

PARABLES OF POWER #5

Holy Haggling in Prayer

Read: Luke 11:5-10

Aim: To encourage people to pray boldly

Introduction:

Recently at the Wesley International Congregation Elders Retreat we spent one whole evening in prayer. There were many prayers of repentance for not praying enough.

On the other hand, a few days later, at a gathering of ministers to appoint someone to a new executive position, only two very short prayers were offered. It was in clear contrast to the precedent in Acts 13:1-3.

How many people pray too much? How many of us could pray more?

This is the value of a prayer diary. It helps us to pray often and regularly. It is vital to pray biblically. Jesus gives us some clues here.

1. Sometimes the door seems locked (7)

Sometimes when we pray it seems as though we just can't get through. The door seems locked.

We pray for healing; the salvation of family members; for parents to understand us – or vice versa; for employment or education to be successful – but the answer seems a long time coming.

But when God is on the other side of the door it is never locked!

Here are some encouraging statements about prayer –

- Prayer brings power. Prayer is power, the time of prayer is the time of power. The place of prayer is the place of power. Prayer is tightening the connections with the divine dynamo so power may flow freely without loss or interruption – S.D.Gordon.
- God will do nothing but in answer to prayer – John Wesley.
- The greatest thing anyone can do for God and for man is to pray – S. D.Gordon.
- God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil... The prayers of God's saints are the capital stock of heaven by which God carries on his great work on earth – E.M. Bounds).
- Prayer is striking a winning blow... service is gathering up the results – S.D.Gordon.
- Will prayers that do not move our hearts move God's heart? – Anonymous
- Hurry is the death of prayer – Samuel Chadwick.
- We can only know the will of God when we really know God – hence our need to spend time with him in prayer – B.C.
- Satan rocks the cradle when we sleep at our devotions – Joseph Hall.

2. The power of importunity (8)

Jesus says that this man gets his bread because of his boldness. There are various translations of this word—

AV – importunity

NIV, New Century – boldness

ESV – impudence

GNB – shamelessness

NRSV, NASB, NKJ, Weymouth – persistence

The Message – waking the neighbours

The Greek word is *anaideia*. It has connotations of all these meanings.

It is the opposite of *aidos* which means propriety, modesty, reverence, bashfulness.

Ironically, these are the very qualities that for generations we have been taught should characterise our prayer! We have been told to be ‘reverent’ and non-assertive in approaching God.

Jesus tells us here to pray in exactly the opposite fashion! It is boldness – even impudence – in prayer that he commends.

3. A process for prayer

Jesus teaches us three stages of prayer. All three are present imperatives which implies continuity of action ie over and over again.

Ask – articulation ie defining the need

There is nothing wrong with asking.

A customer says to a car salesman: ‘Would you take \$10 000.’

Salesman: ‘Come on, you must think I’m mad to suggest that?’

Customer: ‘If I didn’t ask, you wouldn’t have the opportunity to say yes.’

Asking God gives Him the opportunity to say ‘Yes’.

Asking helps to clarify just what it is we need. We need to be specific when we pray.

Seek – attitude ie persistence

Seeking means looking for something. The word has within it a sense of ongoing activity. If we had the thing we wouldn’t be looking for it.

Jesus talked about this in some of his parables – eg the parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep. Both involved ongoing effort to find something. Poet Eden Worrell put it like this –

*Don't stop praying, the Lord is nigh,
Don't stop praying, he'll hear your cry
God has promised and he is true;
Don't stop praying, he'll answer you.
Don't stop praying, but have more trust;
Don't stop praying, for pray we must;
Faith will banish a mount of care;
Don't stop praying! God answers prayer!*

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Knock – action ie doing something about it

In the parable, the man knocks and knocks and knocks. He is unashamed!

I remember as a teenager attending Pentecostal ‘tarry meetings’ where people would spend hours on their knees seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We would not give up – we prayed until we found the answer.

On Sundays we invite people to the John Lees Chapel at Wesley Mission after church so there is time for them to wait on God for their needs to be met.

Ephesians 6:18 – the word ‘all’ (including ‘always’) occurs four times, indicating the need for total commitment in prayer.

Note the value of the 10/5 program – praying with the spirit ten minutes a day at least five days a week. See B Chant, *Praying in the Spirit* Tonbridge: Sovereign World, 2002:123ff for testimonies of the extraordinary benefit of doing this.

4. God’s promises (10)

Jesus said, ‘*Everyone* who asks receives.’ This is an astounding statement.

What causes us to hesitate is uncertainty about whether our prayers are according to God’s will. We would like to include a word like ‘sometimes’. But Jesus does not include it.

Or we want to qualify it by saying something like, ‘As long as it is in God’s will.’ And of course, like any wise parent, God only answers those requests that are His will.

Prayers for others

Note that in our parable, the supplicant’s plea is unselfish: he is asking for someone else. These prayers are more likely to please God.

Eg James 5:14-16; Job 42:10

Prayers based on God’s promises

Not everything we ask for is God’s will for us—often we are foolish and self-centered in our prayers. But there are many things we know are God’s will—

- Wisdom and revelation
- victory over temptation
- peace of heart
- reconciliation with our enemies
- guidance
- freedom from depression
- freedom from care
- more love in our lives
- more patience

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- more gentleness
- more humility
- more grace
- more courage
- We can ask for –
- the fullness of the Holy Spirit
- spiritual gifts
- daily bread
- our basic needs to be met
- the Word of God to dwell in our hearts
- strength in difficult times
- joy in the midst of sadness
- light in periods of gloom
- self-control in the way we live

Indeed, from the New Testament we can form quite a list of people we should confidently pray for—

- ‘Everyone’ (1 Timothy 2:1)
- Kings (1 Timothy 2:1)
- All in authority (1 Timothy 2:1)
- All the saints (Romans 8:27; Ephesians 6:18)
- One another (James 5:16)
- Our city (Jeremiah 29:7)
- Our nation (Exodus 32:31,32)
- Missionaries (Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3)

Obviously, this list could be expanded further. But even as it is, there is enough to keep us busy for a long time!

Let’s take God seriously! Begin with those things we KNOW are His will.

5. How much more... (13)

‘How much more...!’ What a phrase! What an encouragement! If we know how to answer a request, how much more will God answer our prayers!

If our children ask for coke, we don’t give them cocaine. If they want a pizza we don’t give them an empty plate. If we know how to give good gifts, how much more will God do so!

Note how Jesus makes particular reference to giving the Holy Spirit here. When we ask for the Holy Spirit this is what God will give us.

Challenge

- Practise the 10/5 program
- Ask, seek, knock in prayer
- Don’t give up
- Remember that God is more generous than we think!

SOMETHING TO THINK OR TALK ABOUT

Remember: You don’t have to answer all the questions: choose those that seem most relevant

Read: Luke 11:1-13

Biblical

1. What does this parable tell you about eating and sleeping habits in the first century?
2. Jesus answered the disciples’ question (1) in three ways – with a model prayer (2-4), a parable (5-8) and some straight teaching 9-13). Why do you think he chose these three different forms of response?
3. What do you think about Jesus’s statement that friendship was not enough reason for the second man to get up and help his neighbour? (8) Is He telling us that this is how it should be or is this man an exception?
4. What other biblical passages on prayer urge us to pray with boldness?
5. What do you think is the key phrase in verse 13? Why?

Personal and practical

6. On a scale of one (little) to ten (much), where would you place your level of boldness in prayer? What can you do about it?
7. Share a testimony of how God has answered bold, prevailing prayer in your life.
8. Are there matters for prayer that you have given up on? Could you come back to them and bring them before the Lord again? Share with the group if you like.
9. Share a need in your life or in the life of someone you know of or in the congregation. Invite the group to nominate a relevant promise from Scripture to meet that need. Use this as a basis for prayer.

About Dr Barry Chant

Barry Chant is Senior Pastor of the Wesley International Congregation in Sydney, Australia. He is a regular speaker at church services, seminars, conferences and conventions. Hundreds of thousands of his books have been sold around the world. He has degrees in arts, theology and ministry, a diploma in education and a PhD in history. He was the initiator and former president of Tabor College, Australia.

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