

# **The Importance and Meaning of Prayer**

**By Rev. D. Earl Cripe, Ph.D.**

Jesus gave us a number of examples about prayer to the Father, why we should do it and how it works. Let's look at some of them.

**Luke 18:1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;**

**Luke 18:2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:**

**Luke 18:3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.**

**Luke 18:4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;**

**Luke 18:5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.**

The lesson here is about prayer, and not just about prayer as such, but prayer with respect to a certain issue. It is telling us that when we are pressed upon by difficult situations there is a tendency to throw up our hands in exasperation — but we should not do that. There is an acceptable and profitable alternative, and that is to pray to God. This little widow in the parable had a situation to which she desperately needed resolution.

## ***The Need for a Persevering Attitude***

The problem in this parable was that her only avenue of help was a hardhearted and godless judge who was in it simply for the money, position and prestige. He did not care about people and he did not fear God. He was

not interested in justice, he was not convicted about what would happen to them if he did not administer justice, and he did not want to be bothered. But the little widow would not let it go. She would not be put off or driven away by discouragement. She just kept coming back and back and badgering him about her problem and the need for a resolution to it.

### ***The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Grease***

Finally the judge said to himself, “I don’t care about this widow. I’m not interested in fairness or justice, I am not afraid of what God is going to do to me now or in the Day of Judgment if I don’t do what is right. But there is something I do care about — this woman is driving me crazy! If I don’t do something to get rid of her she’s going to bug me to death. The only way I know to handle this is to give her what she wants. Then maybe she will go away and leave me alone.” So he gave her what she wanted, and presumably she did go away and leave him alone.

### ***Another Strange Parable***

This is another of those curious parables where people have a bit of difficulty understanding why Jesus would use some crass, almost crude example to make a point. The answer probably is twofold. One is that people can understand these kinds of earthly examples and get the point very easily. The other is that Jesus will shock an otherwise indifferent and sleepy group of listeners into coming awake and wondering what in the world Jesus is talking about.

In any case, whatever His motives, Jesus calls upon the disciples to listen to what this judge is saying and learn a lesson from it.

**Luke 18:6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.**

**Luke 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?**

**Luke 18:8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?**

Of course Jesus is not telling us that God is hardhearted, that He does not care anything about people, that He is not interested in fairness, and that in order to get a favorable decision from Him we must bang on His door until we drive Him crazy. Jesus is making another point entirely. If you want something from God, it has to be a burning desire on your part, a strong conviction and something you feel you cannot do without. You cannot just casually say to God, "Well, this or that would be nice if you happen to see your way clear to do it, though I must say it really doesn't make much difference to me one way or the other." God is not too busy to listen to us, but He has too many important things under consideration to be attracted to that kind of halfheartedness and indifference. Go to God with things you need and things you really want, and then be prepared to stick with it. There is a tendency to say, "until you get a response," but I do not think that is accurate. You could get that out of this parable, but if you did I think you would be missing the point. Jesus' point has nothing to do with God's attitude about His people, about your needs or about fairness. It altogether has to do with the person who needs something from God and the appropriate attitude and commitment and dedication that such a person must have. God will answer, but we only have a right to expect an answer if we are sincere about it. If we have forgotten about it tomorrow, it probably was never very important to us to begin with, and probably not something we really thought we needed.

### ***My Own Testimony on This***

It's always tricky in these kinds of situations, and considered bad form by some, to bring yourself in the picture as an illustration; but I am going to do it anyway. For fourteen years of my wayward Christian life my mother and my father prayed faithfully for me every day of the world, and never let up. For 14 years! Finally, in answer to their prayers, God cornered me and brought me to my knees. I would not have spent the last 45 years in the Ministry and I would not be a servant of the Lord today if it was not for the tenacity of a godly Mom and Dad who simply refused to quit calling upon God. They believed that God

would answer sooner or later; and He did. This is the best illustration I know of dramatizing what Jesus is saying here.

### ***Another Example***

**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;**

**Luke 11:6 For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?**

**Luke 11:7 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.**

**Luke 11:8 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.**

The point that Jesus is making in these four verses is really pretty simple:

A long weary day is over, you have settled down comfortably with your wife into bed and by midnight you are sound asleep. But your dreams are interrupted rudely by a pounding on the door. You get up somewhat irritated and go to see who it is that's troubling you at this time of night. It turns out to be the friend next door. You tell him firmly, trying to keep irritability out of your voice, that is the dead of night and the household is in bed and asleep. You cannot disturb your family by getting up and doing what he asks at this time of night; the request is unreasonable.

But the man persists. He is in a dilemma. Unexpectedly, company has shown up at his place in a tired and hungry condition and he has nothing in the house to give them. He hates to bother you as much as

you hate to be bothered, but what is he to do? You simply must help him out.

### ***You Would Help Him, Would You Not?***

Jesus has painted a worst-case scenario in order to dramatize a point. All of the people in His audience who are listening to this parable understand the disappointment of the man who has been roused out of his bed at midnight; but they feel compassion for the poor fellow and they know that they would help him, because, well, that is just what friends do for one another. And that is the point Jesus is making. Even though you are not happy about it, still because of his importunity, you would do it anyway. And, once you got fully awake and over your displeasure, you would be as cheerful and as charitable about it as the situation demanded.

### ***For His Importunity?***

Jesus says that the householder will help his neighbor because of the man's tenaciousness and insistence. Does this mean that we must be tenacious and insistent with God in order to get help from Him? Well, in our previous example of the little widow who pestered a judge mercilessly until the man finally said, "The only way I'm going to get this woman off my back is to do what she asks; otherwise she's going to hound me to death." And He used that as a segue to say that God will avenge those who petition Him day and night about what they need and what they want Him to do. And so, we do not want to be disparaging of that thought. Even so, that is not the point that Jesus is making here. He is telling us that if this aggravated man, roused up from his warm and comfortable bed at midnight, has enough compassion for his neighbor to help him in spite of the audaciousness of the man and the inconvenience of the situation, surely we must be able to understand that God cares enough for us to help us.

### ***Asking is the Key***

Even so, the point is made that we must ask. God will not follow us around and bestow good things upon us arbitrarily, even though we are not

giving Him attention, we are presumptions about it, and we are not asking. It does not work that way. And the Apostle has told us that another reason why we do not get what we asked for from God is because we asked for the wrong reasons; and what we want to do with what God gives us pertains to carnal activities. And so Jesus is telling us that we must ask and we must ask for the right reasons. Remember that this is said in the context of teaching the disciples how to pray and this council is specifically in connection with that answer. The “Lord’s Prayer” in this instance may be short, but the answer is comprehensive. Having established the fact of the willingness of God to help those in need who come to Him in earnestness and pour out their petitions in a way illustrated by this desperate neighbor, Jesus continues with one of the great passages and promises of the Bible:

**Luke 11:9 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.**

**Luke 11:10 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.**

Of all the promises in Scripture that have encouraged, challenged and comforted me through the years, none has meant more than this one. It is one of the most thrilling and stabilizing things that the Bible has to tell us. If you ask, you will receive. Everyone who has ever come to God, believing in faith, and asked, has received. Hebrews 11:6 is clear on that; and it is both a comfort and a warning to God’s people. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Those who come to God must first believe that He is — that He is there, that He is watching, and that He cares — and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. And everyone who has gone out earnestly and made the commitment to seek — for God, for the Kingdom, for truth, for wisdom, or knowledge, or whatever — has found what he was seeking for. As you contemplate this, remember the warning and the encouragement; we walk by faith and not by sight. The assurance that this is true has nothing to do with

our experiences or our expectations. It has to do with the character and the dependability of God. We have found it; we have received it. And everyone who has ever gone to God's door and knocked on it has had that door open to him and he has been let in.

Oh, but he has!

If you do not know that, then the problem is not your life, your church, your activities, your method of dress, the amount of time you spend in prayer and study the Bible. That is not the issue. The problem here is your confidence in God. This is a promise; an absolute promise. It can not be, it will not be, it has not been otherwise. Jesus seeks to drive this point home with another illustration that is sort of a parable:

**Luke 11:11 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?**

**Luke 11:12 Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?**

**Luke 11:13 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?**

If a son has a good and loving father (and of course remember that we are talking about the Father of all Fathers when it comes to goodness, compassion and love), he will give his son what the son asks for as long as it is good and profitable and will be beneficial to the boy. We could get into that kind of discussion but it is not necessary here. What the son is asking for is bread, he is asking for an egg. He is not asking for the moon, he is asking for a little bite to eat. "What," Jesus asks us, "will the father do in this situation?" Will he give the son what he needs and what is good for him? Or will he give the boy something that he cannot eat or something that is going to harm, or perhaps even kill him? Jesus does not answer the question because it does not need to be answered. He assumes the answer in the question He asks those

disciples. “If you, being only fallible men struggling with the selfish and arrogant nature of Adam, know how to give good things to your children; do you not know how much more than that your Heavenly Father will give to those children of His who ask Him?”

### ***A Well of Water Springing Up***

And what is it that our Heavenly Father will give us that is so good? It is the best thing of all; the greatest gift that could possibly be given by God to any man. It is the gift of the Holy Ghost. Once we have been given the person of God to live within us — to direct our thoughts and guide our actions — the rest falls into place.