

**Date:** May 4-5, 2024

**Title:** The Stories Jesus Told: The Friend at Midnight

**Scripture:** Luke 11:5-8

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We started a series a few weeks ago that we've called *The Stories Jesus Told*. We're just simply looking at the parables that Jesus tells in the Gospels. And this story is about a friend at midnight who goes to his friend and says, could you give me some bread? And the friend says, hey, not really. I'm already in the house. The door's locked. The kids are inside. And the point ultimately is, he says, not just because of your friendship, but because of, and the word that is used here in the NIV is shameless audacity, because of your shameless audacity, you're going to get what it is you ask for.

This is a story that Jesus tells about prayer. I don't know what your relationship is to prayer, but I would guess there's a lot of different ways that we relate to prayer in this room. To some of us, prayer is a sweet encounter with God, and we feel as if we can bring anything to God. For others, it's a bit of a mystery. We say, you know what? I've tried to pray a few times, but it hasn't worked out that well. And I'm not exactly sure how it all works, if it works, or if I should try it. For some of us, maybe we've been followers of Jesus for 30 years. And so, there is an idea about this. For some of us, it's something that we're trying to figure out if Jesus is part of our life.

But my guess is all of us have tried to pray when we've been faced with something, whether it be a health challenge or relational challenge. Maybe you're in high school, college, and you're praying about what's the next opportunity or about a relationship, or you're praying that God would bring a baby or something in your life. Or you're just saying, this has caused me to pray.

Jesus, in this section, Luke 11:1-13, first gives us an instruction on prayer and then an illustration or a story about prayer. And we're going to look at each of these. But as I was thinking about this, I was thinking about one of the joys of my life, which has been being a dad. I have four boys and they've been a joy for me from when they were very little until today.

As my boys were growing up, there were a lot of things they asked for. But one of the things they asked for that I never wanted to do was for me to take them to Disney. Now, I know some of you are like, why wouldn't you want to go to Disney? It's the happiest place on Earth. And I say it's the hottest place on Earth. The most unpleasant place on Earth. Because you go in circles and wait in lines forever. You pay \$17 for an elephant ear, and you just say, this is not what I want to do. And so, I told my kids from very early on, look, we'll do it one time. That's it, just once.

One of my kids, when he was about 12, came to us and he said, do you think we could go to Disney before all of the magic has gone? Now, that's kind of audacious, probably more precocious than audacious, but there was a sense in which he was saying, come on, you said you would do this, would you do this? Take us to Disney. So, we loaded the family in the minivan. We drove the 20 some hours to Orlando. We rented a cheap hotel on the way

down. We got there, paid the money for the tickets, and we did the whole thing. And I told them never again. And I have stuck to it.

Now, I tell you that simply because coming to God here in this story, he says, not because of your friendship, not even just because of the child nature of the father, but because of your shameless audacity, because you will come and ask there are things that I will do. So, how does that square with your experience? Because if you've come to God and said with some desperation, God, could you or would you do this? You know something about what that feels like.

So, let's look at the instructions and then the illustration. The instructions are in verses 2-4. This is a shorter version of the Lord's Prayer. Matthew, chapters 5-7, there's what's known as the Sermon on the Mount. In chapter 6, we get the longer version of the Lord's Prayer. Here, Luke records a shorter version of it, and this is the instruction and the entry to the story. Here's what he says. Verse 2, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."

I don't know how you pray. Sometimes I'm guilty of a kind of prayer that I call the grocery list prayer. And when I say guilty, I don't mean guilty as in it's a bad thing. I just mean I fall into a trap and that is how it is. When you go to the grocery store, you have a mental list or a written list, and your whole thing is, I'm going to get to the store, I'm going to get what I need, and I'm going to get out, right? Well, sometimes that's how I end up praying. It's God, here are some things that I think you should do that I think would be good, and I need. I get in and I want to get out. And I don't think that's what Jesus is teaching here in terms of prayer. Why? Because it starts with a relationship.

When you pray, say, father. Now some of us have bad father images in our lives, and so, it's hard to even imagine coming to a father who is for us and who is good. But here the image of a Heavenly Father is one who is for us, who you can come to. And so, it speaks of a relationship and a relationship that we enter into in Jesus Christ, where we come. There's a sense in which everybody's a child of God. In Genesis, you kind of see this.

But in John chapter 1, we're told that as many as received him, Jesus Christ, they have the right to become the children of God. So, in another sense, the people who are the children of God are those who come through Jesus Christ. So, some of us come to God without a relationship, and then we wonder why it seems as if God is distant. We need a relationship with Jesus Christ, but not just a relationship with the Father. But there's a reverence here, hallowed be your name. See, God isn't just a buddy upstairs who wants to grant us everything that we want, but he's to be revered as the creator and the ruler of the universe.

And then it says, your kingdom come. If you've been here over the last couple of weeks, you know how prominent this phrase kingdom is. Inside the stories Jesus tells, he keeps talking about this rule of God, the way in which God's sphere is moving in and throughout the world. He says to his people, when you pray, pray your kingdom come. There's a responsibility here to say, I want what you want. I want your ways in my life, in the world in which I live. And so, part of prayer is saying, am I aligned to the very priorities of God?

After this, there's the request. Give us this day our daily bread. And the phrase that's used here is a phrase that simply means give me just enough for today. So, he doesn't ask for everything for all of time or too little. It's a simple request. Give me what I need.

And forgive us our debts as we forgive those who sin against us. Forgive us our sins. There's a repentance here. Sometimes people think that if they have come to faith in Jesus Christ, they repent once and they never need to repent again. But there's a recognition, if we come to a holy God, that there are times that we still need to repent and ask for forgiveness for the things that haven't been in alignment with God.

Sometimes people will think that they don't need to repent anymore, but that's not really a sign of sanctification or of being right with God. It's a sign of self-delusion that says, I now have moved to a point where there's no need for me ever to come to God and ask for forgiveness.

Then He says lead us not into temptation. So, does God lead people into temptation? In James chapter 1, verse 13, we're told that God can't be tempted with evil, and he doesn't tempt anyone. So, God isn't the one who leads us into temptation. But there's a sense in which he's praying here for protection. He's saying, Lord, keep me from the things that would take me away from your best, from your standard.

These were all parts of his prayer. And so, the prayer wasn't just God, here's what I need. But there was a relationship, there was repentance, there were requests, but there was also a realignment of priorities. All of this was part of prayer.

Abraham Lincoln once said this about prayer. He said, "I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day." Have you ever felt that? Like you just don't know which way to go.

John Piper says, "Prayer is the turning away from ourselves to God in the confidence that He will provide the help we need. Prayer humbles us as needy and exalts God as wealthy." Prayer humbles us as needy and exalts God as wealthy.

Henri Nouwen says it this way. "Prayer is the center of the Christian life... It is living with God in the here and now."

So, the instruction in here is part of what prayer is. It's bigger than just requests. And then he moves into this illustration, this story about this friend who comes. And again, the point that he makes ultimately is he says it's not because of your friendship that you're granted what you want, but it's because of your shameless audacity.

And this word is used only this time in the New Testament. It's the only time the Greek word is used. And it means something that's outside of social convention, something that's imprudent, something that's impertinent. In other words, this was a word that said to do something that was almost so bold that it was offensive.

Now, that is what Jesus says is how you should pray. So, what does that mean for you and me? Some hear this and they think, well, what I should do is I should almost demand from God. I should tell God what He should do. And certainly, there's an element here of saying there's a boldness, a shameless audacity. But I believe when you look at this, there's something else that's going on here because the metaphors that are used are mixed. There's this friend, then there's the father.

Here's what he says. Back to the father imagery. Verse 11, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?" Now, some of you dads may have done that as a joke for one of your kids. But his point is you wouldn't do that. "Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If 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!"

So, he says, you, even though you're not good like the Heavenly Father is good, know how to give good gifts. How much more will your Heavenly Father do that for you? See, the issue a lot of times is that when we pray, we come to God and we say, God, I want you to do for me what I think is best. And what we actually need to understand is that sometimes what God does is what is actually best, not what we think is best. My problem is I think I know what's best. I think that I have the best idea of what God should do that makes the most sense for me in my life. And so, I tend to say, God, this is what you should do.

But notice what He says. If your Heavenly Father knows how to give basically a good gift, and what does He say the good gift is? Do you see that there? The what? The Holy Spirit. Now, why that? Well, the Holy Spirit, John 14:16 is called the helper. Some translations say the comforter or the counselor or the advocate. And you may say, well, why do so many different English translations have different words to translate this word for the Holy Spirit? The answer is because the Greek word is so nuanced that there isn't a single English word that can capture its meaning.

I heard somebody once describe it this way. They said that the Holy Spirit, when given permanently, enters the believer, powerfully equips the believer, and personally encourages the believer. Meaning that the Holy Spirit is God's answer to a lot of our requests in life. Notice that in verses 9 and 10, you have these famous verses about asking, seeking, and knocking. It says this. "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. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." The tenses here mean keep on seeking, keep on asking, keep on knocking.

So again, our way of hearing this might be to say shameless audacity. Keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking, and then God will give you what you ask for. Not necessarily. He'll give you what you need. God doesn't always define good the way that we do, but he gives us what we need.

You see, there's two ways that we can get off in prayer. One is to be so into the shameless audacity that we have no reverent trust for God's goodness and Him giving us something that's better than we ask for. And the other is to be so deferential to his sovereignty that we

never ask with boldness or shameless audacity, God to work in our situation, and we become resigned.

You see, the answer isn't less shameless audacity and less sovereignty of God, it's that these two things are like train tracks that run through our lives where we need to keep coming and saying, God, I'm hurting. God, this is hard for me. I think it would be good if you would do this. While at the same time, being able to say, God, I trust that you are a good father, and you know what's best and you will give what is best.

You see this seeking, asking, knocking thing speaks of different experiences. To ask is to say, I see something. It's obvious to me. It feels accessible. Would you? To seek means something isn't really obvious, but it's accessible. It's there, and I have to seek it. And to not, means something's behind a closed door, it doesn't feel accessible. We have these different experiences when it comes to God. Sometimes it feels like it's right here. Sometimes it feels like we don't know, and sometimes it feels like it's shut off from us. But those experiences are part of coming and saying, but I will trust you.

I mentioned my boys asking about going to Disney when they were growing up. You know, my boys used to ask for a lot of things when they were growing up. And if you have kids, you know how this works. I didn't give my kids everything they asked for, not because I didn't love them, but precisely because I did love them. If your kid is like, I don't want to eat vegetables. I want ice cream. That's all I ever want. That's what I'm going to eat. Well, why don't you, as a parent, give your kids ice cream every time they ask? The reason you don't is because you say if you have a full ice cream diet, that's not good. And it's precisely because you love your child that you don't give them a full ice cream diet. Or if they want to play in the road, you don't say, well, you know, cars come, cars go. You instead say, no, you're not going to play in the road because I love you.

And yet, when it comes to God, if God doesn't give us exactly what we want, our tendency is to say, well, God doesn't love me. God didn't do for me what I thought God should do. He didn't do it in my timing, when maybe what God is doing is something else in our lives that He needs and wants. Again, that's hard for me because a lot of times I think I know. But if God is good and we have reverent trust, we can be both shamelessly audacious and say, God, would you? But God, I also trust the train tracks running through our lives saying I can ask and let you know that I'm hurting. You're not unconcerned and aloof and it isn't all predetermined. But at the same time, I trust that you know what is best and you're at work in the middle of my life.

C.S. Lewis once put it like this. He says, "If God had granted all the silly prayer I've made in my life, where should I be now?" Another well-known author, not quite as profound as C.S. Lewis, Nicholas Sparks put it this way. He said, "I don't pray because it doesn't work. Prayer doesn't fix anything. Bad things happen anyway." So, let me ask you, who's right? C.S. Lewis or Nicholas Sparks? I mean, that should be easy, right? C.S. Lewis. But I'm not just saying that because it's C.S. Lewis. The reason is what's a better version of reality? Is there's a God who sometimes doesn't do something that I think he should do, and he's doing something that is even better. Or there's a God who doesn't do anything, therefore it's pointless. Or the God of the Bible is a God who you can cry to and say, God, would you work? God, I'm asking you. It feels like you would be glorified if this happened. While at the same time, being able to say,

but God, you know, and sometimes God's work is to say, I'm doing something and giving you the Holy Spirit, a resource that you wouldn't have if I gave you what you asked for.

Somebody once wrote this. I ask for strength that I might achieve, and I was made weak that I might learn to humbly obey. I ask for health that I might do greater things. I was given infirmity that I might do better things. I ask for riches that I might be happy. I was given poverty that I might be wise. I ask for power that I might have the praise of others. I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God. I ask for all things that I might enjoy life, but I was given life that I might enjoy all things. I got nothing that I asked for but everything I hoped for. Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am among all men most richly blessed.

How do you know that God is good and that you can trust? Well, if you've come to faith in Jesus Christ, the way that you know is that the God of the universe loved you so much that he sent his son, that if you believe in him, you can have eternal life, that your sins can be forgiven because of Jesus. If God is that good in that, then He can be trusted to be good in things that aren't even that big. They're big, but they aren't that big. And so, the way that you can say, I know God is trustworthy and I can bring him my concerns is because he has demonstrated his love for you in this. That while we we're still sinners Christ died for us. That is the love of God. And it is the assurance that when you come to him you can trust him. And because of that, you can ask with shameless audacity for God to work in your life because there's reverential trust.

Before we conclude, I just want to say this if you're here and you have been one of those people who is just not sure where God fits in your life, maybe you've prayed, some not prayed, maybe today is just a day to say, God, I do want a relationship with you. I want you to be my father. Then you can come today and just acknowledge Jesus as the Savior, your savior, and enter into that relationship. And if today you're here and you're person who says, I have believed. Maybe today is just your day to say, God, I want to be a person who asks boldly, while at the same time, trust implicitly in your goodness.

Let's pray. God, I ask that you would help us to be people who have enough faith to be both bold and trusting simultaneously, and that that would help us to be people who pray and experience you in all of your fullness. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.