

# ***“A Knock at Midnight”***

**Luke 11:1-13**

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## **Introduction:**

Many years ago, I remember reading the story about a small town in Oklahoma that had one church and one tavern. After some time, the church came to the conclusion that the tavern was giving the town a bad name, and it even got to the point where the church intervened—they called together an all-night prayer service where they asked God to do something. Well, as they were praying, a storm developed, lightning struck the tavern, and the tavern burned to the ground. The owner of the tavern was an outspoken atheist, the insurance company happened to deny coverage for the fire since it was an **“act of God,”** and so the atheist took the church to court and actually sued them for the destruction of his property. Naturally, the church hired its own attorney, and the attorney argued that the church had nothing to do with it. In response to this rather unusual scenario, the judge opened the trial with these words, **“I find one thing in this case most perplexing: We have a situation where the plaintiff, an atheist, is professing his belief in the power of prayer, and the defendants, all faithful church members, are denying the very same power.”** Very interesting!

This morning, as we go back to our brief series of lessons on some of the parables of Jesus, I would like for us to consider a parable on the power of prayer. The parable is found in **Luke 11**, and in our pew Bibles, the passage is found on **page 1620**. In fact, the parable itself is found immediately after Luke’s account of what is often referred to as being the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer, of course, is not to be repeated over and over, but it is more like a sample prayer. In fact, what is commonly referred to as being the Lord’s Prayer is actually the only prayer that Jesus never prayed, and I say that because in it the Lord said, **“...forgive us our sins.”** And so, coming from a man who never sinned, the prayer was obviously meant to be more of a sample, and it came in response to a request from the disciples, **“Lord, teach us to pray.”** This morning, then, I would like for us to consider the Lord’s answer to that request—with a special focus on the parable He told to illustrate some very important lessons on the power of prayer. As we have already learned, a parable can be a simple comparison, or it can be a longer story.

This morning, though, **▶PPT▶** let us consider the parable on prayer—the story of a man who goes knocking on his friend’s door in the middle of the night—**Luke 11:1-13**...

<sup>1</sup> *It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples."* <sup>2</sup> *And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. <sup>3</sup> 'Give us each day our daily bread. <sup>4</sup> 'And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.' "* <sup>5</sup> *Then He said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; <sup>7</sup> and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' <sup>8</sup> "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. <sup>9</sup> "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> "For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. <sup>11</sup> "Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? <sup>12</sup> "Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? <sup>13</sup> "If you then, being evil, 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?"*

As we think back on these 13 verses, I would invite you to keep your Bibles open as we apply the story of the friend at midnight to our situation here in south-central Wisconsin nearly 2000 years later, as we sift out the spiritual lessons from the actual story.

I. **And one of the first things we notice as we look at this entire paragraph is that PRAYER IS BASED ON A DEEP AND PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. »PPT»**

And perhaps one reason why some people do not pray as they should is because they see God as being very distant—great and majestic and not really in tune with our needs—not able to understand what we are going through—not very approachable, almost like the Queen of England. You might remember the controversy some time ago when the President and his wife visited London, and on that visit, the cameras caught Michelle Obama reaching out and putting her hand on the Queen's back. That is not done! And so some were appalled that a mere mortal had dared to reach out and touch the Queen. Unfortunately, some may look at God in a similar way—as being so beyond us, as being so busy with the world that He is completely unapproachable.

And yet in the parable of the Knock at Midnight, we find that God is compared (or really contrasted) with a good friend, a next-door neighbor. And so (starting in **verse 5**) the Lord invites us into a story as He invites us to suppose that we have a friend who is on a long journey who stops in at midnight to stay with us for the night. Apparently, it was common to travel in the evening to avoid the heat of the day, but the hour is late and when our friend arrives, we have nothing to offer in terms of food—there were no 24-hour Kwik Trips in those days, and so we go next door to a neighbor. And this is where it gets interesting, because as we knock on our neighbor's door (a man described in **verse 5** as being our *"friend"*), our so-called *"friend"* basically tells us to, **"Get lost! Don't bother me! It's too late! My kids are in bed! I can't get up! Leave us alone!"** History tells us that families would often sleep together in one room, and so to get up and find some bread for this neighbor, the whole family would have wakened up. As parents, we know how hard it is to get our kids to bed sometimes, and so maybe we can empathize at least a little bit with the neighbor here.

And yet, in the ancient middle-east (and even today), we know that hospitality was extremely important—for strangers, but especially from friend-to-friend. And so we start to see that Jesus is not really comparing God to a grumpy neighbor who doesn't want to be bothered with getting up in the night, but it is more of a contrast—similar to the fish versus snake issue at the end of the paragraph. And so the parable is more of a rhetorical question: Which one of you would have a neighbor treat you like this? And of course, no one would have acted like this! And so the answer is: Neither will God! Just like your neighbor, God is honorable. God would never fail to act because He is too busy, or sleeping, or because He has more important things to do.

When it comes to prayer, God, therefore, is like a friend—like a friend we can call on for bread in the middle of the night. And unlike the friend in the parable, we do not need to shame God into acting. We don't need to harass God until He finally gives in. Unlike the friend in the parable, God does not give in just to get rid of us, but He is eager to provide for our needs—even in the middle of the night!

And so when it comes to prayer, we discover that God is like a friend. Prayer, therefore, is based on a relationship. As our Father, God listens to us as a friend listens to a friend, **"What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!"** When it comes to prayer, God is our friend. It all starts with a relationship, **"Our Father in Heaven, hallowed is Your name!"**

**II. As we look back into this paragraph of Scripture, there is a second basic idea we can take away from this parable, and that is, THE MAN IN THE PARABLE CAME TO HIS FRIEND WITH A VERY SPECIFIC NEED.**

**»PPT»**

Most of you know that children can be very good at this. Children are very good at letting you know exactly what they need. Perhaps you have heard the story of the

little boy who really wanted \$100. He prayed for weeks, but nothing happened, and so he decided to write a letter to God requesting the \$100. When the Post Office got the letter addressed to, **“God, USA,”** they decided to deliver it to the White House. The president was so amused that he instructed his secretary to send the little boy a \$5 bill. The president thought that would be quite a bit of money for a little boy. The little boy was very happy with the \$5, so he sat down and wrote a thank-you note. He addressed it in the same way, so the Post Office sent the thank-you note on to the President as well. The note said, **“Dear God, thank you very much for sending the money. However, I noticed that for some reason you sent it through Washington, DC, and those guys deducted \$95 in taxes!”** Well, at least we can say that the young man was very specific in his request! Children can be very good at doing that! Yesterday I was in the office, and my youngest came in with a very detailed Christmas list—four very detailed little bullet points. Children know exactly what they need, and they are not afraid to ask for it.

In the same way, the man in the parable went next door and said, **“Friend, lend me three loaves,”** and then he went on to explain the situation. He did not just stand there at the door saying, **“Help me!”**, but he was very specific in his request. He did not need two loaves or four loaves, but he needed three loaves of bread. As Paul said in **Philippians 4:6**, **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”** As I see it, Jesus told the parable to illustrate what He said in the sample prayer up in **verse 3**, **“Give us each day our daily bread.”** In other words, this is how you do it. We figure out what we need, and we ask God for it.

Bread, of course, has always been very important, and so it serves as a symbol of everything else that we need. We go to God, then, with our specific needs—we pray for our health concerns, we pray for our source of income, we pray about our clothing, we pray about our transportation, we pray about our need for shelter and warmth, we pray for our friends and family. If we have a concern, we take it to the Lord. I know that as Christians we might be tempted to think that that is pretty selfish—to always be praying for our needs. And yet as Jesus pointed out at the end of this paragraph, we need to think of it in terms of children asking their parents for something. If our kids need something, we (as good parents) want to know about it. In the same way, God loves to hear from His children.

Several months ago, we started a new tradition at our dinner table, and that is, as the head of the family, I will ask what we need to pray about—and so in that way, we are able to share with one another, and all of the pressure is not on the one who leads the prayer, but we are able to mention (very specifically) what we are thankful for or what needs that we have. By mentioning those specifics, we are able to recognize what God has done for us. Jesus, then, is teaching that we are to be specific in our prayers.

**III. There is a third basic concept I’d like for us to notice from this paragraph of Scripture, and that is, WE ARE TO GO TO GOD IN PRAYER WITH CONFIDENCE THAT OUR PRAYERS WILL BE ANSWERED.** **»PPT»**

And again, sometimes we may be tempted to wonder whether God is really listening. Perhaps we have wondered whether it is really a waste of time. I am reminded of something that supposedly happened during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. Apparently he just hated those long receiving lines at the White House, and he always complained that no one ever really cared what was said. So, one day during a reception he decided to try an experiment. To each person who came down the line and shook his hand, he would murmur, **"I murdered my grandmother this morning."** And just as he expected, the guests responded as they always did, with those typical little phrases, **"Marvelous," "Keep up the good work," "We are proud of you," "God bless you, sir,"** and so on. It was not until near the end of the line while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that the president's words were actually heard, and totally unrattled, the ambassador leaned over and whispered to the president, **"I'm sure she had it coming."** I guess his little experiment proved that we do not always listen to what is said to us. And so maybe people think about prayer like this.

And yet we learn from this morning's parable that we are to go to God in prayer with confidence that our prayers will be heard. I don't know about all of you, but I would have to think long and hard, and I would need to be pretty desperate before going next door and ringing my neighbor's doorbell at midnight. In fact, I would need to be pretty bold and confident. Can you picture it? Can you imagine standing on your neighbor's porch at midnight? It's all dark, the neighborhood is dead quiet, you know his kids are in bed—I would need to be pretty confident in his answer before reaching out and ringing that doorbell. Once we ring that doorbell, it sets off a whole series of events—the dog starts barking, the kids start crying, the lights come on, and so on. We would need to be confident before taking that step.

In the same way, we are desperate, and yet we can go to God with confidence at any hour of night or day. As the Bible says in **Hebrews 4:16**, ***"Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."***

If I had some idea that my neighbor would come out and start beating me, I would never ring that doorbell. I have some neighbors who I would never disturb in the middle of the night. But I have other neighbors who are friends—neighbors I would feel confident in disturbing in the middle of the night in case of an emergency. In the same way, we can go to God with confidence. As Jesus says, we can go to God like a child goes to his parents. As parents, we look forward to helping our children—we aren't out to trick them or hurt them, but if they tell us they're hungry, we try to satisfy that hunger. In the same way, God is on our side—He is pulling for us, and He wants us to do well. That doesn't mean that we always get exactly what we ask for, but it means that (like a parent to a child) God's answers will always be good—He always wants what is best for us. Do we see God as a loving Father who loves doing good things for His children? The answer to this question will most likely determine whether we see prayer as being a privilege or a burden. The parable teaches, then, that we are to approach God with confidence—knowing that God is good.

**IV. As we come to the end of this section, there is something else we can learn about prayer, and that is, THERE IS VALUE IN PERSISTENCE.**

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And again, this is not the idea that we need to beat on God's door until He gets embarrassed and finally lets us in, but it is the idea in verse 9 (based on the tense of the verbs), that we are to, ***"Keep on asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and it will be opened to you."*** The idea is that prayer is a long process—it is not a one-time event. We can ask for something, and that may do it, but there may also be some seeking or searching involved. We know that when we are looking for something, the search can sometimes go on for several days. If you have kids, then maybe you have been through the whole thing where you go looking for the remote control for the TV. Several weeks ago, one of my friends on Facebook asked where he should start looking for the remote control. He has two small kids, so I told him he should go straight to E-bay—order several, because you are just now getting started! You will lose many remotes over the coming years. Years ago, I remember looking for weeks. We actually ordered a new one online, and we had been using the new one for several weeks when we finally found the old one right where our 3-year old had hidden it—next to the cushion in the top part of a wingback chair. Like prayer, that search was a process.

And then, even beyond asking and seeking, we see the reference to knocking—and again with knocking, we see a process. Do you know anybody who only knocks once? That's a little weird. Usually we knock several times. And even then, if nobody answers, we usually wait a little bit and knock again. And if we really need what is on the other side of the door, we may come back and knock again, and again, and again.

It seems that this is sometimes where our prayers break down a little bit. It is hard to be persistent and to continue in our prayers to God. And yet did you know that the typical teenager in the United States right now sends an average of more than 50 text messages every day? That number comes from the Nielson Corporation. And yet how many of us are able to pray 50 times every day? With prayer, there are no charges, there are no fees for going over, there is no special equipment required. This morning, then, let us remember to be persistent in our prayers—as persistent as a teenager with a cell phone.

**Conclusion:**

There is so much more we could learn from this little paragraph, but these are at least a few of the highlights. When it comes to prayer...

- We need to remember that prayer is based on a deep and personal relationship with God—He is so much more than a grumpy neighbor who doesn't want to get up in the night.



- Secondly, we need to remember that our prayers need to be specific. Just as the man in the parable went next door for three loaves of bread, so also our requests to God can be very specific as well.
- Thirdly, we can go to God with confidence, knowing that God is listening, knowing that God is interested in our troubles and concerns.
- And then finally, there is a benefit to being persistent in our prayers. We are to keep on asking, seeking, and knocking—not giving up, even if our prayers do not seem to be answered immediately.

I know we're coming up on a busy time of year, but over the next few weeks, I hope we can take this parable and try to apply it to the prayers that we offer. In **verse 13**, you might have noticed that Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit. He kind of leaves it hanging there without much explanation, but thankfully the apostle Paul picks it up later (in **Romans 8:26**), as he explains the connection between the Spirit and the prayers that we offer. Paul said that, ***"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."*** Certainly, prayer is a process, but we do have help, and hopefully the words of Christ will encourage us during this coming week.

In response to the question, ***"What must I do to be saved?"***, the Bible consistently teaches that we must believe in Jesus, we must turn away from sin, and we must allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you would like to study further, if you need the prayers of this church to overcome some special struggle in your life right now, or if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)