

Prayer of Jesus: God Never Does Nothing

Luke 11:1–13

Turn to Luke 11 please. We went over this text not that long ago, and I want to do it again because we're going through this part of Luke, and because this Scripture is so encouraging.

People, never give up on prayer. "Pray without ceasing" means "never give up on prayer." There are many reasons for this, but here's today's answer: God never does nothing. He always responds quickly with some kind of good help, and we need the help he gives.

Let's read Luke 11:1–13

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, your holy name be honoured, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone their debts. And don't lead us into testing.""

Then Jesus said to them, "Which of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him,' and the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.'? I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Jesus, Tell us What you Pray (Luke 11:1–2)

Our text begins: *One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."*

John the Baptist also prayed. When John's disciples asked him how they should pray, they wanted John to tell them how he prayed, so they could pray the way John prayed. John taught his disciples the kind of praying that he thought was important.

So when Jesus' disciples wanted him to teach them about praying, they meant, "Tell us what you were praying over there, so we can pray as you pray." We should assume that this prayer, the Lord's Prayer, was the normal way Jesus himself prayed.

Pray Like This (Luke 11:2–4)

The Lord's prayer in Luke is shorter than in Matthew. We have been taught Matthew's. Let's not assume either one is better. Matthew was written for Jewish believers, and Luke was written for Gentile believers. Jesus himself is entirely satisfied to have his prayer taught either as Matthew has it or as Luke has it. Today we're reading the prayer in Luke. Five simple lines, which I will paraphrase:

Father, Make your Name great
Rule on earth
Feed us every day
Forgive us every day
Don't lead us into trial.

It begins "Father." Not "Our Father who is in heaven," just "Father." Jesus grew up knowing that Mr. Joseph was not his birth father. Mary and Joseph will have told him that. God was the birth father of Jesus. That's why Jesus first called God "father," just as we call our birth fathers "father" or "dad."

And somehow, Jesus always assumed that his followers had the same relationship to God that he had. Jesus taught us that if he could call God "Dad," then we can call him "Dad." The prayer begins with us speaking to God as if he was our birth father.

The first two lines are about our Father. This is what the children long for and pray for. "Make your name great! Rule on earth! Do this, Father!" There is a lot of submission in these lines. "Your name, Father, your kingdom." It was not easy for Jesus to keep submitting to his Father and how his Father wanted things to happen. He prayed this way to submit.

These two lines also express longing. "Father, if only you would make your name great, if only you would rule on earth! Make your name great, and rule on earth."

Then three lines of prayer for ourselves. Feed us every day. Forgive us every day. Food and forgiveness are daily needs. They both come from our Father faithfully. The forgiveness request adds this: "for we forgive everyone their debts." "Forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone their debts." Forgiveness has a condition: we must not carry grudges. Forgive everyone.

"Don't lead us into trial." God himself never entices anyone to sin. In that sense, God never leads us into temptation. When there are tests and trials, God led us there. Jesus went through a difficult trial at the start, when he was tempted by the devil.

God did not tempt Jesus, but the Holy Spirit did lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tested. At some level, however, trials are *not* inevitable. Jesus taught us to pray, “Father, don’t lead us into trial.” I still mull over that line. Jesus included this in a very short prayer.

Remember that the Lord’s Prayer was first the way Jesus prayed, and then it became the prayer Jesus taught.

Friend at Midnight: God is Not Like your Friend in Bed (Luke 11:5–8)

Jesus said to his disciples, “Which of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him,’ and the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’?”

That’s all one question. Jesus wants us to picture ourselves as the one outside, waking up our friend at midnight to ask for bread. Jesus asks us, “does any of you have a friend who would say ‘no’ like that?” And the obvious answer is “no, of course the friend inside will get up even if he’s grumpy.” Then Jesus explains this obvious answer:

I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity [your lack of respect for your friend in bed], he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

Jesus begins the story “who of you?” In short, the parable goes like this: “Which of you would go ask your friend for bread in the middle of the night, and the friend in bed would say ‘no’?” The answer, “No friend would ever do that.”

The NIV translates this well: *yet because of your shameless audacity [your lack of respect for your friend in bed], he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.*

This story has been used to teach persistence in prayer. If we keep asking God we will get what we want. That is not what this parable teaches. The KJV translated it “because of your persistence,” but that’s not what the word means. It always means rude or disrespectful.

There is no persistence in the story. You, the friend outside, do not knock on the door at all, you just call out, and you only call once. Nothing here teaches persistence. The man outside is rude and impudent by coming in the middle of the night to wake his sleeping friend and get him out of bed to help him.

Here’s what Jesus means: “If a human will get up in the middle of the night to grant the request of a rude friend, how much more will God answer your requests? Even if your friend was grumpy, he would get up and give you what you need.

“Well then,” says Jesus, “if your friend in bed would give you bread in the middle of the night, how much more will *God* give you what you need!” God is nothing like your friend in bed. He is not asleep, he’s never reluctant, so of course he never says “no.” God is not like the friend in bed.

Right and Wrong Persistence in Prayer

The right kind of persistence in prayer is never giving up on prayer. Never saying to ourselves, “it is no use, I’ll not bother to pray any more.” The right kind of persistence in prayer always calls out to God. Pray without ceasing. Continue to pray.

The wrong kind of persistence in prayer is thinking that if I ask for this enough times, God will give it to me. I can wear him out if I keep asking. God is just waiting to see if I will ask for this 300 times, and sooner or later I’ll have reached the magic number, and he’ll give me what I ask. That is wrong persistence, a pagan understanding of God, and a pagan understanding of prayer.

Jesus taught this about prayer: *When you pray, don’t keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask.* Matthew 6:7–8. Don’t keep babbling, many words don’t matter.

There is a story about a persistent widow in Luke 18. She was persistent. But the point of that story is that God is NOT like that unjust judge, therefore prayer is NOT wearing God out by pestering him with the same request. Jesus always taught that God was generous and eager and happy to give. Jesus did warn us not to get so discouraged by life that we gave up on prayer.

If you have passion for something so you keep asking because you can’t leave this thing alone, then do that. But don’t think you will be heard because of how often you asked. Nevertheless, keep praying, don’t give up on prayer.

Jesus Applies the Friend at Midnight: God Never says “No” (Luke 11:9–10)

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. According to Jesus, this is what the “Friend at Midnight” story teaches us about God. Jesus gives us three challenges here: Ask! Seek! Knock! Jesus guarantees the result: *Ask and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened.*

The first three were challenges, actually commands: ask, seek, knock. Then Jesus gives the same three as promises: *For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

It sounds like we can ask for anything and seek anything we want. But we haven’t moved very far from the Lord’s Prayer, people. Prayer is the essential Christian discipline, and the Lord’s Prayer is the essential Christian prayer. We don’t leave the Lord’s Prayer behind.

You can feel Jesus trying to correct our scepticism and doubt about God’s willingness to respond. Jesus expected his followers to have doubts about prayer, and he knows that’s not right.

Verses 9–10 persuaded me that when we pray, God never does nothing. Often enough, God does not do what I’m asking, but he never does nothing. He gives us something good right away, some kind of bread for the soul, some kind of help from his Spirit, never nothing.

He might be saying “you must wait for what you want,” but that is never the whole story. There will be help when we need it. Jesus was so convinced about this, so certain and emphatic. That’s why we never give up on prayer.

Parents, What Would You Do? (Luke 11:11–13)

In the friend at midnight story, Jesus put us in the position of the one asking. He told us to imagine ourselves going to our friend at midnight to ask for bread. In that story, he told us to imagine that we were the one asking, like praying.

In this story, Jesus puts us in the position of the one listening and giving. We put ourselves in the place of a parent whose child asks for food, or in the place of God, hearing our requests.

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

If we are parents whose child is hungry and asks for food, this is a no-brainer. Of course we will give the child good food, not something nasty. So, says Jesus, you are evil, yet you would always give good food to your child, so how much more will God? If you evil ones would act like this to your children, how much better will your Father in heaven treat you?

I don’t think prayer is a discipline. The friend at midnight asks his friend for food because he needs food. The son asks his father for food because he’s hungry and needs food.

We organize our times for eating and for sleeping, and there’s nothing wrong with organizing our times for prayer. But we eat because we’re hungry and we need food, we sleep because we’re tired and we need rest. We pray because we need what God gives. That’s why we never give up on prayer, not because we’re disciplined, but because we need what God gives when we pray.

The Holy Spirit

How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

For Jesus, the greatest and most generous gift God could give anyone was to put his Spirit on them. Jesus ends this with the Holy Spirit to show how incredibly lavish God is when we pray. If you being evil will give good food to your child, how much more will your Father in heaven give the greatest gift, the Holy Spirit, to those who ask?

This section on prayer began with the Lord's Prayer: "Father in heaven, your name, your kingdom." When I'm in a difficult place, it is hard for me to pray about the Father's name and his kingdom. It takes help from the Holy Spirit just for me to be able to pray that prayer.

And once I have prayed it, what will it take for me to bring honour to God's name and his kingdom? Again, it will take help from the Spirit for my life to actually accomplish what I've asked for. We need the Spirit's help to pray that prayer, and we need the Spirit's help for God to answer it.

When I ask God for something that he's not giving, this is what he is doing, right away: he sends his Spirit to help me line up with the Lord's Prayer. God immediately gives strength to move in the right direction. That's not what I'm asking for, but that's what he's doing.

So, people, pray. Jesus gave few rules about prayer. If I want to keep my faith and live faithfully, I will find a way to pray. Don't stray too far from the Lord's prayer.

This Scripture convinces us that when we see no response at all to our prayers, God is nevertheless working generously with his Spirit, as soon as we pray. When we are not getting what we asked for, God is giving the Holy Spirit to encourage and strengthen us and give us endurance to stay faithful. God thinks that's the best thing He could give the children that he loves. Let's not doubt our Father. Keep praying. Amen.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, you have taught us to see God as an amazingly generous Father. Give us eyes of faith to see our God this way. What if our Father was being generous when we did not think he was doing anything at all? Thank you that the one everyone who asks receives. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.