

The Master Teaches Us to Pray

Luke 11:1 begins, “And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

The disciples seemed to have patiently waited in awe as they observed our Lord praying. I would speculate that the disciple who approached Jesus to inquire of prayer lessons would be Peter. Inquisitive Peter. But you must admit, whoever asked this of our Lord asked a good question and probably most all of God’s children have asked this question in one form or another. I don’t know of a Christian who would not like to know how to pray or how to pray better. The Lord then launches into the model prayer that is also given in the sixth chapter of Matthew. After the model is set forth, Luke 11:5 tells us, “And he said unto them....” The Master Teacher gives us the parable of friends followed by the parable of Fatherhood. This is the follow-up to the question in verse one, “...Lord, teach us to pray....” In the context of the Scripture, this is the continuation of Christ’s teaching on how to pray. It is a worthy subject for us to consider in the beginning of this New Year.

I. A FRIEND IN NEED

Luke 11:5a, 6a, “And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a Friend, and shall go unto him at midnight...For a friend of mine....” Our Lord, the Master Teacher is now emphasizing the need of intercessory prayer, i.e., the need to pray for others. Our Lord was the great example of intercessory prayer. We see this in passages such as John 17:9, when our Lord says, “I pray for them....” One of the most poignant examples given by the Lord is found in Luke 22:31 and 32: “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”

Intercessory prayer has the ability to stop a historical trajectory in its tracks.

II. A FRIEND TO PLEAD

Luke 11:6: “For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.” The very fact that we pray is because we have needs. And the needs cannot be supplied by our own resources and means. To say, “I have nothing,” is what we all need. Jesus said, “...for without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5b).

A. We need to plead for things to be done.

In the summer of 1876 grasshoppers nearly destroyed the crops in Minnesota. So, in the spring of 1877 farmers were worried. They believed the dreaded plague would once again visit them and again destroy the rich wheat crop and bring ruin to a vast amount of the population of this great agricultural state.

The situation was so serious that Governor John S. Pillsbury proclaimed April 26 as a day of prayer and fasting. He urged every man, woman and child to ask God to prevent the terrible scourge. On that April day all schools, shops, stores, and offices were closed. There was a reverent, quiet hush over all the state.

The next day dawned bright and clear. Far higher temperatures than was usual for April soared and Minnesotans were devastated as they discovered billions of grasshopper larvae wiggling to life. For three days the unusual heat persisted, and the larvae hatched. It appeared that it wouldn't be long before they started feeding and destroying the wheat crop.

On the fourth day, however the temperature suddenly dropped, and that night frost covered the entire state. The result -- it killed every one of those creeping, crawling pests as surely as if poison or fire had been used. It went down in the history of Minnesota as the day God answered the prayers of the people.

B. We need to plead for some things to be undone.

During World War II, a chaplain came across a young soldier dying on the battlefield. He took him up gently in his arms and said "Son, you don't have long to live. Is there anything I can do for you?"

As he was dying, the young man's life flashed before his mind. He recalled the sins of his youth and the many times he had broken his parents' hearts with his rebellious living. He remembered the times he had turned his back on God and denied the voice of conviction in his soul.

As he looked up into the chaplain's face, the soldier sighed, "No, sir, there is nothing you can do for me. I need somebody who can undo some things for me."

Charles Spurgeon said, "Sin is a knot that only God can untie." Can you parents recall a time when your child struggled and struggled with a knot in their shoelaces until they finally brought the shoe to you and asked you to please untie it for them? Only God can untie the great knots of life, which is why we must pray with earnest pleading.

III. HURDLES IN PRAYER

A. Time: "...at midnight..."(Luke 11:5b). Armand Nicholi of Harvard University Medical School said, "Time is like oxygen; there's a minimum amount that's necessary for survival. And it takes quality, to develop warm and caring relationships." Midnight is a time that most people have retired. The point is well made by our Lord that this person of prayer is not one who casually approaches the throne of grace. He will take the time necessary to get to know the Lord better and get prayers answered.

B. Lack: "...I have nothing..." (Luke 11:6b). An eastern newspaperman visited a town in the old west and noticed there were targets all over town drawn on the side of buildings and hitching posts. Someone had shot the bulls-eye out of every target -- dead center! Not a single target had been missed. The newspaperman thought now he will have quite the story, because whoever made these shots had to be the best shot in the entire west! As he went around and inquired, everyone that he talked to said it was indeed one man who had made all these remarkable shots. What was disconcerting was that he was a man who frequented the saloons and his aim would be highly compromised to say the least. Finally, he met and interviewed this "sharp shooter." The newspaperman asked the man, "How in the world did you shoot out every bulls-eye?" "Oh, it wasn't all that hard," the man said. "You see, I just shoot first and draw the target later." This old story reminds me of what we often do. Instead of admitting our faults and failures, we cover for ourselves.

C. Inconvenience: "my children are with me...I cannot rise..." (Luke 11:7b, c). The custom was that the children slept on pallets next to mom and dad and the father would have to disturb the sleeping kids to get the bread for the man. Great prayer warriors will not be dissuaded by inconvenience.

IV. HELP IN PRAYER

A. Persistence: "...because of his importunity..." Importunity comes to us from the Greek word "anaideia" which means "shameless persistence." He was willing to risk his friendship and the peace of his neighborhood until he received an answer.

In Luke 11:9 the Lord commands us to ask, seek and knock. These are present active imperatives, meaning ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking, knock and keep knocking.

B. Transparency: "...as many as he needeth..." (Luke 11:8c). In those days a family would eat an average of one loaf of bread per day, but in our parable the man was asking for three loaves (Luke 11:5). This is a subtle message that Christ is relating, i.e., our prayers cannot be too big. God is not challenged by the magnitude of our prayers. Let us therefore be transparent with God about what we need.

C. Familial: In the Luke 11:11-13 the Master Teacher instructs us that prayer is all about relationship. If we have God as our Father, prayer changes everything and everyone involved. Allow these words to bless you: Luke 12:30b, 32a: "...your Father knoweth that ye have need...Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you...."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

