

Our Prayer Life

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Bible Verses for Lesson: Luke 11:5-13, NKJV

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; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 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'? 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.

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. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 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? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 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!"

1. God's generosity

In this teaching in Luke 11 our Lord Jesus taught His disciples that God responds generously to those who seek, ask and knock. Jesus spoke clearly, "*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. [v. 10]*" Jesus gave this teaching after His disciples' request to teach them how to pray. The Model Prayer, which is often mistakenly referred to as 'the Lord's Prayer,' teaches us to pray for our daily sustenance, both spiritual and natural, to forgive others' offences toward us, and to pray for the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven and that God's will be done on earth as in heaven. Then, He goes on to teach them about God's generosity in connection with our daily sustenance. He emphasizes that God is generous in giving 'good gifts' [v. 13], including both natural gifts and spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit.

We need to be fully convinced of God's generosity toward all of His creation. Our God is a very generous Creator. This characterization of God is called 'General Providence' in the theological language. This refers to God providing sufficiently so that all of His creation continues to exist while fulfilling the purposes of their creation. Lord Jesus described this nature of God as giving sunlight and rain without regard to the good and the evil in people.

[Matt 5:45] that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

God's general providence has been instituted at the time of the creation through the natural laws He built in all creation. Even those who follow Satan in this world are allowed to breathe clean air, drink sparkling clear water and be filled with nutritious produce of the earth. However, when the Egyptian Pharaoh refused to allow the people of Israel to leave Egypt, God turned the gifts of His general providence to curses which were brought upon the entire Egyptian people. This story teaches us that God's general providence is not always guaranteed to the enemies of God but can be limited or eliminated as God sees necessary.

When the curse of death comes to the unbelieving sinners, all gifts from God they could enjoy thanks to God's general providence are taken away from them and they transition into a cursed place where God's providence, grace and mercy are no longer available, forever. However, for God's people the picture is quite the opposite. To the blessed children of God death is only a stepping stone from this world, where they could enjoy the gifts of general providence and the special providence for His people, into the realm of eternity wherein they come to enjoy 'very special blessings' of God, which cannot be compared to what they enjoy here on the earth, as apostle Paul teaches in the following verse.

[1 Corinthians 2:9] But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

'Special Providence' is a theological term that refers to the special blessings and provisions that God bestows to select groups of people, most notably to His chosen people, in contrast to the general providence that applies to God's providence for all His creation. Just as parents sacrifice and labor so as to provide good things exclusively for their own children to show them their love and care, God provides in special ways for His own children with special

blessings and aids in times of need as well as superior benefits that are not available to the rest of His creation. Both Old Testament and New Testament scriptures describe the special providence of God for His chosen people.

[Psalm 105:5-6] Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth, O seed of Abraham His servant, You children of Jacob, His chosen ones!

[Luke 12: 24-28] Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?

In His sermon of Luke 12 Lord Jesus speaks about God's general providence bestowed on the ravens and the lilies of the field, which represent God's creation in general. But He wants Christians, who are the chosen people of God, to understand that God is fully aware of our natural needs and He deeply cares for them because He loves them far more than the rest of His creation. This message should not be confused with the so-called 'prosperity gospel,' which deceives people in subtle ways and tells them that God will make all Christians rich and prosperous. God loves His children, but He alone chooses the ways of expressing His love and care for each of them. There should not be any confusion about the fact that the greatest blessing from God is the gift of His Holy Spirit in us.

2. Let us seek, search and knock

"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. [v. 9]" This is an outstanding promise of God to His people. Here, what should we ask and how should we ask? Lord Jesus provides the answers to these questions in the verses on top.

From verse 6 and on He speaks about a person who goes to his neighbor in the middle of the night to borrow three loaves of bread so as to feed a guest that had come to his house suddenly. He went to ask for loaves of bread not for his own family but for a visitor who came to his house. Because he was begging so earnestly and persistently for his guest friend, this neighbor of his would rise up from his bed and give the bread as needed to him. Through this story that Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples He is teaching us that God will likewise answer our prayers for others when we so earnestly and persistently ask Him. What wonderful presentation of God's generosity in answering our prayers!

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. [v. 8]

Next, Lord Jesus teaches us on what to ask for when we pray to God. He says plainly that we humans help one another by lending and giving bread, fishes and eggs in times of need, thus it is only right for us to manifest the generous nature of God in us. Just as we do so to one another, would God not give us with 'the good things' bounteously, He asks. Furthermore, Lord Jesus says God will give His children much more excellent gift of His Holy Spirit, who, He implies, is the best gift that God can give to His children. In other words, whereas we humans mostly ask for natural things to God, the best gift we can ask God is the gift of Holy Spirit.

This causes us to be puzzled. In the course of our life here on the earth we humans face many needs daily – food, clothing, dwellings, cars, schools/ education, jobs, health/ healing from illnesses, physical strengths, human relations, social status, political powers, intellectual capacity, artistic talents, professional talents and many others. These are the things we ask God to give to us in His kindness and we are grateful for them when they are given as a result of our prayers. God knows that we need these natural things and we naturally ask God to provide them for us on a daily basis. But Lord Jesus is telling us to lift our sight high above these mundane things of life, high above our natural and social needs and look toward the kingdom of Heaven where God dwells to see the qualities and assets we will need to have with us when we come into His kingdom. He is trying to help us be prepared for our time with Heavenly Father in the eternity's time. Furthermore, He knows that the gift of Holy Spirit will bring spiritual riches to our lives while we live here on the earth because Holy Spirit will bring forth the following fruits in us.

[Galatians 5:22-23] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Do you lack love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control in your life? Lord Jesus is saying that if you have God's gift of Holy Spirit in you, these fruits of the Spirit will enrich your life so much more than the natural gifts we tend to ask God. The mark of a Christian is being abundantly rich in these fruits of the Spirit of God. They make people genuinely happy. And that is why Christians are happier and more joyful than non-believers.

So, this is a way of Lord Jesus scolding His disciples. It is a reprimand to not disregard God's love and care for His people because God already knows what we need and in His abundant love for us He provides richly what we need in natural ways. And He is telling us to rather pray for the gift of Holy Spirit, His help, the prosperity and expansion of the Kingdom of God, and for clear manifestation of God's justice in His churches. We need to pray earnestly, persistently and diligently for these goals rather than for our natural needs.

[Matt 6: 7-8] And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. "Therefore, do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

[Matt 6:31-33] "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

In spite of the explicit prohibition by Lord Jesus of repetitious rote prayers, some denominations still practice catechism prayers before statues of Mary and so-called 'saints.' This practice is a direct affront to God because they are doing what He told the believers to not do specifically. It is also a serious act of denigration of God's character. When Jesus taught the model prayer, He told them to start all prayers with "Our Father in Heaven!" He wanted His Jewish disciples to come to His Father as their Father instead of as Jehovah as the Jews were used to doing traditionally. So, if God is our Father, should we recite a rote, memorized prayer before Him to make our petitions? Do we as people do so when we come before our parents and talk to them? Why do we recite a memorized prayer from a prayer book written by a church authority when we come before our Heavenly Father? When we do so, we are saying "You are just like Buddha that the Buddhists recite prayers to or a stone god to whom the Japanese people pray." We have downgraded God to the level of Buddha, stone gods and tree gods when we recite prayers out of a prayer book. Let us go to the living God who will always listen to our petitions when we come to Him saying, "Abba Father!"

3. How should we pray?

We have learned where to place our prayer priority. Now, let us consider how we should pray. God is pleased to see His children come to Him each day, regularly and often, wanting to have a time of dialogue with Him. Through this process of regular prayer sessions, the relationship between us and our Heavenly Father gets deepened and the mutual love becomes greater in depth and breath. From the teaching found in the verses we read, let us note how God responds to our prayers.

First, our Heavenly Father rises from His throne so as to respond to the persistent requests of His children. Consider the meaning of verse 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 [v. 8]."* When we are persistent in our prayers, God will even rise up from His throne to respond to our prayers! Lord Jesus wanted to teach this wonderful nature of God to His disciples. Let us be persistent with our earnest requests and believe that our Father will answer to our requests because of our persistence.

Secondly, let us believe that God will answer to every righteous prayer of His children. Lord Jesus knew that the faith in His disciples was shallow and limited. He compared their faith as like a grain of mustard seed, which is the smallest of all plant seeds. In spite of the small size of our faith, He teaches that God can work a great miracle if we ask in faith, such as moving a mountain from one location to another. He is referring to hindrances that are impossible to be removed by our strength alone. So, God lends His hand to remove them if we ask in faith.

In this dark and turbulent era, we see dark forces of evil being openly active in our society and in the world. If we ask God to remove them because we are limited in strength and resources, He will rise up and remove them so that His work could proceed for the Kingdom to expand and that His righteousness shine brightly in this dark world. God will use His angels to provide protection to persecuted Christians in China, to constrain and eliminate godless evil

regimes of the world and to enable the gospel to be preached to those who are under oppression without freedom. His work must go on so that the glory and power of Almighty God be manifest as the world nears the end of the ages. We need to pray these godly requests earnestly and in good faith, for nothing is impossible when we are on God's side.

[Matt 17:20] So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

James, a brother of our Lord Jesus, writes that God gives generously to His children without reprimand. And he emphasizes the right attitude of asking in faith without doubting. We must set aside our haphazard prayers of habits and tradition, but ask in full faith and conviction that God's projects for furtherance of His Kingdom and gospel will be fulfilled and that His glory and truth be clearly manifest in our lives, in our churches and in our nation and in this world because He is the Almighty Creator of the whole universe. Let us pray diligently, every day, with persistence and in full faith.

[James 1: 5-8] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.