in heaven. When the church is in lockstep with God, His power is the key to bringing forth justice for the poor and oppressed (Psalm 10:17–18, Isaiah 1:17) because pure religion cares for the world (James 1:27).

Application for Activation

James teaches that we do not have because we do not ask, and when we do ask, we do not receive because we ask amiss due to our worldly passions (James 4:2–3). As believers, we need to purify our hearts to ensure that our pursuit of God is with the right motives. We must seek His kingdom and His righteousness. We must place our trust in God’s character and His love for us, knowing that everything we need is in Him. Therefore, we can come boldly to the throne of grace and be persistent in prayer. We are able to come to God as Father as instructed by Jesus and believe that He can reward those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Luke 11:5–13

In today's text, Jesus has just finished teaching His disciples how to pray. He taught them a model prayer, which we refer to today as the Lord's Prayer.

5 And he said unto them, which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?

Needs give rise to prayers, which are usually in the form of supplications or requests. This lesson begins with a parable in which Jesus portrays a situation where a need arises, and a neighbor has to ask a friend for help. Philos (FEE-los) is the Greek word translated "friend." It denotes a "loved one, a dear and friendly person, associate, or neighbor." The person to whom supplication is made is usually seen as a supplier of the need. Even though God is the ultimate supplier of all needs, there are times when we need help from a friend or a neighbor. While our need may be urgent, we must realize that sometimes a need arises when the circumstances are not favorable. The person may lack the resources to help. At other times, the need may arise at the wrong time of the day or out of season so that the friend cannot help, no matter how pressing it is.

In Jesus' parable, the neighbor went to call upon his friend at midnight to make a supplication. He beseeches his friend to lend him three loaves of bread. The man seeking to borrow three loaves has a sense of obligation because he realizes that he is expected to provide refreshments for the person who has come to visit him. All of this occurs at midnight. In a parable, the darkness of midnight implies a calamity, sorrow, or unfavorable situation. Jesus' listeners understood, like us, that when you go to someone for help "at midnight," the welcome may not be good, leaving us with a pressing need in the midst of an awkward and trying state of affairs.

For believers, such an end-of-the-rope situation is likely to inspire us to pray. We should be motivated to pray with a sense of need and a sense of obligation. When we are motivated by need, we are usually asking for ourselves, but when we are driven by obligation then we feel a sense of duty to pray for or make intercession for others. In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul urges us to be alert and always praying, interceding for all the saints (6:18). This means "standing in the gap" for another person whose need you see as urgent.

7 And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.

The refusal to open the door created an impediment to the friend's chances of having his needs met. The man felt troubled by his friend's request. This gives us the idea that the supplicant's request was a disturbance to his friend—so much so that the friend may become weary of being bothered. Without opening the door and giving any hope of access, the man answer's his friend with four statements. First, he states that his friend is troubling him. The word translated "trouble" is kopos (KOH-poce), which means "weariness, laborious toil." This gives us the idea that the supplicant's request was a disturbance to his friend and will make the friend weary himself or give him such laborious toil in the process of opening the door and going to give the supplicant what he requests. The friend seems to say, "Don't bother me because I will not go through the trouble of opening the door to get what you need." Second, the door is shut. The implication is that it is well past the time of shutting

the door. It simply too late. Third, the man says that his children are in bed with him, meaning that the entire household is being upset by his friend's persistence. Finally, he says, for these reasons it is impossible for him to get out of his bed to answer the friend's request. We are all familiar with times when we can't seem to get our prayer needs met; despite praying, it seems answers are not forthcoming.

8 I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

In this parable, the man was unwilling to give his friend what he requested. When we look to people for help, we will find that some are unwilling to extend themselves for another person's request, regardless of the reason or need. Some people are stingy and cruel. Others lack the resources or are reluctant to share. Despite his familiarity with his friend, the homeowner will not go through the trouble to help. The Greek word for "importunity" is *anaideia* (ah-NIE-day-ah). The use of this term means that the friend is shamelessly persistent in seeking help from his neighbor. He is not shy about asking his friend for help. When one's need is pressing, he or she will go beyond the bounds of modesty, casting away dignity and any pretense of decorum in order to get the needed response.

Another interpretation of the word *anaideia* focuses on the giver. The request is honored simply because the reputation of the giver is at stake. Jesus uses this parable to emphasize the need for earnestness and perseverance in prayer to God. From this vantage point, the focus is on God's nature as a generous giver who responds to all manner of requests, even those that arise under less than ideal circumstances. In these verses, Jesus strongly encourages us to bring all of our requests to God, particularly those that are most urgent. Even if we have a need at midnight, Jesus enjoins us to seek God with persistence and determination, believing fully that God will and can answer our prayer.

9 And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. 10 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Here we are made to know three forms of outward actions in the process of requesting: asking, seeking, and knocking. In this passage, Jesus' encouragement for us to do these three things elevates them to the status of command backed by divine authority. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Jesus provides these three commands as a way for us to gain the substance of our faith by making requests of God. Asking, seeking, and knocking are different forms of petition. Here the Greek word *aiteo* (eye-TEH-oh) is translated as ask. Its use suggests that the petitioner is lower in position than the one to whom the petition is made. The Greek word translated "seek" is *zeteo* (dzay-TEH-oh). *Zeteo* signifies a seeking that is aggressive and therefore the seeker strives, endeavors, and desires that which is sought. Its use suggests that seeking is not a passive inquiry. *Krouo* (KROO-oh) is the Greek word translated "knock." When we knock at another's door, we are close to their place of abode. When we think of this term in regard to petitioning God, we are knocking on the door of heaven.

The coveted privileges of receiving, finding, and experiencing an open door is for everyone, without discrimination. Though Jesus was speaking to His disciples, His statement seems to apply to a general audience—believers and nonbelievers—because of its axiomatic nature. In practice, followers of Christ are instructed to make petitions in the name of Jesus. We must have a fundamental belief in Jesus (John 14:12–14), the reality of abiding in Him and His words abiding in us (John 15:7). The fact that He chose us and ordained us so that we should bear fruit (John 15:16) gives us authentic grounds to petition God in the name of Jesus. God is the ultimate source of our needs.

Jeremiah 17:7 says, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is." A consistent attitude of petitioning God in times of need is sure to breed trust and reliance on Him. As we go through the challenges of life, we can always petition our Heavenly Father, being fully assured that we will receive what we need. The three terms—ask, seek and knock—are each followed by a resultant action. If we bring our needs

before the Lord in prayer, then Jesus gives us the assurance that if we ask, we will receive; if we seek, we will find; and if we knock, the door will be opened.

11 If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? 12 Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

Jesus uses a comparison here to point out God's generosity and His desire to respond to our petitions. Understanding this example hinges on the significance of the items identified here. Jesus' parable is about a son and his father, but it applies to any parent and their child. There is an expectation here of a nurturing father and a proper parental relationship, just as a loving and caring father is willing and expected to please his son and to give him what is right and good. Given the expected relationship between parent and child, Jesus provides a common example to prove his point regarding God's generosity and love.

Jesus poses three questions. He asks what father would give his son a stone in place of bread. The child's request for bread is based on an innate desire to live. Bread is used figuratively of food in general. But bread also provides the sustenance of life, spirit, and eternal life because Jesus is the Bread of Life. It is abnormal for a parent to offer a stone instead of the requested cake of bread. Stones were used as a means of punishing offenders. Those who committed certain evils were stoned to death. Any parent who would do such a thing as substituting a stone for bread is cruel and wicked. Another request a child might make is for some fish. In biblical times fish constituted one of the staple foods, and the fish trade was highly developed as indicated by the fact that some of the apostles of Christ were fishermen. To offer a serpent in place of a fish would be indicative of giving the son something that would definitely bring pain instead of sustenance. It is not clear that the snake is poisonous, but its intent to harm and hurt the child is clear. To give a child a scorpion in place of an egg is another way of providing that which brings harm instead of life. But the scorpion goes further; it is known to bring sudden death.

13 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Man is evil from birth (Psalm 51:5), and as such he is prone to evil. Poneros (poe-nay- ROCE) is the Greek word translated "evil." It can mean "wicked, bad, vicious" and is used to describe the moral or ethical condition of people. Jesus addresses His disciples in a way that lets them know that they are inherently evil as a result of the Fall yet they still have the capacity to give good gifts to their children. This is indicative of their fatherly love, their willingness to do good to their children, and the fact that they feel the imperative to perform their fatherly responsibilities. Jesus then compares their character of evil, which produces the good that cares for their child, with the essential character of goodness, love, generosity, and kindness with which our Heavenly Father abounds. Based on God's intrinsic nature, and the fact that He is our Father, He will give us what is good for us. In concluding His explanation, Jesus encourages His followers to come to God with their requests and with the expectation that God will provide for them because God desires to give good things to His children. Spiritual development is essential for every child of God, and the Holy Spirit is the agent of that development. In every believer, development should begin with an aspiration to grow. It is this aspiration that leads us to petition God. Spiritual development is characterized by an increase in the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. Believers must desire to grow and to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. Our spiritual development is seen when we yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit, desire and receive the gifts of the Spirit, and consistently receive the revelation of truth as guided by the Spirit. As children of God, we must grow in the knowledge of Christ as well as in wisdom and understanding. These are laudable areas upon which we should petition God to help us as we grow in our trust of Him. He will grant our requests.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Daniel Prays Despite Legal Prohibition
(Daniel 6:6–13)

TUESDAY

God Forms the Holy Nation
(Ezekiel 36:22–28)

WEDNESDAY

Jesus Prays for Future Believers
(John 17:20–26)

THURSDAY

The Holy Spirit Empowers Believers
(Acts 1:6–11)

FRIDAY

Justice for Those Who Pray Fervently
(Luke 18:1–8)

SATURDAY

Ask, and It Is Yours!
(Matthew 7:7–11)

SUNDAY

Ask, Seek, and Knock!
(Luke 11:5–13)