

doesn't. So, in English we could say "I eat" or "I am eating" or "I began to eat" and we would add or subtract words. In Greek, you say "I eat" or "I am eating" or "I began to eat" and it's all the same word.

So when Jesus told his disciples to "ask, seek, and knock," he wasn't telling them to ask God for something one time to and then move on to the next request if he didn't answer. The best way I can think to translate Jesus' words are, "keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking," because those who are asking and are seeking and are knocking will receive and find and be welcomed in. To casually ask God for this, that, and the other, turns our prayers into a spiritual drive-thru where we come to expect prompt service and a bag full of exactly what we ordered. And if we don't get it, then we move on to our next request. That's not prayer.

Despite the implicit struggle in persistent prayer, Jesus offers hope to his disciples. He tells them that if they will persist in bold prayer, that God will answer their prayers. Now it's impossible for us to come up with a formula for how God answers prayers, but Jesus clearly teaches that God does respond to our prayers and that the way we pray makes a real difference in God's response. God wants us to engage him in prayer—to get serious about it. Jesus then offers one more teaching about prayer here.

Snakes And Bread (vv 11-13)

So that his disciples wouldn't misunderstand what Jesus was trying to say, he returns to an analogy they could all understand. As evil as human beings can be, it's still extremely un-

likely that a father is going to give his child something that could hurt them—a snake—rather than something that would nourish them—fish. It doesn't mean that a father will give his child cake and doughnuts for breakfast every morning just because they ask, but father will give his child breakfast. And if a child asks for some eggs, no father in their right mind would give them a scorpion instead. Even if they didn't want them to have eggs, they would feed their child.

So here's what Jesus said: if you wicked people know how to love and provide for your children, how much more does God know how to love and provide for his children. And rather than leaving this as a generic promise, like Matthew does, Jesus specifically applies this to the Holy Spirit, which tells us something. Although we do have physical needs, our greatest need, and our greatest provision, is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, our struggles, and our church. The Holy Spirit not only empowers us to face whatever situation we're in, He also works in the lives of others. The Holy Spirit provides comfort in times of loss, wisdom in times confusion, and peace in the time of the storm. The Holy Spirit empowers and directs the church as well. TS: So how do we apply this to our lives?

How Do We Apply This?

When you realize that this whole conversation began when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, we realize that this passage is key to understanding the life of prayer. We realize that this is exactly how Jesus prayed, crying out to God on numerous occa-

sions and in turn, being strengthened to face the road ahead, even the cross.

Thus, we apply this by making persistent, shameless prayer a habit in our own lives and for the life of our church. Like Jesus, we find times to slip away from all those who demand our attention and we go before the Father and cry out to him. That means we turn away from the temptation to make our prayers half-hearted, one-time requests for his intervention. Just as Jesus was teaching his disciples how to have a prayer life, we should treat this teaching as a fundamental part of what it means for us to have a prayer life. And that should involve praying for our church as well as praying for our personal needs.

Two, we apply this by setting aside our pride and determining to do whatever it takes to get God's attention. Mind you, I am not saying God doesn't want to listen or that He's trying to avoid us, I'm just saying persistence is as persistence does. Sometimes humbling ourselves means that we get others involved in asking God to meet our needs. Imagine that the one neighbor went and got all his other neighbors and they all stood outside his house and said, "Joe, this guy really needs your bread—none of us have any!"

Three, we apply this by trusting that God is better than any human father we know of, that he is fully able to meet our needs, and that he will meet our needs. The need to be persistent in prayer does not mean God is apathetic to our needs; it means he responds to his people when they are faithful in prayer.

BACK 2 BASICS

PRAYER

April 18, 2021

Pastor Jared Stoner



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Back To The Basics

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Introduction

Good morning. I trust all of you are doing well. We're taking a few weeks right now to just look at some basics of our faith. Last week we talked about tithing. This week I want to talk about prayer. You'll probably notice that I come back to the topic of prayer on a regular basis. I do that because it is absolutely central to our life and walk with God. I feel something like Peter, who told his congregation, *"I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have (2Peter 1:12-13)."* I'm not preaching on prayer because I haven't preached on it very much, but because it's important enough that we should be reminded of it on a regular basis. This morning, I want to look at Luke 11:5-13.

Growing In Prayer (Luke 11:5-13)

"⁵Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'⁷ "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.'⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the

bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. ⁹"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹²Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Unexpected Company: The Story (vv 5-8)

Luke 11:5-13 explores one of the ingredients of effective prayer—bold persistence. This passage reminds me of one of my favorite proverbs, which says, *"If a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse (Prov 27:14)."* That's true wisdom! In this story, we find two neighbors who have a good relationship, which is put to the test when one neighbor has a friend who arrives late at night and he has no food to offer his guest. In a culture that places a premium on hospitality and doesn't have 24-hour Super Centers, this was a really big problem. Rather than lose face by having his friend go to bed hungry, the man runs next door to his neighbor's house and calls out to him with that whisper voice people use that's just as loud as their regular voice, *"Dude, give me some bread."*

As you would expect, his friend wasn't

thrilled about being disturbed at that late hour. One, he already locked the door, which was far more time-consuming than the simple turn of a lock. Two, his kids were already in bed with him, which was a common practice dating back to forever, and his kids were asleep. In order for the man to get bread for his neighbor, he would have to try to get out of bed without waking his children, get the bread, open the door, re-lock the door, and get back into bed with his probably-not-sleeping-anymore children. Therefore, no one is offended or surprised when Joe says, *"Beat it."*

Conclusion

Being the master student of human nature, Jesus recognized that the neighbor wouldn't get up and give his friend the bread because he was his friend, but he would get up and give him the bread because of his boldness and persistence. Now, in order for us to really understand what Jesus is saying, we must identify what it is that made the difference between Joe giving him the bread and Joe not giving him the bread. Let me give you several translations of this verse, and I think you'll begin to get the idea of what Jesus is saying. The New Living Translation translates this as, *"shameless persistence."* The English Standard Version translates it as, *"impudence."* Other translations translate it as shamelessness or persistence. What does that mean?

One, it means we persist in asking God to intervene on our behalf, even when his initial response seems to be no or silence. In this

story, the man had a need and he continued to make his need known, even when the first response was, *"leave me alone."* When it comes to praying about personal needs or praying for our church, I think the depth of our faith can be measured by the length of our attention span. When God doesn't immediately respond to our requests, do we just let it go and say, *"well, I guess it wasn't God's will."* Although that sounds spiritual enough, that's not what Jesus tells us to do.

Two, this boldness shows itself in the humility required to set aside our pride and do whatever it takes to have our needs met. When the depth of our need outweighs our pride, we're willing to go asking, even when the door is locked and the kids are in bed and everyone else says, *"I'd be way too embarrassed to do that!"* It's like all the sick, lame, and blind people who came to Jesus in spite of everyone who tried to keep them away—their pride went out the window and the shamelessly pursued the one who could meet their need. Are we willing to shamelessly persist, even when others with better manners, walk away with their needs unmet? At this point, Jesus leaves the story behind and talks openly with his disciples about prayer.

Ask, Seek, Knock (vv 9-10)

The difficulty with understanding verses 9 through 10 is that the Greek verbal system significantly differs from our English verbal system. I'm not going to bore you with the details, but Greek verbs have tense and aspect in the same word whereas English