

Jesus Stories II: The One About The Sleepy Friend

Reconnect – August 2, 2009

Series/Morning Intro:

- Today we're continuing our summer series on the stories that Jesus told – taking a closer look at what he was trying to get across as he spoke these “parables” – stories with a message – to his listeners
- Most of the time it was Jesus who was driving the content of what the story was going to be about
- But today's story came about as the result of a request from his closest followers – they wanted to learn how to pray like He did – and so in response, he told them a story
- This quote from writer Eugene Peterson is worth repeating, about these Jesus stories:

"A parable is not ordinarily used to tell us something new but to get us to notice something that we have overlooked although it has been right there before us for years. Or it is used to get us to take seriously something we have dismissed as unimportant because we have never seen the point of it. Before we know it, we are involved." (Peterson, Tell It Slant, 19)

- So let's be involved this morning, with “The One About The Sleepy Friend”

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Then, teaching them more about prayer, Jesus used this story: “Suppose you went to a friend’s house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’ And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can’t help you.’ But I tell you this – though he won’t do it for friendship’s sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.

And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

You fathers – if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

Luke 11:5-13, NLT

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Text: Luke 11:5-13; Philippians 4:6-7

Key Thought: Prayer should reflect our relationship with God: the courage to ask for what we need, with the confidence that He works for our good.

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Pre-Intro: “I hear you knockin’” – Dave Edmunds [video]

Intro: The “importunate” telephone

- One of the downsides to better and better technology is that life seems to be faster and faster paced
- It’s very hard to ever truly “unplug” or “turn off” – and that goes to the interruptions that we tend to suffer when we want to do those very things
- Let’s talk telemarketing, for example: how many people are on the national “do not call” list?
- How many people are still getting calls? Yeah, I thought so!
- The tricky part is that places that you do business with currently can still call you – unless you specifically request with them that you don’t want to be contacted by phone – the “do not call” list does not apply in that situation
- As they say, it never fails but when you sit down to dinner, or at any other worst time, that the phone rings, and it’s an offer to try and convince you that you already have a credit card that you need to check on, or that they’re ready to drop off the meat in your mailbox – annoying!
- There’s a term for that – “importunate” (not a word we hear much anymore)

im·por·tu·nate

–adjective

1. urgent or persistent in solicitation, sometimes annoyingly so.
2. pertinacious, as solicitations or demands.
3. troublesome; annoying: *importunate demands from the children for attention.*
 - When our phone rings at home, it goes right through me, because I spend a good part of my workday talking on the phone, answering phones – well, you get the picture
 - But the same phone, ringing at the same time, can also be a needed or even welcome event – maybe it’s good news, or maybe it’s a friend that needs your help badly, or someone is letting you know something that you had wanted to know for awhile – the difference, obviously, is in the relationship

Relationship makes all the difference:

- Relationship makes all the difference – you get two letters in the mail, both requesting money
- One you throw away, and the other you respond to with a cheque – the difference is that one of them was from an organization that you have no dealings with, and the other one was from a friend doing humanitarian work – relationship makes all the difference
- An actor spends most of their time behind bodyguards and hiding from paparazzi, with an unlisted phone number and tinted glass in their vehicles – but if you’re a family member, they’re just “Uncle Whoever” – relationship makes all the difference
- A professional athlete walks past hundreds of kids pleading for their autograph without looking at them – but then gathers one up in their arms when they get home from a road trip – their own child – relationship makes all the difference
- And it was a relationship – a unique one – that Jesus’ closest followers observed him in, every day – his interaction with God, who he called his “Father”
- They wanted a relationship like that with God – or at least, they wanted the benefits that this relationship seemed to bring – the power, the assurance, the wisdom, the strength – so they went to Jesus and asked him to teach them how to pray
- First, he gave them what we know today as “The Lord’s Prayer” – which we’re going to look at in the new year here at Reconnect (not that far away!) – and then to build on that, and to sort of illustrate the heart behind that prayer, he told them a story

Read text: Luke 11:5-13

Then, teaching them more about prayer, Jesus used this story: “Suppose you went to a friend’s house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’ And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can’t help you.’ But I tell you this – though he won’t do it for friendship’s sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.

- Three friends – one is a surprise, another is asleep, and the third is in the middle of it all
- A friend has come from out of town – “on a journey” – and is being given hospitality by another friend
- “bread” – only baked once a day – you made enough that day to meet your family’s needs for that day – no more, no less, because it wouldn’t keep, and you couldn’t afford to waste any
- Middle Eastern hospitality at the time of Jesus – you gave everything to a guest, over your own family
 - For you not to have anything to put in front of a guest would put you in a very shameful cultural situation, and could severely harm the relationship and even your reputation
- “Family and I are all in bed” – in for the night, the doorway is likely barred and secured from thieves, and the family may all be sleeping in one room anyway, which is the way a good deal of the world still lives and sleeps today

- “shameless persistence” – Greek *anaideian* – the only time the word is used in the New Testament
- The idea of boldness, even rudeness – “importunity” – the wrong thing at the wrong time
- It’s nerve, it’s cheek, it’s guts – all at the same time
- Like when someone invades your personal space – or jumps in front of you in line – or interrupts you when you’re speaking to them – or calls just as you’re sitting down to dinner
- We get that way when we’re desperate – when we’re trying to get a job and we need to speak to the HR person who is doing the hiring, or when we’re trying to get in to see a doctor, or when we need to buy that certain gift for our child for Christmas, so we elbow the person behind us in the gut and grab it – that’s “importune” – but sometimes, oddly satisfying ;)
- I think about my four year old son – my “one track mind” four year old son – and how he will ask me the same question 7 times in a row, without taking a breath!
 - “Can we go to the park now, Daddy?” (Yes, soon) “Can we go to the park now, Daddy?” (etc.)

And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

- Maybe my son is onto something
- Why is persistence needed with God? Does He need to be convinced?
- No, that’s why Jesus gives the next section – but sometimes, we need time to change
- And sometimes, God wants to build the relationship he has with us
- If your meals were brought to you every day at the same time in silence, and you ate them all in your room watching TV, you wouldn’t have much of a relationship with the chef, would you?
- The acts of asking, seeking, knocking, keep us clearly remembering that God wants us to ask Him for things – that it’s not wrong or unspiritual to “bug God with these things”

You fathers – if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

- “how much more” – the key to the entire story, and where so often people go wrong – it’s not a comparison parable, where God would be the sleepy friend, and the person knocking on the door would be us – it’s a CONTRAST parable, where God is so much a better friend than the sleepy friend – and we are so much more desperate than the one knocking on the door
- It’s not God = sleepy friend, it’s God > sleepy friend – in logic, an argument *a fortiori* – “from the lesser to the greater”

- “Although the sleeping man plays the part of the God-figure, Jesus is not trying to teach that God goes to bed, shuts the door, can’t easily get up or doesn’t want to be bothered. The point of comparison is simply that, like the sleeping friend, God will give to those who ask Him whatever they genuinely need” (Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 275)
 - Along with that – He does not view us as “importunate” – we are not bothering him!
- “give the Holy Spirit” – the epitome of a close relationship with God – God’s Spirit, interacting with people, leading us and guiding us
- III. – Christmas – you learn as you grow older how fun it is to give just the right thing, and it becomes the best kind of challenge to do it

The Paradox of prayer (“Prayeradox”): trust and perseverance together

- Crux of the story – a mix of trust and perseverance – and you have to have a healthy mix of both:
 - Trust – if you only have trust, then why pray? God can read your mind anyway... and He’s already probably decided what He’s going to do, so what can you do about it? (Fatalism)
 - And then why stop with not praying? Why DO anything for anyone else, either? Because if God wants it, then He’ll make it happen with or without you... and in fact, how can anyone really know God, anyway?
 - And without communication, as Dr. Phil could tell you, there goes the relationship
 - Perseverance – if you only have perseverance, then it’s not REALLY praying – it’s just putting coins into a vending machine – if you have enough change to feed it with, and you push the right buttons, and the machine is working right, then what you want pops out the bottom and you have it
 - We all learned early on how to (try) to manipulate our parents – and generally the first tactic we tried was the “ask, ask, ask” approach – ask morning, noon and night, ask ask ask ask ask can i please have it please please can i can i can i?
 - And when you see it in your own kids, then it’s even MORE jarring – and annoying – and just plain WRONG
 - As a parent, most (all?) of the time, you know what your kids need before they even get the chance to ask you – and you have a good idea of what they like and want, too – it’s OK that they ask – there’s that communication thing again, and relationship – but you also want them to trust you enough that when you make a decision, that you will stick to it and come through (“Yes, we ARE going to Dairy Queen, but if you ask me AGAIN, no we’re NOT!!!)
- You need a mix of both trust and perseverance, as Jesus outlines in this story – and that’s the nature of a relationship
- Think Reese Peanut Butter cups – you need the peanut butter AND the chocolate for it to work – and sometimes, when you eat one, it’s just like praying ;)
- It’s unfortunate that the waters have been so muddied when it comes to praying – and the understanding of praying in our culture

- On one hand, on the perseverance side, you have the preachers on TV with “blab it and grab it” – this idea that God is like a vending machine – that somehow by praying the right way, or having the right words, or giving the right amount of money, that your prayers will be automatically answered, and you’ll be healthy and wealthy
 - Can you imagine your children coming home from school one day and trying to put into practice the “mind control techniques” that they learned at school that day, to get everything that they wanted from you?
 - At best, you’d be amused, and at worst, well, you’d be either sad that they felt that you weren’t reliable enough to look after them, or maybe mad that they would even try it!
- On the other hand, on the trust side, there’s the reaction to that in Christianity, so that you feel guilty even feeling strongly enough about something to bring it up to God! You wouldn’t want to be FANATICAL, after all... even though your heart is breaking and you’re scared and you feel alone, well, you better not bother God with it, because maybe it’s not “His will” to do what you need or to help you
 - And where’s the relationship there? Can you imagine THAT angle with your kids? “We’ll have ice cream for dessert if it’s your will, Mom” or “I’m bleeding pretty bad from my knees and it really hurts, but I didn’t want to say anything and bother you with it”
 - Give me a break! Again, a pretty “unnatural” relationship – ridiculous, actually
- Praying is not black and white, it’s NOT a formula, it’s not “always this way” or “always that way” – because Jesus goes out of his way to mention BOTH these elements, just moments from each other – somehow, there’s no conflict, there’s no paradox – it just IS
- That’s part of a journey to a mature relationship with God, just as we as kids grew up to know our parents better – we learned our parents’ strengths and flaws – but when you get to know God better, it’s about appreciation – and the trust and the perseverance come together naturally, where prayer becomes a discussion – a conversation – a relationship – an exchange of thoughts and ideas and feelings and plans and hopes and fears and dreams – in short, life
- Prayer leads to knowing God better – knowing God better leads to more and “better” praying – and it’s a cycle that continues, even when times get difficult or the wheels fall off – because He doesn’t turn his back on us

Key Thought:

Prayer should reflect our relationship with God: the courage to ask for what we need, with the confidence that He works for our good.

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.

Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand.

His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. **(Philippians 4:6-7, NLT)**

What does prayer look like in your life?

- Are you more on the trust side, or the perseverance side?
- (Hope's illness) – Hope and her fevers – we continue to pray

Conclusion: Praying as natural as breathing

- Breathing out and breathing in – breathing out – we bring our requests to God – our needs, our fears, our very lives – our life before God
- Breathing in – we receive in turn God's strength, God's provision, God's assurance, God's peace – He gives us renewed life in us, by His love and Spirit

Response: Hallelujah (Your Love Is Amazing)