

**HUNGRY FOR GOD:  
STUDIES ON PRAYER**

**6**

**PRAYING WITH PERSEVERANCE**

**Luke 11:1–13**

**By John Ebert**

*“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”*

Luke 18:1

*“The value of persistent prayer is not that He will hear us...but that we will finally hear Him.”*

William McGill

*“The primary purpose of prayer is not to get answers, but to deepen our friendship with God.”*

Morris Venden

## AIM OF STUDY

- To encourage us to pray to God continually for everything that we need.

## KEY VERSE

“I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.”

Luke 11:8

## PREPARATION

Read over the notes on “**How to Teach the Bible in Small Group**” and “**Some Practical Suggestions for Leading a Small Group Discussion**” in Vineyard Church of Columbus’ *Small Group Leadership Training Manual*. Before you read over the Scripture, pray that God would give you direction for leading your group and teach you something relevant. Then, read through the passage and the Bible study below. **You will need to go over the questions and choose which ones you want to emphasize and which you could eliminate if your time is limited.** Note that the application questions are marked with an asterisk (\*). Rather than leaving these to the end of the study, ask one or two as you work through the passage so people are being confronted by Scripture’s truths and applying them to their own lives. If you find you are falling behind schedule and need to move ahead, you could summarize some of the passage and then go to the final questions.

These studies contain more background material and information on the passages than any group will cover in a meeting. The authors are supplying this for the leaders’ benefit—to help reduce your study and preparation time; to provide resources for possible questions group members may raise; and to clarify some gray areas of doctrine that may be in your mind as you prepare. Obviously, we cannot exhaust any one subject in a document like this, so you may want to do further reading and discuss doctrine with your pastor. We highly recommend *The New Bible Dictionary* and *The New Bible Commentary* as excellent resources for study.

## OPENERS

[This is a true story written by one of our editors.]

One chilly autumn night, my daughter and I watched from our balcony as a mother duck led her six ducklings—single file—home for the night. Unfortunately, one after the other, all six ducklings fell into a drainage sewer in our parking lot. The mother duck seemed frantic, as she circled the sewer cover for nearly an hour, unable to rescue her babies. When dusk arrived, she headed home, obviously heartbroken that she had to leave her beloved ducklings behind. Neighbors had also gathered by this time, and we contacted the fire department, asking them to rescue the ducklings. Hey, if they can get cats out of trees, why not ducklings out of a drainage sewer?

Sure enough, firemen arrived and tenderly lifted each duckling out of their underground prison. I provided a temporary home for them using my cats' carrier—an action that did not go unnoticed by my cats! In any case, the ducklings were safe on my balcony for the night. They settled in and went to sleep. Then, about 6 a.m. the next day, I was awakened by a loud, somewhat nervous “quack-quack” sound. It was the mother duck, and this time, she'd brought her husband as backup! Up I got—in my pajamas—and excitedly collected the carrier with the ducklings inside, ran up the hill in front of my apartment, and opened the carrier door. I cleared the area immediately to avoid being attacked by mama and papa duck, both of whom began to swoop toward me when they saw me near their babies. As I dripped cold morning dew and grabbed a heavy robe, I watched through my apartment window as both parents waddled to the carrier. Mama circled several times, while papa stood guard at the side. Then, mama gave the ducklings a silent “go-ahead” order, and each marched single-file behind their mother. Papa took up the rear, and the family waddled home.

I was in awe of the miracle I'd just witnessed! Suppose the mama duck had simply given up when she was unable to get what she needed the night before? Suppose she had never returned—husband in hand—to rescue her babies? Suppose no one had cared enough to contact the fire department and provide a temporary home for the ducklings?

Thankfully, mother duck persevered, and my neighbors and I cared enough to get involved, even though it was cold, an inconvenient time and risky business (those ducks can get nasty when their babies are endangered)! The duck family got what they wanted, and I like to think their “relationship” with the human family may have become a bit more trusting than it was before.

Many times in life, we are like that duck family. Our situations seem hopeless. Our pain and/or fear is great, and we are helpless. But God is our helper. Always willing and able—not necessarily in the way or in the timing that we would like—to respond when we persevere in prayer.

***Pray that the Holy Spirit will come and encourage you through this study to persevere in prayer.***

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

[This is background material for leaders. You may decide what to share with your group.]

The passage in this study is one of many passages in the gospel of Luke that record what Jesus taught his disciples. What makes this passage unique is that this is the only case in Luke in which the disciples ask Jesus to teach them anything (Marshall, p. 456). Since this is Jesus' response to the disciples' request for teaching on prayer,

we can assume that what Jesus says here is what He thinks is most important for us to know about prayer.

### **STUDY THE PASSAGE: Luke 11:1–13**

**Let's read Luke 11:1–13. Would two volunteers read verses 1–8 and 9–13?**

#### **1. Look at Luke 11:1. What prayers do you see in this verse?**

This verse records that Jesus was praying, but it does not directly tell us anything about how He prayed or what He said. Because the rest of this passage contains some of Jesus' teaching about prayer, we might reasonably assume that Jesus was praying in accordance with what He taught in this passage.

The disciple's request, "Lord, teach us to pray" is also a kind of prayer. In fact, this is probably the first prayer that we should pray.

#### **2. Look at Luke 11:2–4. What kind of prayer does Jesus teach his disciples?**

A common categorization of types of prayers is given by the acronym A.C.T.S: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. In prayer, we can worship God, confess our sins, thank God for what he has given us and ask God for things. In addition, prayer can include listening to God, interceding for others, even complaining to God about our problems. While other types of prayer are included in these verses, Jesus' primary focus is on only one category of prayer: asking God for things. In this model prayer, Jesus begins with one main lesson: we begin by going to God, Our Father.

#### **3. What does Jesus tell His disciples to ask for in prayer? How often do you think we need to ask for these things?**

There are five requests in Jesus' sample prayer.

The first two, "hallowed be your name" and "your kingdom come," have to do with God's purposes on earth. Hallowing God's name means treating it as holy, showing proper respect for God, and worshipping God. In this request, we ask God to do things that bring honor to His name and also to change people's hearts towards God so they honor and worship Him (Culpepper, p. 234). The coming of God's kingdom refers to God's ruling over and governing all things. In this request, we ask God to take control of the world and order all things according to His will. In asking for His kingdom to advance, God's answer could impact our families, our neighbors, our co-workers, our government, or people in another part of the world.

The third request is for “our daily bread.” In this request, we ask God to provide us with food and anything else we need to sustain our lives.

The fourth request is for forgiveness. We think, say, and do things that offend God and injure other people. In this request, we ask God not to hold these offenses against us, but to forgive and restore our relationship with Him and with others.

The final request is for deliverance from temptation. Since God does not tempt anyone (James 1:13), it seems odd to ask God not to lead us into it. Scholars believe that the Hebrew phrase was difficult to translate into Greek because of differences in the two languages. A more literal translation of this supposed Hebrew phrase might be “cause us not to succumb to temptation” (Marshall, p. 462). In any case, what we are asking is that God help us escape or overcome any tempting situations that we encounter.

This prayer is a model that we might pray each day. For each day, we should hallow God’s name and pray that His Kingdom will come. Each day, we need our daily bread. Each day, we need cleansed from our sins. Each day, we need strength to resist temptation.

One other thing to note is that this is a prayer not only for individual, but community prayer. Jesus doesn’t say ‘give *me* my daily bread’, ‘forgive *me*’ and ‘lead *me*’, but ‘give *us* our daily bread’, ‘forgive *us*’ and ‘lead *us*’. Jesus probably assumed that individuals would pray as He instructed. The way He chose to word the prayer, however, seems to indicate that we should ask for these things as a group whenever we gather with other Christians (Culpepper, p. 234).

**\*How often do you pray with others? What kinds of prayer do you participate in together?**

- 4. In Luke 11:5–8, Jesus tells a story to make a point about prayer. This story recounts an incident involving three friends. Imagine yourself as each one of the characters. Given the circumstances, how would you feel? What would you do?**

One friend, the traveler, precipitates the incident by arriving in the middle of the night at the host’s home. In the hot climates like the Middle East, one might travel at night to avoid the heat during the day (Marshall, p. 464). This person probably is tired from the journey and wants to relax, get something to eat, and rest.

The host is another friend, who welcomes the traveler to stay the night. In Jesus’ time, people prepared the food they needed each day. They didn’t have refrigerators or plastic wrap to store food for a long time, nor were there 24-hour convenience stores where they could buy food at any time of the day or

night. Therefore, it is not surprising that the host did not have a supply of food on hand to share with the traveler who probably arrived unexpectedly. However, hospitality was highly valued in Jesus' culture, so it would be embarrassing for the host not to be able to feed a guest (Bock p. 311). Today we might be more likely to have food on hand or offer to make a quick trip for carryout. However, if a good friend showed up late at night when we didn't have anything to give them to eat, we might feel some of the pressure that the host felt.

The third friend is the neighbor. This person's family is asleep. Then, the host comes banging on the door and wakes the neighbor up. The neighbor is probably angry about being woken up and unwilling to help the host. In Jesus' culture, families often slept together on a mat on the floor, so the neighbor probably would have to step over and awaken others to get to the door. Also, the door would have been bolted with a wooden or iron bar that had been pushed through some rings (Marshall, pp. 464–465). The neighbor might have realized that if the children were awakened, it would take time to get them back to sleep, and they would be tired and irritable the next day. All of us can probably relate to the probable anger the neighbor felt. Like the neighbor, we might also view the host as an enemy, not a friend. Like the neighbor, we may help the host only so that we could go back to sleep.

**5. Jesus' story is supposed to teach us something about our prayers to God. Which of the three friends represents God in this story? What does the story teach us about how God responds to our prayers?**

In the sample prayer that Jesus gave us in verses 2–4, we ask God for things. In the story, the host asks the neighbor for some bread. Therefore, the neighbor in the story represents God.

This story might confirm some of our fears about God's response to our prayers. Just as the neighbor is asleep and unaware of the host's difficulties, we might think that God is unaware of our needs. As the neighbor is reluctant and even unwilling to help, we might think that God is reluctant to answer our prayers. And as the neighbor only helped in order to get the host to leave them in peace, we might think that we have to greatly annoy God with our prayers before He will respond. The only positive aspect seems to be that the neighbor finally did get up and help, so we can hope that if we pray long enough, God will give us what we want.

**\* Is this bleak picture of God's response to our prayer really what Jesus intended to teach us? Is this how you usually picture God when you approach Him in prayer?**

The rest of the passage contains some additional information that might help us understand better what Jesus wants us to know about God.

**6. Which of the three friends represents us in this story? What realizations prompt the host to go to his friend's home in the middle of the night? What does the story teach us about how to pray to God?**

Just as the neighbor, the one to whom the request is directed, represents God, the host who makes the request represents us.

The host first recognizes that there is a need to provide bread—which is unavailable—for the traveler. In the same way, we may be unlikely to pray unless we realize that we need something.

It is interesting that the story is about someone who needs bread to share with someone else. That might tell us that our requests are not supposed to focus only on our own needs, but also on the needs of others. Even if we think we have more than we need, there are people around us who are not as fortunate, and we can pray for them.

Another interesting thing is that the host identifies a source (i.e., the neighbor) that can provide what is needed. Similarly, we probably will not ask God for things unless we believe that God can give us what we need.

**7. What impact might this situation have on the neighbor and host's friendship? What impact might asking God to meet our/others' needs have on our relationship with Him?**

The host actually goes to the neighbor and asks for help. Jesus seems to be implying here that even if we know we need something and we believe that God can meet our need, we still must ask Him. In Matthew 6:8, which is part of another passage where Jesus teaches His disciples about prayer, He says that God knows what we need before we ask. Jesus goes on to teach the disciples to ask anyway. God could supply everything we need without our asking. However, receiving without asking would remove the personal aspect of the relationship. The neighbor could have left extra bread in a box outside the front door so that others take whatever they needed. While that would have prevented the neighbor and his/her family a solid night's sleep, it also would have denied an opportunity to deepen the neighbor and host's relationship. Before this incident, the host may have been unaware whether the neighbor was a dependable friend. Afterwards, the host knew the neighbor was a friend who would help even under difficult or inconvenient circumstances. While the immediate result of this incident was that the host acquired the needed bread, the more valuable result was that the host gained a deeper appreciation for—and trust in—the neighbor's friendship.

God does not want to just supply our needs; He wants to develop a close relationship with us. That is why Jesus places such a premium on prayer. Asking God for what we—and others—need provides a way for us to receive what is needed and—more importantly—deepens our intimacy with, and trust in, God.

Finally, even though it was the middle of the night, the host persistently knocked on the neighbor's door. Perseverance shows faith in the one who is asked to provide. The host persisted because of confidence that the neighbor would supply what was needed. His perseverance was rewarded when the neighbor granted the request. Similarly, our persistence in prayer shows our confidence in God. That is why God may sometimes wait to grant our requests. Our perseverance in prayer stretches our faith, helps us to grow and develop a deeper relationship with God. When God finally answers our persistent prayers, we're encouraged to pray even more!

8. **This story is a parable, which usually has only one main point of connection. What is the MAIN THING that Jesus intends for us to learn about prayer from this story (v. 8)?**

The neighbor did not provide bread because he was a friend, that is, because he loved the one who asked. The neighbor provided the bread because of the boldness/persistence of the host.

The Greek word translated as “boldness” in the New International Version is *anaideian*. This word does not appear anywhere else in the Bible. In some other English translations this word is rendered as “persistence.” However, in Greek, the word actually means “shamelessness.” Gaining honor and avoiding shame were important motivators of behavior in Jesus' culture. In Greek, the grammar is a little unclear as to whether it is the host or the neighbor who is “shameless.” After all, the host was probably ashamed of not providing bread to the traveler, or by having to wake the neighbor to get bread. The neighbor may have been ashamed of failing to help the host provide hospitality to the traveler (Culpepper, p. 236, Marshall, p. 456).

Since Jesus is teaching us how we should pray in this parable, it seems likely that the host was the “shameless” one. Our pride often makes it difficult to admit that we need help from anyone, even God! Asking for help also forces us to admit that we are dependent on God and interdependent on others—quite a stretch in a culture where independence is idolized. The main point Jesus seems to be making with this parable is that **we should be bold in asking God for whatever we need**. Even more, Jesus is encouraging us to persevere in prayer, even when God does not immediately answer our request.

9. **Luke 11:9–10 might be considered the “moral” or explanation of the meaning of the parable in Luke 11:5–8. What do these verses tell us about the meaning of the story?**

In verse 9, Jesus tells us to ask, seek and knock and promises that we will receive, find and have the door opened to us. In verse 10, Jesus repeats those same commands and promises, but in a slightly different way. By doing this, Jesus emphasizes once again that we are to ask God for what we need.

In verses 9 and 10, Jesus uses a Greek verb tense that suggests continual asking. When we receive an answer to one request, He assumes that we will find a new reason to ask, seek or knock.

Jesus’ point is that His disciples should pray boldly and persistently for their and others’ needs. **Receiving answers to prayers should increasingly encourage us to pray for even greater needs.**

10. **In verses 9–10, why do you think Jesus does not specify what to ask for—or what we’ll receive?**

In verses 9 and 10, Jesus teaches that we are to “ask and it will be given,” not to “ask for the kingdom of God and it will be given” or to “ask and what you ask for will be given.” Though this open-ended teaching is consistent with His main point that we are to ask God for what we need, it also implies something else. In other words, what we receive may be something other than what we’ve asked for, what we find may be different than what we sought and the door that opens to us may be different than the one on which we thought we were knocking.

**\*How do you pray? Do you pray boldly, like the host who went to his or her neighbor at night, or do you pray reluctantly? Do you pray often, even continually? Or do you seldom pray? How might Jesus’ teaching change the way you pray?**

11. **While Luke 11:9–10 clarifies what the parable tells us to do, Luke 11:11–13 helps us understand what the parable says about God. What do these verses clarify about how God responds to our prayers?**

The story in verses 5 through 8 might have given us the impression that God was reluctant or even unwilling to answer our prayers. Jesus dispels this impression in verses 11 and 12 with another example. Here, He describes how human parents respond to requests from their child. If a child asks the parents for food, the parents would provide food (a good thing), not poison (a harmful thing). In fact, even if a child wanted something harmful, parents

would deny the child's request. Parents try to meet the needs of their children in a healthy way.

In verse 13, Jesus concludes the analogy by arguing from the lesser to the greater. Even the best human parents make wrong choices for their children sometimes, but they still try to provide what their children need. Unlike a human parent God is perfect, exceedingly more powerful and never makes wrong choices for His children. God is certainly able give us exactly what we need at exactly the right time. In the same way, even though the neighbor in the parable (vv. 5–8) was asleep and initially reluctant to help, the host's request was eventually granted. How much more then will God, who is always awake, always willing and able to help respond to our requests for assistance?

It's important to note that just as a parent might sometimes delay or refuse to grant a child's request, God may sometimes answer our prayers in the way we expect or ask Him to do. In fact, Jesus specifies what God will give to those who ask: the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's presence and power, Who is with us—and within us—to accomplish God's purposes for our lives. Just as our asking and receiving from God builds our relationship with Him, the Holy Spirit's presence is God's way of building His relationship with us. Of course, God will give us with things we need, too. Jesus is just emphasizing here that **persevering in prayer gives us much more than just things. It deepens our relationship with the Creator of the Universe.**

**\*What picture do you have of how God responds to your prayers? Is your idea of God more like the sleeping neighbor who does not want to help, or like the father who gives good gifts? How might Jesus' teaching change your view of God?**

#### **APPLICATION**

**\*Let's ask God to teach all of us to pray. What one thing did the Lord impress on you during our discussion that we could pray about?**

**\* Does anyone view God more as the reluctant neighbor than the loving father? If so, would you let us pray that God would change/correct your view of God?**

**\*How can we pray for one another's needs right now? How can we do this effectively through the week until we meet again?**

**\*This week, try to pray with someone else about what Jesus taught in Luke 11:2–4. Elaborate on each petition, asking more specifically for what you need.**

## **WRAPPING IT UP**

When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, He responds by teaching them that prayer is asking God for things. He gives some examples of what to ask: that God's name be honored, that God's reign is extended, for what we need each day, for forgiveness and for deliverance from trials. Then He tells a story to encourage the disciples not be ashamed to ask of God. He emphasizes that we should persevere in asking, seeking and knocking. Finally, he says that even as earthly parents give good things to their children who ask, how much more will God answer our prayers with what we need and more. In all this, the main thing that Jesus teaches us about prayer is to ask God, to ask boldly and with perseverance for what we—and others—need!

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