

FRIENDS AT MIDNIGHT

Text

Luke 11:5-13

Topic

After giving His disciples a pattern for prayer Jesus encouraged them to intercede for others by telling the story of the friend at midnight

Title

*“In My Midnight Intercessions
When I Tell All the World that I Love You”*

Introduction

I don't know how it was for you growing up, but if I ever asked my mom for something the words I never wanted to hear were, “go ask your father.”

“Go ask your father” in parent-speak translated to “**No!**”

Jesus had just given His disciples what we call the Lord's Prayer. It was really a model, or a pattern, for them to follow when they prayed. It was a *form* for prayer rather than a *formal* prayer. In the verses that immediately follow the Lord's Prayer it's as if Jesus was saying, “now go ask your Father!” Except that, in this case, you *want* to hear those words; they do not mean “No!” but seem to mean “Yes!”

To emphasize that your heavenly Father wants to say “Yes,” Jesus told two brief stories:

1. In the first story a friend goes at midnight to ask for bread for a needy traveler. The answer is “Yes!” and he is given the loaves he needs.
2. In the second story you ask your Father to give you the Holy Spirit and again the answer is “Yes!”

Why, then, does God the Father seem to be saying “No!” to so many of our requests? Maybe we can find the answer here.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Ask & Your Father Will Give You Bread To Feed Others, and #2 Keep On Asking & Your Father Will Give The Holy Spirit To Fill You.

#1 Ask & Your Father Will Give You
Bread To Feed Others
(v5-8)

Do you see that? Do you see that the friend goes to ask for bread, not for himself, but to feed someone else?

Jesus was telling His disciples, and He is telling you, to “go ask your Father” for the needs of others, then set before them what He provides.

Let's work through the verses to see how we come to that conclusion.

Luke 11:5 And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves;
Luke 11:6 for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’;

In Bible times people often traveled in the evening or at night to avoid the intense heat of the Middle Eastern day. One such weary traveler arrived at his friend's house at about midnight. It seems he had come unexpectedly; but that did not excuse the host from exercising hospitality.

Showing hospitality was more than just a common courtesy. The way you *showed* and *showered* hospitality upon guests, whether invited or unexpected, was a measure of your character. Your reputation was at stake. As Rocky Balboa once said, “They don't remember you - they remember your reputation.”

Put yourself in the story. You are an average family living in a one-room structure that also serves as the barn for your livestock. You and your family are already asleep. You went to bed thankful that God provided your daily bread, but you have nothing left over. Suddenly there's a knock on your door. You answer it, and it's a friend on a journey. Regardless the

time; regardless your poverty; regardless your lack of bread; you must show hospitality.

When was the last time you ran out of bread in the middle of the night, and went next door to ask your neighbor for a few loaves?

Probably never! But what if your situation was an emergency and you needed help? Would you hesitate to go next door?

You must bear in mind that the situation Jesus was describing was, in fact, an emergency – a social emergency. Your reputation was on the line. So, you get up and go quickly to your neighbor to ask for bread.

The disciples would see nothing unusual about this; it happened all the time.

Luke 11:7 and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'?

Luke 11:8 I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

Our understanding of these two verses is critical to properly interpreting the story. When we read them, we add our own biases. We think of ourselves, in modern America, bothering a neighbor in the middle of the night for a few slices of bread. As we've already said, this was far more serious – Hospitality 911.

The real sense of these words, a better reading of them in context, is something like this: "Do any of you even for a moment think that your friend won't get up to help you?"

So, you see, the point of the story is not at all that the friend wouldn't respond unless you kept knocking like crazy. He was more than willing to respond.

That is a very different read than we usually have on these verses. Let me answer the two concerns (or complaints) you might have about reading it this way:

1. First, in verse seven, doesn't he answer from within and tell the friend outside that, if he gets up, he'll disturb the whole family? Doesn't he try to get rid of his friend? *Not really!* The force of Jesus' words are that you can't imagine him answering you that way. Remember, this was another simple, one-room dwelling. The animals were stabled inside, and the family was all bedded down. The whole family, and the stabled animals, were already disturbed, as soon as the friend knocked.
2. Second, in verse eight, doesn't it say that it was because of his "persistence" that he will rise and give him as many as he needs? Sure it does; but "persistence" doesn't necessarily mean his persistent knocking. One commentator put it like this: "The word importunity... means *shamelessness, boldness, impudence, audacity*. It does not mean *persistence* as many in the church think – that we have to keep praying the same prayer – asking for the same thing – until God gives it. Its simple meaning is that as the man who shamelessly dared to ask his friend at midnight to meet his needs, and got what he asked for, so too believers who shamelessly through prayer ask, seek, and knock, will also get what they ask for from God."

This story is **not** teaching you that if you will be persistent enough in knocking on Heaven's door that God will finally get disturbed enough, or see how serious you really are, and be obligated to answer you. It is teaching almost the very opposite – **that God is more than willing to give you the bread you request from the get-go!**

When you "go ask your Father," the answer is "Yes!" Why, then, does our Father seem to be saying "No!" to so many of our requests?

Let's make a spiritual application of the story. You are the man who has no food left over. Will you admit your poverty? Your spiritual poverty? Will you humble yourself and admit that, apart from God, you have nothing to offer anyone? It is an important first step.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." Heaven and all its resources are available to you but only if you admit your total dependence upon God.

All the people you know are on a journey at night. Their life on earth is a journey during which the Lord wants to reveal Himself to them. But it's night – it's dark, in the sense that this world is dominated by sin. Sin has brought disease, disaster, and death. Sooner or later, your friends will have a midnight experience for which they need help.

You “go ask your Father.” Only His ‘household’ is not a poor, one-room dwelling. His ‘household’ is heaven, and He is over the earth. He can give you all you need to set before your needy friend.

What do they really need? Most often, what they really need is spiritual bread, spiritual food – **not** the physical or material help we ask for.

Earlier in Luke's Gospel a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus. Instead of healing him Jesus told him that his sins were forgiven. He went on to heal the paralytic in order to show that He was the Son of God with power on earth to forgive sins. But it was spiritual healing, spiritual help, that was most significant.

You can declare to people that Jesus *can* and *will* forgive them of their sins. It is the greatest need they have; and you have this food to set before them. God may give you gifts, or other resources, to help them physically. But the bread, the food, they need, is to know God.

I don't know about you, but this reading of our verses sets me free to enjoy talking to my Father in heaven. It relieves me of being a brat-child, always disturbing Heaven with my continual request for non-essentials. It focuses my heart's attention on others.

#2 Keep On Asking & Your Father Will Give
The Holy Spirit To Fill You
(v9-13)

The Holy Spirit is a Person and He is God. When you become a Christian, God the Holy Spirit comes to live in you. If He is already in you, why are you supposed to ask God the Father to give Him to you?

The only answer I can see is that even as a believer who has the Holy Spirit you continually need a greater experience of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Luke 11:9 “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.

Luke 11:10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

The verbs used mean, “Ask, and keep on asking; seek, and keep on seeking; knock, and keep on knocking.”

Is there a progression in the three verbs, in the sense that you get more and more intense as you go from asking to seeking to knocking? You certainly read it that way if you interpret “persistence” earlier to indicate that you might meet with resistance. But clearly God is not reluctant to give you the Holy Spirit.

Ask, seek and knock might refer to different situations you might find yourself in that require the abundance of the Spirit:

- You “ask” and He is given seems to be a general statement. As you are praying, talking to God, keep on asking for the Spirit in your life.
- You “seek” and He is found would seem to indicate a waiting on the Lord for His spiritual help rather than pressing forward thinking you’ve got it under control, or that you know what to do.
- You “knock” and it will be opened stresses obedience to the Spirit once He shows you the door that He is opening.

You are promised that your Father *wants to* and *will* give you the Holy Spirit. To reinforce this promise of the Spirit, Jesus tells another little story:

Luke 11:11 If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?

Luke 11:12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

This is similar to parents jokingly saying that they sent their kids out to play on the freeway! It is immediately understood that you would *never* do such

a thing. Neither would your heavenly Father. If you ask, especially for the Holy Spirit, **He gives Him to you.**

The illustration suggests a sense of fullness. The father gives his son a three course meal – bread, fish, and eggs. Your Father in Heaven wants you to have a sense that your serving others is filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, it's not *your* wisdom or insight that you are setting before them as spiritual food, but rather those things that are suggested to you by the Holy Spirit as you yield to His influence.

Luke 11:13 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!"

You are *already* a son; God is *already* your Father. The person in this verse is born-again, a Christian, who is told he or she can have a greater, fuller, experience with the Holy Spirit.

Why don't we have a greater, fuller experience with God the Holy Spirit? Two things come to mind - our backgrounds and our biases. We need to forget our *backgrounds* and our *biases* and take God at His word.

1. Some of us tend to be more conservative when it comes to our understanding of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that because the Holy Spirit indwells us we don't need to ask, seek, and knock for Him. We think that our personal study and discipline are all that is required to live the Christian life. We think we can memorize all the right answers to the needs of others. We ask our Father to bless our wisdom and insight rather than asking for, seeking for, even knocking for, His.
2. Others of us tend to be more charismatic when it comes to our understanding of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells us but we only believe He has filled us if we speak with tongues or prophesy or experience some other outward experience of His presence. With regards to the needs of others we are reluctant, or we refuse, to tell people that God's grace is sufficient in their suffering.

Neither extreme is healthy! You can, and should, ask your heavenly Father to give you the Holy Spirit. But His fullness is not to showcase your gifts but to reveal the Giver.

Conclusion

“Go ask your Father.” He will delight to give you two things:

1. The spiritual food that your night-traveling ‘friends’ really need, and
2. The fullness of the Spirit that **you** need in order to set the food before them.

*This Friday, January 27th, from ten til midnight, we will gather as the **Friends at Midnight**. We will approach God as our Father for the needs of others and for leading for our church. Be part of it!*