

“PRAYER’S CERTAINTIES”

STUDY NOTES FOR CARE GROUPS – SERIES: PRAYER (LUKE 11:5-11)

The following are resource questions that you can use with our Care Group for discussion. They are based on the sermon preached on Sunday, September 13, 2009, by Pastor Arnold at the Grace Baptist Church, Singapore. To hear the actual sermon, you can go to <http://www.gracebap.org.sg/worship/series.html> and listen to the sermon.

Context:

Chapter 11 opens with Jesus praying. Those around Him had heard Him pray many times. Jesus’ prayers were special and illustrated the close relationship He had with the Father. The disciples wanted the same spiritual sense in their prayer lives as well. Today, we are going to talk about the Certainty of Prayer through the parable of (i) the Persistent Friend and (ii) the Good Father.

STUDY PART A: PARABLE OF THE PERSISTENT FRIEND (vv 5-8).

A man went to his neighbour at midnight to borrow bread. Bread was usually baked each morning and only enough for just that day. A friend had just arrived, as it was a common practice to travel at night, out of the heat of the day. It was an ordinary custom of hospitality to give a newly arrived guest something to eat. Failing to offer food to a guest would be insulting and dishonorable. It would not be unusual for a person to go to a neighbor when out of bread. The neighbour would give bread since he too might be in need sometime.

I. The friend’s reply (v. 7):

- he was not as concerned about the bread which he had, but with the trouble he would have to go through to get it
- since the whole family shared a single sleeping area of mats and a common blanket, anyone getting up would surely disturb someone else.
- to open the door would be a disturbance to the whole household.

II. The friend’s final response (v. 8):

- The word “impudence” (ESV), “boldness” (NIV), “importunity” (KJV), “persistence” (NKJV) carries the idea of “shamelessness” or being “thick-skinned.” Jesus was teaching the need for persisting in prayer, so the emphasis rests upon the man who came asking a favour. He was shameless in his persistence, continuing his pleading until his friend responded.

The same truth of persistence is taught in Luke 18:1-8 in the *Parable of the Unjust Judge*. The whole point of the story is the need for persisting in prayer. If the man had simply asked his friend to arise and provide some food, it would not be an “impudence.” The picture is one of overcoming reluctance on the part of the householder. It is obvious that the man continued to knock, in spite of being refused, until at last, not out of goodwill but because the man would not go away, the friend got up and provided the bread.

Reflection:

TRUTH #1: With this understanding of the parable, the believer is able to ask with assurance since God will respond to our persistency in prayer. The believer will be answered with all the goodness and mercy of God. God will respond to the request in such a fashion that honor is bestowed upon His name and the requester will receive the goodness of God. God's character is good; He will not see His own forsaken (Psalm 37:25). The personal pronoun "I" is very important here. The degree of one's faith is largely determined by the foundation on which it sits. Therefore the statement, "I say unto you," was not merely a case of trying to reassure the disciples. This was a *PRONOUNCEMENT* by the Son of God. The faith of a believer in coming to God rests on the integrity and authority of the Son of God. All three imperatives are followed by the result. The Jews, out of reverence, avoided the name of God. At this time, the sacred personal name of God, YHWH (Yahweh) was held too sacred ever to be pronounced. What is meant here, is "Ask, and God will provide. Knock, and God will open the door."

TRUTH #2: The one who is asking for bread is described as being a friend (verse 8). There existed a relationship between him and the one who could grant his request. Likewise, those asking God to meet a need must have an existing friendship with Him.

Application:

The Christian should not give up, but continue seeking for an answer. Doors will be opened and that which is not seen will be found. In each of the three modes of petition, "asking, seeking, knocking," implies three things:

- asking implies getting,
- seeking implies finding and
- knocking implies waiting.

But regardless of the different forms of petition, the believer is promised a corresponding reward from God: "gift, discovery, welcome." The believer can anticipate that God will somehow intervene; he will receive, as a direct result of prayer, something that would have otherwise been lacking in his or her life.

Let each of us renew our pledge of covenantal faithfulness to God; praying for forgiveness and a renewed resolve to walk faithfully with God.

STUDY PART B: PARABLE OF THE GOOD FATHER (VV 11-13).

Jesus asked a rhetorical question: What sort of person would give his own child something harmful and useless when the child asks for his or her basic needs? Fish and eggs could be obtained easily. The question begs for a negative answer – no one would do such an evil deed.

Jesus was leading up to a climatic statement here.

- He had told the story with which His listeners could identify.
- He had emphasized that faith is not the only criterion for success in prayer; it is sometimes necessary to persist.
- His final point would be that in prayer, believers are coming to a loving, Heavenly Father

This is an important point, for it relates to the attitude and confidence with which we pray. When making their petitions, believers are

- not coming like a slave groveling in front of their master
- not like a neighbor to neighbor
- not as a friend to a close friend,
- not even as child to an earthly father

Each of these alone could provide a reasonable explanation for not answering – these examples are people who might be willing *BUT NOT ABLE TO HELP*. But believers can come to a heavenly Father – Willing and Able!

Summary: Certainty of Prayer (v13).

Jesus answered his own question by directly contrasting man's evil nature with God's good nature. The thought that God the Father could give anything but good gifts to His children is even more absurd than what was posed in the question. The gift that God the Father wants to give is the gift of the Holy Spirit as a sign, or display of God's favour. Note that this is a pre-Cross and pre-Pentecost setting. How much more so is God's blessing poured out on those whom He redeems through the blood of Christ? (cf. Rom 8:32 - He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?). Jesus dealt with two contrasts:-

1. The actions of an earthly father with those of the Heavenly Father. A holy God could be expected to provide for His children's needs even more than a good human father. Like the earthly father, the child trusts in his love because the father knows best and the child therefore yields to the goodness of the father. Similarly, believers can trust in God's love and even though sometimes we cannot understand why God chose to respond in different ways, we can trust God because God is holy and just.
2. The needs of a child (physical v spiritual) – an earthly father who was worthy of the name would certainly respond in a proper way if his child asked for one of the necessities of life and would not be so cruel as to give something that was harmful and dangerous. If so, the holy Heavenly Father would respond to requests for something far more important: the Holy Spirit, who would provide for their spiritual needs.

Discussion:

1. How much time and effort do we spend on prayer nowadays? Is the amount of time spent in prayer a result of being so richly blessed by God that we have "no need" of our own? Why and why not?
2. What about the needs of others? Do we know of their needs? Why and why not?

Application:

Spend this week praying for two types of needs: (i) self and (ii) others. Write those needs and share with one another in the Care Group so that ALL can share in praying to our Heavenly Father.

Prayer:

Lord, You gave us Your Holy Spirit as Your best gift, the Spirit of love and trust. You know our needs and you know how best they can be fulfilled. Amen.