

August 31st, 2008
“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 13”
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Luke 11:9-10

“And I tell you, ask, and you’ll receive. Seek, and you’ll find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks, receives; and whoever seeks, finds; and the one who knocks will discover an open door.

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

We concluded our last lesson with an exposition of the model that Jesus gave His disciples for praying. **Luke 11:1-4** tells us:

As Jesus finished praying one day in a certain place, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

So Jesus said to them, “When you pray, say, ‘Father, may Your name be held in awe. May Your kingdom come. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us the bread we need each day. And forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone who sins against us.

And do not allow us to be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’ ”

A brief analysis of the model prayer shows us that the purpose of prayer to ask God for things. In this brief model, Jesus instructs us to ask God for physical sustenance, for forgiveness of sin, for insulation from temptation and deliverance from evil. He also instructs us to ask for the coming of God’s Kingdom and the completion of God’s Will, assuming that we have faith that God, as our Father, wills that we receive the best from life, and that He has the power to make the best available to us.

Jesus uses the parable of the Persistent Friend to explain how we should pray to reasonably expect the things from God for which we ask Him. **Luke 11:5-8** records:

[Jesus] continued, “Suppose you must go to a friend at midnight and say, ‘My friend, may I borrow three loaves of bread? An acquaintance on a journey has just arrived and I have nothing for him to eat.’ What kind of friend would answer, ‘Don’t bother me! I’ve already locked up the house for the night and my children are tucked into bed. I can’t get up to give you anything’?

I’m telling you that even if he won’t get up and offer help for the sake of their friendship, yet because of his friend’s bold persistence, he will arise and give him whatever he needs.

Let's examine the parable from the standpoint of the person that is being asked to fulfill the request. The first point I would make, were I in the position of being asked, is that my friend's request is inconvenient. If someone calls my telephone number after 11pm and is not either a relative, a close friend, or a member of the church with a serious problem requiring immediate attention, something that cannot wait until the morning, they will probably get voicemail. Someone coming to my door at 12am had better be in pretty serious trouble if they want to get my attention, In **Luke 13:25**, Jesus says:

25 When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,'

The second point I would make is that the request is unnecessary. Regardless of how late my friend's guests arrived, they would have to eat breakfast the next morning, so there should be some food in the house for that. If I were the host, I would just serve the person whatever I had at midnight, even if it was the next day's breakfast, rather than waking up my neighbors.

So, as a friend, I am faced with an inconvenient, unnecessary request. The reason that I choose to deal with the request is the fact that my friend won't go away. If I ignore him, he will continue knocking, keeping me from my sleep. If I get up, I can get back to sleep. So it's a matter of self interest. I go to the door and say, "Hey man, here's some bread. See you later." In **Luke 18:1-5**:

1 Then [Jesus] spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

2 saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.

3 Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.'

4 And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man,

5 yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' "

In these two parables, Jesus indicates that if we pester God enough, He will give us that which we want. But God actually wants us to communicate with Him constantly because He wants our interaction, and He wants to hear our appreciation for His goodness. **1Thessalonians 5:17-18** tells us:

17 pray without ceasing,

18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Look at the trouble to which God went to get our attention. He sent His only begotten son to the Cross, to pay for our sins, but also to get our attention. In **Mark 16:15**:

15 And [Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

This command is a serious request by God for attention. He tells us to tell everyone about Him.

But let's compare for a moment. As a parent, how often do you want to hear from your children for whom you are caring, who are sleeping under your roof and putting their feet under your table? How many days do you want them to come home from school and not say "Hi, Mom, I'm home?" When they are at home and they want something, do you want them to ask you or just get it themselves?

Emily, a young mother, called to consult with her counselor. Emily began their conversation, “For Christmas, I got a new couch, and this morning, while I was cleaning, I discovered that my two daughters cut out the whole back of my sectional with scissors.”

The counselor asked, “To do what?”

Emily replied, “Just to be a three-year-old and a four-year-old.”

The counselor replied, “No. They had some goal in mind. What were they trying to do or make?”

Emily replied, “I haven’t had the guts to look inside to see what they put in there.”

The counselor said, “Take the phone, go over to the couch and see what they were doing.”

So Emily went. She looked, and then replied, “It looks like they were practicing shapes. There are a couple of squares cut out, and then just a whole bunch of shreds.”

The counselor said, “Where are the girls now?”

Emily said, “They are playing. They just woke up from their nap.”

The counselor said, “Call them over to the couch, look at the couch with them and ask them what they were trying to make. Don’t look or sound angry, but just find out what they were doing.”

After a few moments, Emily came back to the phone. “They said that they were trying to cut out a person, but after they started, they couldn’t figure out how to do it.”

The counselor laughed. “Maybe they’ll be famous dress designers when they grow up, and make millions of dollars.”

Emily laughed as well, and said, “Well, I was mad at first because now I have a cut up couch, but when I found it this morning, Mariah, my four-year-old, said, “Mommy, I cut the couch.” When I told her to go to her room while I decided what her punishment should be, Jennifer, my three-year-old came up to me and said, “Mommy, I cut the couch too, and I need to get into trouble.” I thought that it was just the sweetest thing.”

“Okay”, the counselor said, laughing, “here’s the way that I look at it. Three and four-year-old children are not responsible for this type of thing. They don’t get it. They don’t understand that cutting a couch or putting ink on a carpet ruins it. Their brains are not even finished laying down synapses yet.

So, first of all, three and four-year-old children are supposed to be supervised. You are the one that needs go to you room without supper, Mom, because you should have had your eye on them. Number two, you need to get some craft stuff for them to play with, and then tell them, “Whenever you are going to do any arts and crafts, ask me first, and let me help you with what you should use, because we don’t use furniture, we don’t use curtains, we don’t use bedspreads, we don’t use clothes, we don’t use anything that you find around the house unless I give it to you.”

Punishing them is not really useful. They didn’t intentionally do anything wrong. The reason that Mariah told you about it immediately is that it didn’t register on her that she did anything wrong. Once they know right from wrong and know that they are going to get in trouble, they start lying.”

Emily said, “Well, that’s what I’m trying to avoid. I want them to always feel comfortable coming to me.”

The counselor cut her off. “Well, regardless of how comfortable they may feel, they are going to lie to get out of trouble anyway. Telling the truth in the face of negative consequences is a stage of their intellectual development that your children are too young to have reached yet. All kids

lie to get out of trouble. But you need to distinguish between an intentionally malicious act and the innocent ignorance of being three or four-years-old and coming up with a cool idea on your own.

So your lesson to them is that it is a bad thing to cut the couch. From now on, before you cut anything, draw on anything, paint on anything, color anything, or do anything like that, ask me first, and I'll give you something to do it with. Okay?"

Emily replied, "Okay. And thanks."

The counselor replied, "You're welcome. Your little one is really cute, isn't she?"

Just as the little ones need to pay attention to their mother and their mother needs to pay attention to her little ones because of their lack of maturity, God wants us to pay attention to Him and He wants to communicate with us because of our lack of maturity in the cosmic sense. God communicated with Adam and Eve in the Garden, giving them the instruction to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then the serpent came along and said to them, 'God doesn't want you to have the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because He knows that eating it will allow you to grow up and be independent like He is. He just wants you to stay immature children. He doesn't want you to make your own decisions, and He doesn't have your best interests at heart. Ignore Him.'

Do you know what sin actually is? Sin is actually ignoring God. Adam and Eve were not like the girls with the scissors. God gave them a specific instruction, and they ignored it. If they had not ignored God in the Garden, it is quite possible that there would be no need for prayer now. Before sin, Adam lived in an insulated environment in which God proactively provided everything that he needed to live well. Everything in Adam's environment was good except his aloneness, and God so proactively provided Adam a companion. God has the ability to anticipate every need that we have or will have, and it takes Him less effort to meet every one of those needs than it would take us to snap our fingers.

But now that sin is in the world, God gives us prayer, just as the mother instructs the girls to ask for craft supplies. God tells us to ask Him for the sustenance that we want and for the solutions to our problems that we need. Often we have ignored God, committing sin, to our own peril. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ, giving us eternal life, is the Heavenly solution to the problem of our sinfulness, but prayer is the solution to our problem our sinfulness on earth. In prayer, we pay attention to God and ask Him to pay attention to us, and He gives those pray help to avoid sin. Jesus tells us, in **John 14:13-17**:

13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

As Christians, it is important to cover our plans and our activities with believing prayer, because prayer is our actual connection to God. God sends the Holy Spirit to help us keep His commandments when we pray, and He causes our Holy Spirit inspired requests to come to pass. Our text, **Luke 11:9-10**, tells us:

“And I tell you, ask, and you’ll receive. Seek, and you’ll find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks, receives; and whoever seeks, finds; and the one who knocks will discover an open door.

The purpose of prayer is not only to request sustenance. Our prayer life is actually intended to cement our relationship with God. Through the interaction of prayer, we can develop a love relationship between ourselves and God, our Heavenly Father. In **Mark 11:22-24**:

22 So Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God.

23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

According to Jesus, God answers prayer based upon the faith of the prayer. Faith in someone is a function of the proven relationship that we have with them. Well, in whom do we have faith? We have faith in people that have behaved benevolently toward us, who have lived up to the commitments that they have made to us, and who have proven to us that we can trust them. When we have faith in people, we give them an intimate level of access to our lives because we trust that they will not misuse their ability to affect us. The Biblical description of this intimate level of faith is “love”.

God’s design is that we have at least two “loving” human relationships. The first is with our parents. We develop love for our parents as they provide for us as infants and children when we have insufficient capacity to provide for ourselves. Our love relationship with our parents is generally a given, as we trust them to provide for our intellectual and emotional development as well as our material needs.

We generally have a difficult time trusting anyone if our parents betray us during our developmental years. We see the type of warped relationship that can develop between siblings when parents have favorites among their children in **Genesis 37:3-4**, which says:

3 Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors.

4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him.

We cannot select our parents, but the second “loving” relationship that we are to have is generally with someone of our own choosing, our spouse. We are to build a “love” relationship with our spouse, and continually develop and increase it using intimate interaction and the sharing of our lives. God’s description of the characteristics a “love” relationship is recorded in **1 Corinthians 13:4-8**:

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails.

It is interesting that all of the characteristics of love, as described by the Scripture are actions, are ways that we behave. There is no Biblical discussion of the fluttering of the heart, or of tingling

feelings in the body, or of someone that lights our fire or stirs our soul. Biblical love denotes the way we behave; we can act in a loving fashion to someone whether or not we feel initially emotionally attracted to them. The emotional aspect of the love relationship generally develops after the behavioral aspects have been established. Benevolent behavior comes before emotional attachment.

Marriage exists because God designed love relationships that require constant loving interaction between the parties involved to flourish in an environment of committed security. The more committed that the parties are to one another and the more constant the behaviors of loving interaction between the parties, the more faith and love that they can develop in one another. We develop faith in our parents over years of them caring for us.

We can find a general barometer of the amount of faith that our spouse has in us by looking at the frequency and quality of our intimate experiences. Conjugal intimacy between marital partners is a tangible demonstration of the level of the love relationship that exists between them. Physical intimacy is the first thing to suffer when loving trust begins to decline, and the last thing to rekindle should the couple restore the relationship. Generally speaking, the more physically intimate a couple is, the higher the level of faith and love that they demonstrate to one another.

In our relationship with God, prayer is our interaction with God that is analogous with conjugal intimacy. God craves constant intimate interaction with us through our prayer life, and which is why He tells us, in **1Thessalonians 5:17-18**:

17 pray without ceasing.

18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Let me tell you about the level of faith, love and intimate interaction with God that Jesus Christ had. **Matthew 21:18-22** records:

18 Now in the morning, as [Jesus] returned to the city, He was hungry.

19 And seeing a fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it but leaves, and said to it, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again." Immediately the fig tree withered away.

20 And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither away so soon?"

21 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done.

22 And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Jesus' relationship with God was so intimate and God's trust in Him in God was so strong that He could say to a fig tree, "Let no fruit grow on you ever again", and the fig tree immediately withered away. God was so close to Jesus that Jesus could influence God to alter natural processes by simply speaking His desire. Jesus declared to the Jews that were persecuting Him, in **John 10:30**:
30 I and My Father are one."

The achievement of oneness is the ultimate reason for all relationships, human and Divine. Oneness occurs when we yield our wills to the will of one another. That is the meaning of the primary relationship reference to oneness that God makes, in **Genesis 2:24**, says:

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Oneness is an integral part of Godly relationships, both the relationships that we have with God and the God-ordained relationships that we have with one another, although those relationships

are designed to be temporary. When my son was eight years old, I began preparing him to leave our house. I told him, at his eighth birthday party, “Well, son, you have ten more years to go.” Each year I counted him down, year by year, and when he was eighteen, he had taken heed of my warnings and prepared himself for his next step. I was proud as he graduated from high school, and was extremely proud to see him off to college.

We took him to Spring Arbor, helped him set up his new domicile, and left him there. But I remember clearly the first time I stood to read the Scripture in the pulpit after he moved. As I opened my Bible, it suddenly dawned on me that Pauly was not there to hear what I had to say. My son, whose diaper I changed, was gone. During his last year at home, he was pretty independent; he had his own car, his own friends, and his own activities, but if I wanted him for anything, all I had to do was just call him or wait a little while for him to show up. Now, he was gone, and I wouldn’t see him for three months. I missed my little boy, the one to whom I used to pitch the ball so that he could hit. The one that I used to take to Kinko’s to get a copy of his certificate when he completed a computer course and earned a certification. Yes, I wanted him to grow up and I wanted him to go to college and I wanted him to become a man, but, for a few moments that morning in the pulpit, I wanted Mr. Pauly to be a little boy again so that I could sit him on my lap in the pulpit when I sat down.

When Paul was my little boy, we experienced oneness. Now he’s grown and independent. But, the experience that I had with him when he was my little boy, going places with me and asking me questions, helps me to understand that which God is saying to us about oneness.

Of course, the person with whom I am really supposed to be one is my wife. She is physically and intellectually constructed to be bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She was created because God determined that it was not good for me to be alone.

We are to be one another’s companions until death does us part. But, how can we do that? Men and women are so different. Some would say that the closest human relationships might be between brother in arms, rather than between men and women, because brothers in arms work together and depend upon one another in war, in life and death situations.

David stood for the Nation of Israel as a challenger to the great Philistine Champion Goliath, a giant man who, when he was fully arrayed in his battle armor, stood nine feet tall. King Saul and the army of Israel were quaking in their boots before Goliath, but David had developed a oneness warrior relationship with God while battling lions and bears out on the mountain while tending sheep. David called upon God to help him defeat the giant Goliath and God did so. **1Samuel 17:57-18:3** records:

57 Then, as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand.

58 And Saul said to him, “Whose son are you, young man?” So David answered, “I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.”

1 Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

2 Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father’s house anymore.

3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

David and Jonathan continued fighting the Philistines together and strengthened their comrade relationship. When Saul and Jonathan died in a later battle, David said, in **2Samuel 1:25-**

26:

25 “How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan was slain in your high places.

26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; Your love to me was wonderful, Surpassing the love of women.”

Comradeship in war can build tremendous bonds between men, but eventually, the war ends and we go our separate ways. God’s design is that we form closer and longer lasting relationships with our wives than with our buddies, living in the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ecclesiastes 9:9 says:

9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.

How can men and women, who are so unlike one another, develop the type of bond forged on the battlefield that David had with Jonathan? Well, how can we and God, who are so unlike one another, develop the type of bond that Jesus had with God, enabling Jesus to perform miracles by God’s power?

The key to these relationships is constant communication, interaction and relying upon one another. David and Jonathan were knit together by relying upon one another while performing a dangerous activity, but our relationship with God and with our husbands or wives is based upon constant communication and sharing of daily activities. The intense activity of war welded David and Jonathan together, but the steady sharing of everyday life, the enjoyment of conjugal intimacy and the shared activity of raising children is designed to create a bond between man and wife that is equally as strong.

Life is about developing intimate relationships, and the path to intimacy between us and God is prayer. We have the capacity, through our interaction with God in prayer, to develop an intimate relationship that will allow us to function on a level higher than we can imagine.

There is no limit to the power of God. The limitation is in the quality of our relationship with Him. **Matthew 17:14-21** tells us:

14 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to [Jesus], kneeling down to Him and saying,

15 “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.

16 So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.”

17 Then Jesus answered and said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.”

18 And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?”

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.

21 However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

Persistence in prayer builds our relationship with God. When we get on His program He will allow us to wield His power to accomplish His will. But we have to ask ourselves; what kind of oneness with God do we want? Oneness occurs when we yield our wills to the will of one another. Do we want God to help us do our own thing, or are we willing to dedicate our lives to God's plan? Jesus has the closest relationship with God that is possible, performing great miracles by the power of God, but ultimately God sent Jesus to die on the Old Rugged Cross. Because of the faith that Jesus had in God, Jesus yielded to God's will, in **Matthew 26:39**:

39 [Jesus] went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Ultimately, God honored Jesus' prayer and His sacrifice, as God will honor any of us that agree to do His will. **Philippians 2:9-11** records:

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

God desires to have this kind of intimate relationship with all of us. We only have to decide whether we are willing to emulate the example of Jesus Christ and yield our wills to God's will in order to have a oneness relationship with God. If we are, Jesus says to us, in **John 14:12-14**:

12 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

We may never make it to Jesus' level, but it is important for us to aspire to it. So, as **Luke 11:9-10** says:

"And I tell you, ask, and you'll receive. Seek, and you'll find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks, receives; and whoever seeks, finds; and the one who knocks will discover an open door.

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