

How to Get Your Prayers Answered
Luke 11:5-10, Luke 18:1-8, Luke 18:9-14

Good morning! I hope you're hearing me loud and clear today. I know I had some audio problems the past couple of weeks. Thank you for bearing with me. We figured it out and, hopefully, that has been addressed once and for all until the pandemic is over. And we don't know when it'll be over. No one knows when it'll be over. Except God, of course. He has a purpose in everything. One thing I'm sure he hasn't forgotten us. Amen? And he is generous with his grace as we learned last week. Amen?

Some churches have reopened. Some have not. In fact, North Point Church, a megachurch pastored by Andy Stanley will remain closed for the rest of the year except for their online services, of course. They're based in Atlanta, which is understandable. What about us, a mini-church? Just to give you an update. POPLC is reopening today with a limit of 150 people. They will not have a live service, however. They will watch their recorded Sunday service in their sanctuary. I haven't received a word from them whether it's ok for us to reopen with limited capacity. I'll check with them tomorrow. And, if they allow us, perhaps, we're going to send you another survey for our own purposes. Is that a deal?

For now, are you with me or are you with me? You have only one choice.

So, let's go to our topic today. Let me ask you:

Do you struggle to pray? You're not alone. The Pew Research Center reports that 68 percent of Christians pray every day. Often, the central question that prevents us from having a vibrant prayer life is, "Why should I pray when my prayers are not answered? I asked for healing, I'm still sick. I've been looking for a job and prayed and prayed, but nothing's happening. I've prayed for this marriage

to work out, but things are getting worse. My son is still doing drugs but I've prayed for him. What's the point of praying?"

We feel like Ziggy the cartoon character who is standing, looking up on a mountain. The sky is dark and there's one cloud up there. Ziggy says, "Have I been put on hold for the rest of my life?"

Sometimes prayer feels like that, doesn't it? As one man put it, "The heavens are brass and nothing comes back". It can be discouraging, isn't it?

Now, there could be a number of reasons why our prayers don't get answered. It's not God's timing. God is teaching us something. I have sin in my life. And so on. All of those are true. But, perhaps, we haven't applied certain principles about prayer that may help us to have an effective prayer life.

This afternoon, I want to share with you what those principles are. They're taken from the three parables of prayer by Jesus.

This message I'm sharing with you is the second part of an 8-part series we're calling "The Parables of Jesus". It's entitled, "How to Get Your Prayers Answered." Last week, we looked at the parable of the vineyard workers. We learned that God is very generous. Today, we're going to look at three short parables. Each parable contains a principle regarding prayer that we can apply in our lives. These are the same principles that men and women of God in Scripture and throughout history have applied to make them great workers for God. They not only received blessings, but they themselves have been a blessing to others. They have learned that "Prayer does not fit us for the greater works; prayer is the greater work." That's a great quote from Oswald Chambers.

Last week, I said that there are about 40 parables that Jesus told in his earthly ministry. A parable is usually a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle. It comes from the Latin word parabola and it means "comparison". And we all know that is how the way Jesus told his stories.

He used allegory or makes comparisons between two people or events or situations or concepts then sometimes explained the meaning or sometimes let his hearers try to find out the meaning. In Sunday school, a parable is often defined as “an earthly story with a heavenly or a spiritual meaning”.

Please turn with me to **Luke 11:5-10.**

This is called “The Parable of the Friend at Midnight”. Notice this comes right after the teaching of Jesus on prayer. So, Jesus teaches his disciples. “Father, hallowed be your name...” Then, he tells this parable.

Now, we can distill quite a few lessons from this parable. Like you need someone to help you in your time of need. You need to ask persistently. God is willing to help you because he’s your friend. You need to stock up on food. That’s a joke.

But what I want to talk about is a lesson on audacity. In short, the first principle I’d like to share with you in order to get your prayer answered is

1. Pray with boldness.

Some of us pray halfheartedly. Like we don’t expect an answer. Like we doubt it’s ever going to be answered. Well, if you pray like that, then expect your prayer to be not answered. James tells us this: “But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.” (James 1:6-8)

What James is pointing out is that the primary requirement in having your prayer answered is to believe in a prayer-answering God. The author of Hebrews says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Heb. 11:6) Now, when you have that kind of faith, God will reward you.

In our story, this guy was in dire straits. A friend had arrived at midnight. He didn't know he was arriving. He was surprised. His friend didn't text him. I mean, if a friend comes at midnight at your place just to stop by, wouldn't you be annoyed? This is the 21st century, man, why didn't you text me? In our story, the guy didn't show annoyance. He was even ashamed because there was no food in the pantry. He was a good friend. I think this guy was a carpenter. If he were a fisherman, there would surely be fish, at least.

You see, in their culture, it was rude not to serve food to your guest. It seems it was ruder than arriving at midnight. Hospitality was very important in Jesus' day. It would be embarrassing to have someone show up and find you have nothing to offer them. So, he went to another friend and asked for bread.

However, this friend was not like him. He was turned away. But our hero kept coming back. I imagine him continuing to bang on the door of his friend's house. Finally, his friend realized that he was really determined, so he got up and gave him bread. Notice he got up not because of their friendship but because of his shameless audacity. Other versions say, "shameless boldness" like the Christian Standard Bible.

Now, we must be careful to not compare the guy who has bread to God. God is certainly not annoyed at our boldness. He will not turn a deaf ear to our requests. In fact, God can give us much more than what we're asking for. But we need to be bold in asking him.

I went to the internet to check out some bold prayers in the Bible and I stumbled upon one lady's compilation of seven bold prayers in the Bible. Her name is Christin, she didn't give her last name, and her web site is garmentsofsplendor.com. Let me share with you just two in her list.

First is the prayer of Jacob when he wrestled with God. Can you imagine stumbling in the night as Jacob did, wrestling with God? He wrestled with the

angel of the Lord until daybreak, and as dawn approached, he would not let the Lord go until he blessed him. The Bible records this encounter, “Then the man said, ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak.’ But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’” (Genesis 32:26) If you’re struggling today with an impossible problem, be reminded that God can do the impossible if you just pray boldly.

Then, there’s the prayer of the father for his sick son in the New Testament. Jesus encountered this man one day. His son was demon-possessed. The man desperately desired Jesus to heal his precious boy. In Mark 9 it says, “The man humbly asks Jesus, ‘But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.’ ‘If you can?’ said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for one who believes.’ Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!’” (Mark 9:22b-24)

We all struggle with unbelief at times. We sometimes wonder, “God, will you come through?” “Will you help me in my time of struggle?”

In those moments of doubt, we can boldly ask as this man did, “Lord help my unbelief!” Jesus doesn’t look down on us or turn us away in our doubts. He is patient with us, and lovingly asks us to trust in him.

Hebrews says, “Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16 CSB)

Pray with boldness, that’s the first principle to get your prayer answered. The second is

2. Pray with Persistence.

Please turn with me now to the parable of the persistent widow. Open your Bibles to Luke 18:1-8.

The meaning of this parable is quite obvious. We find it in verse one. Jesus wants his followers to never give up in prayer. Notice that he gives the example of

a woman who has an adversary. That must be an adversary who was really bent on bringing her down. So, the woman was crying out for justice. She appeals to the judge who could give her relief from her pain. “It’s not fair. I don’t deserve this. This is too much.”

Isn’t that how we feel sometimes when faced with an adversarial situation? When we encounter a problem or difficulty that seems to sap all our energy? When life seems to have dealt us a bad hand?

“Lord, why am I going through this? God, this is too much for me to handle. You’re not fair, God. Why did you take away my brother, my mother, my spouse? Why are people mean to me? Why do they persecute me?”

We ask many “why” questions. In the end, we give up because answers are not forthcoming. But Jesus says, “No, never give up”.

There are at least two reasons why we should never give up.

First, **God is always listening to your cries**. He hasn’t turned a deaf ear on you. It just seems so because it’s taking a while. But as the saying goes, “God’s delays are not his denials.”

John 9:31 says, “We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.” Also the Psalmist says, “But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.” (Psalm 66:19)

You see, there’s something bigger at stake. You don’t know exactly...but God knows. And he knows exactly what he’s doing. Like in the case of the Israelites in Egypt. They were slaves for many, many years. They have cried out to the Lord many, many times. Their prayers remain unanswered for a long time. Until God raised up Moses to deliver them. In the end, God was glorified when he performed miracle after miracle just before and after they left Egypt. He said to

Pharaoh, “But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” (Exodus 9:16)

How about the time when Jesus delayed his going to Bethany in order to visit Lazarus who was sick and dying? Lazarus eventually died but Jesus raised him from the dead. Jesus said to Martha who was visibly upset because Jesus did not come on time, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” (John 11:40)

Maybe, that’s what God is telling you now. Just believe. Just wait. Just keep on praying. Then you will see the glory of God.

Even in our pandemic situation, many are wondering why it’s taking so long. Some are asking “What is God? Is he not aware of what’s going on?” This is particularly hard for those who have lost their loved ones due to covid.

Again, God knows what he’s doing. Besides, the world has gone through many upheavals before. Yet, it has survived. God is permitting this to happen. Nothing has caught him off-guard. This, too, shall come to pass. We just need to pray persistently. And wait for his answer.

Another reason why you should never give up is this.

God will not delay in helping you. He will act swiftly as verse 8 says. If this judge who did not believe in God and respect people finally relented and gave justice to the widow, how much more would our loving Father in heaven give you what you need? He loves you and has your best interest at heart.

When God’s prophet Habakkuk started to complain about a vision God gave him because it’s taking a while to fulfill, God said to him, “For the vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay.” (Hab. 2:3)

So, just like any prayer you have, that’s what God is saying to you, “Just wait for it. It will not delay”.

You see, it just seems to be delayed because our timetable is different from God's timetable. In fact, God is not bound by time and space. He is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. If we're here at this point right now and moving toward that point, God is already there and waiting for us. But he is also with us at the present point.

You can imagine him as the author of a book. You are the reader of the book. When you start to read the book, of course, you don't know what's going to happen page after page. And you just anticipate what's going to happen next. Sometimes you're excited, sometimes you're sad. Sometimes you read fast because you can't wait. Sometimes you wonder what the solution is to the problem of the main character. But the author already knows the solution. He wrote it in the first place. He knows the end of the story. He knows the entire story. From beginning to end. And if we extend the analogy further, you can imagine yourself to be a character in the story. You don't know what's going to happen next. You don't know what the solution is to your problem. But God knows. So, you don't have to worry. It will come. Just a few more pages to go. Don't give up because the answer could be just on the next page.

Again, just like in the previous parable, don't read this parable and think that God is like the judge in this story. Jesus isn't saying that. He's contrasting God and the judge. He's saying that if the widow's persistence swayed the judge, how much more is God persuaded by the passionate and tenacious prayers of His children?

And talking about persistence in prayer, let me share with you this prayer guide from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. It's called 30-Day Prayer Guide for America. Kevin shared this with me and I thought I'd share them with you. This will keep you praying for 30 days. You can start today, tomorrow, any day but be consistent and persistent. Our nation needs a lot of prayers.

Pray with boldness, pray with persistence, and the final principle is

3. Pray with humility.

So, please turn to [Luke 18:9-14](#).

Prayer is more than asking for the right things; it's about assuming the proper posture before God. We have a hard time grasping the significance of this parable because we're so used to seeing the Pharisees as the villains of the gospel.

It's important to remember that in Jesus' day, the Pharisees were the heroes. It was tax collectors who were considered evil. They were Jewish citizens who collected taxes for Rome and often extorted more than necessary to line their pockets.

Jesus doesn't excuse the tax collector's behavior. Instead, He responds to the way the tax collector approaches Him. Unlike the Pharisee who shows up full of himself, comparing himself to others, and reminding God how good he is, the tax collector approached God with a sense of self-reflection.

We find the correct posture in prayer when we stop comparing ourselves to other people and begin comparing ourselves to God.

Who or what are we compared to God? Nothing. In other words, he is God and we are not. We cannot come to God unless we acknowledge our lowly position before a holy and just God. Unless we admit our sins to God, like the tax collector, we cannot come to him.

The Psalmist says, "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false." (Psalm 24:3-4) He is saying we cannot come to the presence of God unless we are living lives that are pure and godly. And James himself expresses the same principle in his letter in 4:8, "Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

The problem is, we don't admit to our sins. Today we use other words. We say, "I goofed" or "I blew it" or we talk about "mistakes" and "weaknesses" and we say "I made a boo-boo" or "My bad." But those terms tend to define sin downward.

It has been said that the three hardest words to say in the English language are: "I was wrong." Every husband soon learns how hard it is to say those words. But when all is said and done, no wife likes to say them either. Most of us would rather do anything than to admit we were wrong.

To live a righteous life also means to obey God and obeying God means living according to God's will. So, after confession, repentance must follow. Repentance is doing what God requires us to do. It means forsaking our old ways and doing what is right before God. The Bible says in 1 Samuel 15:22, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." This is repeated in Proverbs 21:3 which says, "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice."

So, the question is, is there anything in our lives that we need to confess and repent of? Are we harboring grudges? Are we sneaking to our computers in the darkness of night to get to the internet? Do we have a critical spirit? Do we gossip? Do we desire things we shouldn't? Do we say things we shouldn't? Do we have secret sins? Do we love our neighbors as we should?

Recently, I had an experience about God humbling me. Not humiliate. There's a world of difference although they come from the same root word. God will never humiliate you. But he will humble you.

Anyway, about a couple of months ago, I decided to replace my underpowered laptop. So, I went online, saw a nice brand and picked it up curbside at Best Buy. A couple of weeks later, I felt that it was still underpowered and so I

decided to get another one, a newly released laptop from a great brand, and returned the other one. So, here I was, enjoying this new gadget and intending to keep it...until I noticed quite a few flaws. In short, I wanted to return it before 30 days were up. I was kind of hesitant because I've used it for almost a month. But I knew I wouldn't be happy using it if I kept it. But as a customer I have the right to return for whatever reason, right? Besides, their physical store was closed and I had no way to compare brands. And yet, as a Christian, am I not taking advantage of this right? Is it proper to just keep on returning things just because I didn't like it? When I return it, Best Buy would have to re-sell it as used and would lose a bit of money. But I reasoned they're making a lot of money anyway. And I debated with myself and argued with myself and almost quarreled with myself.

Anyway, I decided to look for another brand and I saw one that I thought was really good. That would be the third one I tried in less than two months. Then, I checked its price in Amazon. Amazon is selling it for \$300 less. So, I ordered the one from Amazon. Then I returned the laptop to Best Buy.

Afterwards, pangs of guilt came over me. I prayed and asked God for guidance and wisdom. That's when God showed me what's wrong with me. I have taken advantage of the situation and of other people. It didn't matter that they're a business and making money. It's just not right to buy something and return it just because I didn't like it anymore or changed my mind. I had to admit that the other two laptops were fine. But I just took advantage of the loophole in the consumer industry.

Humbled, I canceled my order from Amazon. I bought the one from Best Buy which cost \$300 more and intended to keep it. It hurt but a guilty conscience hurt more.

Now, after two days, I decided to check again its price at Best Buy. And you know what, it went down by \$300! So, I went to the store and asked for the credit. God is good! Now, I have a clean conscience and I got my money back.

Folks, to get your prayer answered, be bold, be persistent, and be humble.

Let's pray.