

The Storyteller / Week 3

Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have 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 suppose 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.” (Luke 11:5-8 NIV).

So, let’s rant for a second. What are a few common things you find *completely* annoying? I think there are a lot of things that get on our nerves, but today I want to start off by talking about one that I think all of us can agree on. At the very top of my *annoying* list is . . . waiting.

None of us love the idea of waiting. It’s difficult for us to know what to do in those moments when we’ve put something out there, but we don’t get something back instantly.

- It’s why someone invented microwaves. So, we can have Mac ‘n Cheese in two minutes flat (I wish they would invent something to deal with a mouth that has been charred by the molten lava heat that comes with microwaved Mac ‘n Cheese!).
- We love to FAST food.
- There’s a reason why *Instagram* ISN’T called *Eventualgram*.

Think about airplanes. Can you imagine what Christopher Columbus would think if a flight on Southwest Airlines was explained to him? He’d be like: “I lived through six months of sea sickness, scurvy, dying crew members, and fighting off pirates of the Caribbean to get somewhere. And now you people can go that distance in FIVE HOURS? And you get pretzels and a Sprite while you’re at it?”

Let’s face it, we do NOT like to wait. So much so, in fact, that we get weirdly annoyed at the thought of standing in line or even waiting for something to download. These annoyances bring us to another parable that was told by Jesus, the great Storyteller. It’s about prayer. And no matter where you are in your faith or if you’re not even sure about the whole God thing, chances are good that you’ve thrown up a prayer or two at some point. And then you *waited*. Text or email Katrina your answer to this question: “What are you looking forward to this school year?”

And it’s not easy just because it’s supposed to be a good thing, right? I mean, maybe you prayed about something and you got an answer right away. Like, BAM! Here’s your reply. If so, that’s great. But most of the time, that’s not how prayer works. Maybe you found yourself praying for something super serious like a sick person or someone who was in trouble and then you just waited. Or maybe you just pray for normal everyday things, like to pass a test or not mess up in your basketball game. Either way, if you didn’t get an immediate response, the whole waiting thing always brings up some questions. Maybe you’ve found yourself wondering:

- *Is this an okay thing to pray for?*
- *Is God saying no? Or yes?*
- *Is God even listening?*
- *Am I doing this right?*

And maybe most importantly, *Does prayer even work at all?* If you’ve ever wondered that, I want you to know something. God isn’t mad at you. Your heavenly father understands you and isn’t going to strike you with lightning if you ask some perfectly normal and reasonable questions about prayer. Besides, you and I aren’t the first to wrestle with the idea of prayer and whether God is listening. In fact, I think that is one of the reasons Jesus told this particular story—so you and I would have an idea of what to do when we pray and hear . . . nothing.

We know about this story because a doctor named Luke began to investigate Jesus' life by talking to people who knew Him well. And one of the conversations Luke discovered was this one that led to Jesus telling a story.

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray.” (Luke 11:1a, NIV).

So, we know right away that Jesus had a goal in the story He was about to tell:

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Suppose you have 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 suppose 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. (Luke 11:5-8, NIV).

You may be thinking: *Who does that? Who knocks on a door all night?* Well, this neighbor had a guest coming into town. And chances were really good that this guest would arrive hungry. Plus, the neighbor didn't have any food, so he was probably starving, too.

It sets the tone for how desperate this neighbor is. He was willing to bug the sleeping family next door IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. I can't even handle people *texting* me in the middle of the night. I can't imagine how bad I'd react to someone knocking on my door all night!

If I were the neighbor, I would've given up after one knock on the door. But he didn't. He kept knocking. Jesus didn't say exactly how long the neighbor waited, all the while getting hungrier, more tired, and more anxious. Surely he wondered, *Is it even worth it for me to keep asking?* It would be like sending text after text, DM after DM, all through the night, all in the hopes of getting someone to respond. Talk about a waiting situation.

If you've ever prayed about a desperate situation, you may be able to relate to this feeling. Like, if you've prayed your heart out for God to help you do well on a test that could make or break you. Or you've sent in a college application or tried out for a team, and you prayed like crazy for things to go in your favor. Or you've asked God to help your family drama get better, help you make it out of a bad social situation, get you out of trouble, or give you the strength to deal with everything that's loaded on your schedule.

After enough waiting and not hearing anything, we start to wonder, *Is it worth it for me to keep asking?*

But that's what is so beautiful about the ending of Jesus' story. Eventually, the friend opened the door and gave some bread to his neighbor! He also gave us an incredible idea that can change the game when it comes to how we approach prayer:

WHEN IT COMES TO PRAYER, DON'T QUIT BECAUSE IT'S QUIET.

- The neighbor may have felt discouraged, but he didn't quit.
- The neighbor may have gotten tired, but he didn't quit.
- The neighbor may have bruised his knuckles from knocking, but he didn't quit.
- The neighbor probably woke up the rest of the neighborhood, but he didn't quit.

Even if you and I don't hear anything when we pray, we can keep praying. God is still good. He still hears us. And He's not bothered by our continuous knocking on the door! I mean think about this, the neighbor, a normal human, opened the door. And if that's how he reacted, imagine how much better a perfect God with perfect love for you reacts every time you pray.

Now, anytime we talk about prayer, it can be complicated. Because the way we view prayer can affect how we pray. For example, when we hear this story, we may think: *This is great news! This means that I can ask God for what I want. And as long as I don't quit, He'll eventually give me what I want!*

That would be great. But I imagine some of you have prayed really big prayers with *a lot* of persistence, and you didn't get what you asked for:

- Your parents didn't stay married.
- Your aunt's cancer came back.
- You didn't make the team.
- Your friend's mom took the job in another state, and now they're moving away.
- You got busted, the news got out, and now you're in trouble.

If you pray for long enough, you're going to hit moments when—even though you prayed over and over—God didn't come through in the way you asked, wanted, or expected. When this happens, this can really mess with our faith. It's easy to think: "I prayed. I asked. I waited. I asked again. And things turned out *OPPOSITE* of what I asked. This can really challenge our confidence and belief in God.

But this parable is less about WHAT we get and more about WHO we are talking to. It's more about our willingness to keep asking, even if things don't go how we want them to.

God is concerned with the things that concern us. He sees our lives and loves us more than we could ever imagine. His character is good. His heart for us is good. When we trust that, it's easier for us to keep asking, and it's easier to wait. It's not a guarantee that we'll get what we ask for, but it *is* a guarantee that we can count on the God whom we're asking.

God *promises* that He will help us experience peace.
God *promises* to comfort us, even in our darkest hours.
God *promises* that He will never leave us or forsake us.
God *promises* that nothing can separate us from His love.

Sometimes those promises can be hard to believe when the answer doesn't look like we hoped or the silence seems unending. It's in those moments—the ones when we don't *want* to keep asking—that we have the opportunity to stretch our faith beyond its borders. That's when you can develop a faith that is rare and powerful: and not just for someone your age, but for someone *any* age!

God keeps His promises. And because of that, we can keep asking. Sure, we are welcomed to ask for the things that we want, but at the same time, we are invited to pursue God, who is always good and always looking out for us. Even when we don't get what we want, it doesn't mean that God isn't good, and it doesn't mean that He has failed to keep His promises.

The question I want to ask you today is: **"What do you think God is like?"** Because how you answer that question will determine if you think God is worth waiting on or not.

If we think God is like most people in the world who would be annoyed by us waking them up by knocking on their door in the middle of the night, we'll be tempted to call it quits. But if we believe

that God is good, kind, compassionate, and full of mercy and love—like Jesus tells us He is—then we'll keep asking, because God is worth asking. We may not get what we want, but when we trust the character of the God we are asking, our faith won't crumble when we don't get what we want.

Jesus came to Earth to show the world what God is like. And based on what He told us and showed us about God, we can trust that . . .

- God is worth going to.
- God keeps His promises.
- God is good.
- He is present *with* us. He listens. He comforts us.
- We can KEEP going to Him.

When we start to believe these things, it changes the way we pray!

So, what is it that you're asking for? What are you hoping for an answer about? Something big? Small? Something new? Or something you've been asking about for a while now?

The first thing I want you to do is **write it down**.

The second thing I want you to do is **slow it down**. Which means you have to *put* something down: the TV, your X-Box, Snapchat, your phone in general, Netflix, Instagram, YouTube, the list goes on and on!

What do you need to put down in order to slow down?

The third thing I want you to do is **set a reminder to slow down and pray**. Put an alert on your phone, set an alarm, make a mental note, etc. Choose the time of day. Select the length of time. And then *decide* to put in the time and practice!

Keep praying.

Keep asking.

Maybe you'll get what you asked for. Maybe not. Either way, you are asking a God who is good and can be trusted no matter what. So, don't quit asking!

Sometimes prayer feels like slow, wasted time. And honestly, sometimes it feels like God isn't there or listening, but He is! Jesus told this story because He already knew it would feel that way. He knew that we'd be easily distracted and feel tempted to give up. He knew that we'd come to conclusions that He wasn't good or present.

This story teaches us that **when it comes to prayer, don't quit because it's quiet**. Don't give up praying to a listening God who loves us so very much!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What's the longest you've waited in a line that ultimately wasn't worth it? What's the longest you've waited in a line that was worth it?
2. In general, why can the concept of prayer be so difficult to understand?
3. What are the reasons you give up praying when you've waited a long time for something?
4. Why do you think that sometimes we only go to God in prayer for certain things?
5. Why is it important to your own faith to keep returning to God in prayer?
6. What did you get out of the story Jesus told about the neighbor?
7. How would being sure that God listens to your prayers change what you consistently pray about?
8. What are some ways that praying consistently can grow your faith, regardless of the outcome?