

## STAYING CONNECTED

*Series: Plugged into Prayer*

Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8

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This week I found an article that gives us 30 things we should do daily to be better people. Things like be grateful, smile, make someone smile, exercise, drink enough water, reduce social media time, spend a few minutes outdoors, get enough sleep, read an inspirational quotes, listen to inspiring music, say positive things to yourself in the mirror... Okay, I kind of chuckled at that one. And since laughter is on the list of things to do daily, I checked that one off too. But as I was scrolling, I was curious but not surprised to see that prayer was nowhere on the list. Prayer is something that the Bible not only tells us to do daily, but to do *at all times*, and, according to Jesus, it has a tremendous impact on our well-being. That's what we want to talk a bit about today. If you have a Bible with you, please turn with me to Luke 11 first.

This is the fourth of five messages in this “Plugged Into Prayer” series. Today we’re going to focus on staying plugged in at all times. There are some appliances, like our refrigerators, that must be plugged in at all times. As Christians, we are to be connected with Him at all times through prayer. We weren’t made to be disconnected. And there are two unique parables of Jesus that teach us that.

### I. THE PARABLE OF THE SHAMELESS FRIEND. (LUKE 11:5-10)

*5 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; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; 7 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.’ 8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence [or, shameless audacity] he will get up and give him as much as he needs.*

So, among the Gospels, Luke is known for portraying Jesus as a person of prayer. Jesus often left the crowds and disciples to pray in secluded places. Having just returned from spending time in prayer as you read in verse 1, and the disciples recognizing the importance of prayer due to Jesus’ example, they ask Jesus to teach them to pray. So He teaches them *the Lord’s prayer* again. A prayer model or outline on how to pray. We studied that prayer in depth a couple of weeks ago. Then Jesus follows up that up with this parable of the shameless friend. But what’s different about this parable and the other one we will look at today is that Jesus is not teaching by comparison but by **contrast**. He moves from lesser to greater, using people who are not like God to make a strong case for the value of persistent prayer, based on who God is.<sup>1</sup>

This first parable involves hospitality. In the Near East, hospitality is a basic law. It's viewed a sacred duty.<sup>2</sup> And in the *ancient* Near East, when they didn't have air-conditioned cars, many people travelled at night. They also didn't have cell phones to let people know they were coming, so someone might show up unexpectedly, like this man's friend does, at **midnight**. And if you had a guest show up, you were expected to provide lodging and food. And remember this is an honor and shame culture. Not being hospitable would bring shame on you, your family, and village.

So Jesus invites his disciples to envision the scene. He says to imagine that you, the person responsible for hosting an individual who arrived at midnight, aren't prepared to host. You aren't ready. For on you're poor. You aren't wealthy enough. You only have your daily bread. You don't have the means to provide **a few loaves of bread**—which would have been just enough for an evening meal. So you go to your friend's house at midnight and knock on the door and ask for bread. But your grumpy friend, laying **in bed already**, says he can't get up to help you. But you badger him enough with your **knocking** and **asking** that he eventually gets up—though begrudgingly—and gives you what you need. He does it, not because he wants to, but because you're going to wake up the whole village with your incessant knocking and you'll bring shame to him as well. What is Jesus teaching here? Is God the Father like this grumpy neighbor? He explains what He means in the next few verses beginning in verse 9.

9 “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. 10 For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. 11 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? 12 Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 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?”

So Jesus is really trying to shape their view of the heavenly Father here. Fathers in the first century Roman world wielded great power over their children's lives. Would a newborn be reared in the family? Sold? Exposed? Killed? Scourged? Allowed to marry or divorce? The children depended on their father's word.<sup>3</sup> That kind of authority is great in the hands of a good father, but terrible in hands of a bad one. What kind of Father is God? Jesus is making the point, teaching from lesser example (the friend) to greater example (God) that the Father is not like a grumpy unwilling friend, but is gracious and willing. He's not going to tell you to go away or quit bothering Him. He loves us. He welcomes us. On top of that, He doesn't sleep. His door is never shut. *Even at midnight* we are encouraged to pray. Some of the most genuine prayers are prayed at midnight. And He will answer us to the honor of His name. So we can come to Him **shamelessly** for our needs—even to the point where it would annoy others—because we know God desires to hear our prayers.

**We can pray in shameless persistence, knowing God desires to hear our prayers.**

One man said when we pray persistently, we are “*not overcoming God's reluctance; [we are] laying hold of His highest willingness.*”<sup>4</sup> I like that. And we shouldn't be afraid of or angry at His response. He won't give you a **snake** when you ask for a **fish**, or a **scorpion** when you ask for an

**egg.** He doesn't put a rock in your happy meal. He isn't cruel or deceptive. He doesn't play tricks on His children. God isn't like that. Some people think He's a big bully in the sky. Maybe in your home growing up the name of God was always negative. Jesus, however, is reassuring us He always works for our good in response to our prayers. He is generous and good and wants to hear our prayers. That fact should encourage us to pray. And, in view of God's character, He commands us to pray. He says to **keep on asking, seeking, and knocking** (present active imperatives) because *if such unwilling sinful humans will honor persistence, how much more a loving Heavenly Father?*

One of the good gifts that He gives His children is the gift of the **Holy Spirit**. That's a clue Luke introduces here that he ultimately solves in his second volume of Acts. Jesus promised the disciples the Spirit would come when they ask, and in Acts 1 we find them in the upper room after His ascension "*continually devoting themselves to prayer*" (Acts 1:14) until the Spirit comes and the new age dawns. We too, receive God's gift of the Spirit, and thus salvation from sin, when we call upon the name of the Lord to save us (Rom. 10:13). He does give good gifts when we ask. Maybe today you need to confess to Him that you're a sinner and trust in Christ as Savior and accept the greatest gift you will ever receive—the gift of the Holy Spirit and thus, salvation.

## II. THE PARABLE OF THE PERSISTENT WIDOW. (Luke 18:1-8)

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, 2 saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. 3 There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' 4 For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; 7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 8 I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

This is another parable of contrast but it is seated in the context of last days discussion—days that are dark and involve suffering as Christians in an unjust world. But notice that this parable is explicitly for showing us that **at all times we should pray and not lose heart** and this is demonstrated through the contrast of the widow with an unjust judge.

This **judge** is a person of power. He has authority. In one way he's a good judge in that he's impartial (not respecting man) but his lack of the fear of God makes him unjust. He fails to carry out the Law regarding widows. Despite God's instruction to care for widows, most of them had a very hard time getting by (cf. Exod. 22:22-24; Ps. 68:5; Lam. 1:1; James 1:27).<sup>5</sup> The **widow**, on the other hand, is the exact opposite. She has no power. She has no resources because she's poor. She cannot bribe and friend her way to the judge's presence. So she is a picture of complete dependence, helplessness, and vulnerability.

But while this unjust judge has no regard for her at first, she is *incessant* in her pleas. **She keeps coming to him** time and time again and he is essentially badgered into answering her request. The phrase “*she will wear me out*” (v. 5) could be translated “*she is going to give me a black eye*” or “*she is going to bruise me*”—meaning she is going to bring shame on this judge and damage his reputation.<sup>6</sup> Again, this is not a comparison between us, in the widow’s position, and the judge in God’s position. He doesn’t respond to our prayers because we badger Him to death. Remember, through the **contrast**, Jesus is teaching from lesser to greater.

So let’s **contrast the widow with ourselves**: She’s a stranger to the judge while we are God’s children. She’s a poor woman and widow, meaning she has no clout, no leverage, no access. We on the other hand, are heirs with Christ, blessed with all the riches in the heavenly places. Jesus is our clout and our access. The courtroom was closed to her, but we have open access to the heavenly court of God at all times. She was promised nothing, but we have His precious promise that He will hear our prayer when we ask according to His will. She pleads before an unjust court of law, but us before a heavenly throne of grace.<sup>7</sup> There is a stark contrast between us and the widow.

Now let’s **contrast the judge with God**: The unjust judge had to be badgered into responding to a woman he cares nothing about, while God is a just and loving Father, attentive to our cries. The judge was weary, but God is never weary of hearing our prayers. In fact, He invites us to pray at all times. We don’t wear Him down into answering. And His name is always honored. The point is: *if a poor widow received what is right from an unjust judge, how much more will God’s children receive what is right from their heavenly Father?* Understanding our heavenly Father this way is an incredible encouragement for prayer.

But let’s sharpen the application a bit by putting it in the “last days” context. Jesus is warning His disciples that they will be persecuted in the last days—the time between His first and second coming, especially as it nears His second coming when things grow increasingly dark. Jesus never promised us a pain-free life. In fact, He said that if they persecuted Me, they’ll persecute you also. All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Life is not always a playground in fallen world. There is suffering. There are unjust judges. Widows aren’t overlooked. Women and children are trafficked. Thousands go missing each year in unsolved cases, many times involving drugs and drug cartels. Healthy Christian values are replaced with selfish lusts. We celebrate pride for a month and our veterans for a day. It’s a messed-up world. But someday, Jesus is teaching, He will come and set things straight. He will bring the justice and He will bring the restoration we long for. Until then, Jesus says to pray. You either pray or you lose heart. The KJV says you either pray or you faint. It’s your choice:

**We can pray or faint.**

The wise choice is to pray and **pray at all times** (v. 1). That’s the antidote to despair in a dark world. The answer is not positive thinking or determination or telling yourself in the mirror that you can do whatever you want to do. It’s the opposite of that. It’s dependence upon God in prayer. Staying connected to the Father.

Again, think of the difference that having a loving father makes. I imagine most of us know what's it's like to be a kid in an unfamiliar place. As long as you're with your father or a parent, that place isn't scary. You trust them. You feel safe and secure, even care-free. But the moment you lose sight of your father and you can't find them—as a kid that's a terrifying experience—you start to panic. As soon as you are disconnected from them, the insecurity, the fear, and sense of lostness sets in. All of the sudden, you are no longer care free and everything is out of control because you are not with your father. That's what it's like when we aren't connecting with our Father in heaven who is sovereignly in control and working for our good. His loving presence brings well-being to our lives. That is why we must stay connected at all times and pray at all times.

### **Pray without ceasing.**

But let's talk about this “prayer at all times” stuff. Jesus we ought to **pray at all times**. Paul reiterates that by saying we are to **pray without ceasing**. He tells the Colossians to **devote themselves to prayer**, being watchful and thankful (Col. 4:2). What do they mean by praying without ceasing? Well, we know from Matthew 6:5-8 that He's not talking about repeating prayers all day long. He's not talking about reciting prayers. It obviously cannot mean we should be in some head-bowed, eyes-closed posture all day long or that we must be talking all day. All it means is that we look at prayer as something that for the Christian is as natural as breathing. You get to the point where don't even think about it. You just do it. It's something you do all day long. It's the natural habit of your life.<sup>8</sup> It's a natural part of your existence, as it was designed to be. We stay in communion with God, connecting with Him, talking to Him as we go through our day. It's like living in a continual God-consciousness—living with God in mind.<sup>9</sup> When I wake up, drive to work, work, eat, or spend time with family—as I go about the day—I am aware of God and my need for Him in that situation and how I can be praying in that moment.

In Nehemiah 2, Nehemiah is before the king and the king asks him what his request is? Well, between the request and Nehemiah's answer it says, “*So I [Nehemiah] prayed to the God of heaven. [Then] I said to the king...*” I don't believe Nehemiah went into an outspoken prayer there. It was a quick bullet-type prayer to heaven where he asked for God's help quickly in that moment of need. That's a good example of unceasing prayer, bringing God into the moment as we recognize our need of Him.

I've told you already how sometimes if I'm driving down the road and I see you (you're driving or walking), I pray for you. I wave too(!), but many times I also pray. My wife's grandpa was a mailman for decades and he was always praying for everyone while delivering mail or riding his bike around town. Some of you farmers or ranches can pray for hours on the tractor. Doctors can pray for their patients. We don't have to bow our head to pray. We are in a prayer-consciousness all day long as we work. Are you happy? Thank God. Are you confused? Ask God for wisdom. Are you weary? Ask God for strength. Is your kid acting up? Don't just tell them to stop. Pray for them and with them. If there's something they do over and over again, I know it's time to pray with them about it. Just telling to stop doesn't do it. Prayer is powerful, and I'm not just looking for cold obedience, but for heart change, and prayer powerfully helps with that.

In closing, do you remember when I told you about those 30 things we can do every day to make our lives better? Some of them were good, but I think we can do without a few of them. We can live without reading motivational quotes. We can live without talking to ourselves in the mirror. We can't live, however, without talking to the Lord in prayer. It's not just a daily thing. It's an all-day thing. Let's put prayer at the top of the list.

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *Alone with God* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2011), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Constable, *Notes on Luke* (2023 ed.), <http://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/luke.pdf>, 67.

<sup>3</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 438.

<sup>4</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 173.

<sup>5</sup> Constable, 394.

<sup>6</sup> Constable, 395.

<sup>7</sup> Wiersbe, 200.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>9</sup> MacArthur, 20.