

Serpents, Scorpions, and Prayer

by Tim Conway

This sermon emphasizes the importance of persistence in prayer, highlighting the need to keep asking, seeking, and knocking, even when faced with silence or delays. Jesus teaches that God is willing to give to His children, encouraging them to refuse to accept denial and to keep pressing in with audacity and confidence in His love and willingness to answer. The sermon addresses the tendency to give up too soon in prayer, the assurance of God's care and provision, and the value of persistent prayer in receiving God's blessings.

Scripture: Luke 11:5, Luke 11:13, James 5:16, Matthew 7:7, John 14:13

Topics: "Persistence in Prayer", "Confidence in God's Provision"

Description

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Transcript

Wow, being back in this pulpit again. It seems like I've been in a dream. Yeah, it was like when we were in Manchester.

It's like our life back in San Antonio was a dream. And then you come back here and it's like life there seems like a dream. I would like you to turn in your Bibles to Luke 11.

I was trying to think earlier. I think, and my mind was moving back and forth through the entire Bible. I think this is the most extensive teaching on prayer that we have in our Bibles.

Luke 11. Verse 1. Before I read this. We sang, Shout to the North.

And Mark didn't shout. I said to Ruby, Mark must not be here. And then Mark shouted in the last song.

Thank you, brother. That's not mechanical. That actually aids the worship.

Let's pray. Father, we just thank You for such a Savior that we have. Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.

Lord, we pray that in all Your mightiness, You might be pleased to bow and condescend to help us, to visit us in this hour. We pray in Christ's name, Amen. The title of my sermon is Serpents, Scorpions, and Prayer.

If you're not familiar with the text, you may not know where in the world I got that title from, but you'll know in just a second as we read the text. Last time I was here in the States, May, June, Ruby and I were anticipating selling our house, which we've decided not to. But what it did was it had us go through our possessions and eliminate a lot of things.

That's very freeing. As I was going through journals, I was going through all sorts of things from years ago, from when I was first saved. And I came across something that's caused this sermon to percolate within me for like the last four months.

I kept thinking, if I preach when I'm in San Antonio, I think I'm going to preach on this passage. Luke chapter 11. Let's read the first 13 verses.

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place. And when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. He said to them, when you pray, say, that little word right there, say, that is an imperative.

Say, Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins. For we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.

He said to them, which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, friend, lend me three loaves? For a friend of mine has arrived on a journey and I have nothing to set before him. And he will answer from within. Do not bother me.

The door is now shut. My children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything.

I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his, ESV says impudence. If you've ever cut your teeth on the King James Version, you know it's importunity. Other translations use the term persistence.

Because of the importunity, because of the persistence, the word impudence, well, you see, there's a footnote in mine that says persistence. But impudence, what do you think about when you hear impudence? To me, that's kind of an odd word. That's kind of an odd choice, I guess, of words for the ESV to use.

What do you think of when you hear that word? Impudence. Kind of negative. What is it? Stubborn.

And you know what? That's right. That's what's behind the word here. But, we'll develop that in a little bit.

Because of his impudence, persistence, importunity, even stubbornness perhaps, he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, the second time he says this, I tell you, they want teaching on prayer, they're getting it. I tell you, he's giving it to them.

Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives. And the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? I also was at that grace group.

Ruby and I have talked about visiting all the different grace groups while we're home during this stint. And the first one we went to was James. And like David, we were challenged with what verses have impacted our life.

This is one of them I mentioned. Specifically, v. 13. As a very young Christian, I began to memorize different verses.

And this was one of them. This portion of Scripture is often running through my mind and through my convictions. Now look, if we just break these 13 verses down, what do you have? Well, you have a request.

You see that in v. 1. The request, Lord, teach us to pray. And then I would say the next portion is perhaps v. 2-4 is you have the imperative. He says when you pray, say.

That's the imperative. And then you have the parable. Right? V. 5, 6, 7, and 8. You've got this parable.

And then in v. 9 and 10, you've got the promise. In v. 11, you've got the rhetorical. V. 11 and 12.

These rhetorical questions. Rhetorical. He's not obviously looking for his audience to give an answer.

He's teaching with effect here. And then in v. 13, you've got this assertion. We could say it's another promise, but it's really an assertion of God's character here.

So that's the way we basically break it down. Now, look, when I read Scripture, I'm looking for emphasis. And I will read books of the Bible over and over and try to pay attention.

What is the author coming at me repeatedly with? In fact, it may be odd to you that I've just been reading Ezekiel over and over. And do you know what jumped out at me is the term north. We say, shout to the north.

North. And I looked it up. Because I went through and I was circling all the north and northern in blue.

And it's far more found in Ezekiel than any place in your Bible. You say, well, what's the significance? I don't know, but I just took notice of that. Here, I have tried to pay attention.

It was stated by somebody earlier. David, it was you. It was just talking about the different Gospels and the fact that if you saw a car accident, any different three people, you'd probably have three different reports and although they're all true, you'd get kind of different perspectives.

And oftentimes as I read the different Gospels, I'm trying to pay attention. What is it that this writer is emphasizing? What is the Spirit of God leading him? Can anybody tell me what Luke emphasizes far more than any of the other Gospel writers? A good guess would be prayer. Because that's what we're dealing with.

Another thing is the Holy Spirit. I would encourage that. Now you know Luke wrote not just the Gospel of Luke, he wrote the book of Acts.

If you go through Luke and Acts and you specifically look for prayer, do you know what you'll find? You will find prayer is mentioned 28 times. Prayer is mentioned 28 times in Luke's Gospel. It's mentioned twice in John's Gospel and then it's mentioned 30 times in the book of Acts.

See, that's the kind of emphasis that Luke places. Here in this passage, two of his primary emphases, prayer and the Holy Spirit, they come together. If you read Luke paying very close attention to every place he talks about the Spirit, it's amazing.

And one of the things that Luke loves to show us is that we have a praying Messiah. You recognize that Luke covers nine specific prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ, seven of which are only found in Luke's Gospel. Luke was taken up, the Spirit moved Luke.

Luke paid particular attention to the fact that Christ prayed. He doesn't only teach on prayer, He prayed. And that's what you find here.

Think about it. They went to Him. Lord, teach us to pray.

Think about who He is. He not only came here as a man who did pray, sought His Father, needed His Father. He came as a man.

He prayed as a man. But He hears our prayers as God. If there's anybody in the perfect place to teach us about prayer, and His disciples knew that.

They knew He was a man of prayer. They saw He was effectual in His prayers. We talk about Elijah being effectual and fervent.

But here's Christ. And they knew it. If there's anybody on the planet to teach them to pray, they knew this was the one.

Now, I heard years ago, I was listening to a sermon by Conrad Murrell, and he made a comment right at the beginning of his sermon, and he says, I am going to be misunderstood. Don't you like that? That's at the beginning of a sermon. Well, you know, what does that do? That kind of causes you perhaps to... But why would a preacher say that? A preacher says that because he recognizes I'm going to say things that he believes it's true.

Preachers shouldn't be preaching what they don't believe to be true. But they recognize this. They recognize the people they're speaking to have such predisposed attitudes towards things, they already have things figured out that putting a dent in what they believe is very difficult.

Because they've already got it figured out. In fact, I recognize, I was even thinking about, I don't think some people are going to hear me right when I say what I say today. And I kept thinking, you know, sometimes it's the older Christians that aren't so disposed to actually entertain what Scripture actually says.

Sometimes it's the new believer that's just simple enough and naive enough to actually take Scripture at face value. I hope all of us will be somewhat minded that way. Brethren, I'll tell you this, these 13 verses have some amazing promises.

And I will feel like I failed if I haven't left all of you more encouraged to pray after this sermon. So, as I thought about how I would handle the text, I thought, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to go through a list of things that this passage does not teach. And the reason I would do that is because I'm afraid that you might believe it does teach these things.

Or you might be prone to err. You see, sometimes I'm afraid that I know we are supposed to compare Scripture with Scripture, but I'm afraid that sometimes we can latch on to one thing in one place and we so heavily let that one thing, that one truth influence us that we can't hear what Scripture actually says in other places. Now, listen, the very first thing, and I'm going to spend a little bit of time developing this, the very first thing is this, Jesus is not teaching that our Heavenly Father is reluctant to give.

He is not teaching that. Now, consider the parable. Let's look at the parable here.

You've got to love this. I love the way Jesus teaches. Consider the parable.

That's verses 5-8. Just think. Here's Jesus.

His disciples come and they say, teach us how to pray. Well, He wants to give them Course 101 in prayer. He wants to encourage them to pray.

And He hits them with this. Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, friend, lend me three loaves? Now, what you want to do right off is you want to look at, okay, it's a parable. It's a picture of something.

There's two people. There's two characters in this story. Who are they? Well, we know there's a guy here that's asking.

And there's a guy that's being asked. But you have to think, who is Jesus wanting these individuals to represent? That's the real question. This is a parable about prayer.

And it says, you have a friend. You go to him at midnight. You say to him, friend, lend me three loaves.

A friend of mine has arrived on a journey. I have nothing to set before him. And he answers from within.

Do not bother me. Okay, let me just ask you this. Who does this represent who's saying do not bother me? Who is it? And very specifically, look at v. 2. V. 2 says this.

He said to them, when you pray, say, Father. Father. He's the one being asked.

And in fact, if you go to the end of this whole thing, v. 11, what father among you? V. 13, if you then being evil 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? Who's being asked? The Father's being asked. Jesus is teaching us to pray to Him. I know that it might be acceptable to pray to Christ.

It might be acceptable to pray to the Holy Spirit. But very specifically, you are getting instruction on praying to the Father. That's what Jesus is teaching us here.

So, don't bother me? Listen, I didn't dream this up. This is Jesus giving us the teachings. This is what He thinks we need to hear.

So, okay, back to our parable. Don't bother me. The door is now shut.

My children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though He will not get up and give Him anything because He is His friend, yet because of His importunity, persistence, impudence, He will rise and give Him whatever He needs.

Now, this parable is Jesus teaching us how to pray to the Father in order to get what we're seeking. That's what you've got going here. We are the ones who need the three loaves.

He's the one who gives them. That's what you've got here. There's no question that Jesus wants us to see God the Father in some way is represented by the friend who says, do not bother me.

Now listen very carefully. You've got to get this. This is why I'm stressing right at the beginning.

This does not teach us that God is reluctant to give. You don't want to miss the point of the parable. And Jesus drives it home in verses 9 and 10 with these promises.

Look, I tell you, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives. The one who seeks finds. The one who knocks, it will be opened.

You see what He's saying? He's saying persistence, tenacity, that endurance in prayer, this is what He's teaching, will prevail with God when giving up in prayer won't. That's what He's teaching us here. You can see that.

He is teaching persistence prevails with God the Father when giving up will not prevail with God the Father. Jesus is not teaching that God is reluctant. Look, the final rhetorical and the final assertion about God's character throw all that to the wind.

Look at it. What father among you, verse 11, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, never forget these three words. How much more? Will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask? And you know that there's a parallel passage to this over in Matthew 7. It says how much more will your heavenly Father give good things? Here it's Holy Spirit.

Over there, it's every good thing to them who ask. How much more? You can take the most generous, the most loving Father in this place, and it's not just God is more willing. God is much more willing.

You see what that does? It doesn't allow us to take this parable here and say, oh, well that characterizes God. He doesn't want us to bother Him. You're misreading it.

What it's saying is you have to persist in asking. God in His greater generosity than any earthly Father, He's much more willing to give than the greatest Father here. But what happens? He wants us for reasons.

We'll look at that a little more. But for reasons, He wants us to persist with Him. How much more? Brethren, those words are utterly crucial for us.

Those words mean that God is... Think, think. Listen, you could equally put in a grandfather here. Do you know when you look at children, you look at grandchildren, doesn't something move in you? You want to give to them.

And you know what? Jesus recognizes that's how we're wired. We are willing to give to our children. You know what? Out there in the world, when people won't give to others, they'll give to their children.

How much more? That's... Is He inclined to hear us, grant us, help us? When we ask and we pray, more than any earthly Father is inclined to hear His children when they ask. So, here's the thing. If Jesus wants us to know that our Heavenly Father is indeed the most caring, most generous Father imaginable, why in the world does He portray in verses 5 through 8 God as a friend who's unwilling to get out of bed because of friendship, but He will get out of bed because we agitate Him enough? Because that's really what the parable's saying.

I mean, you know why He gets out of bed? Simply because He wants to put an end to the knocking on His door. He wants to shut this guy up and get back to sleep. That's basically the parable.

And so, is God tired? Is God annoyed? Is God irritable? Is He stingy? The truth is, I recognize this parable sitting next to what you have in verses 9 through 13, this parable can almost seem inconsistent. It's like, really? See, would you have chosen that parable to teach? If somebody said, teach me to pray, and you got to thinking, oh, I'm going to tell them how loving our Heavenly Father is, how willing to give, how He is the Father of lights and every good and perfect gift comes from Him. He is so willing to give.

Would you have chosen verses 5 through 8? Is that how you would have told it? I don't think any of us would have. Because you know what you would have said? If I use that parable, I am likely going to send the wrong impression. But again, I back off here and I say, I'm not the teacher.

They didn't ask me to teach them on prayer. They asked Him. Would you not say, quite honestly, would not all of you admit that verses 5 through 8 is not a very attractive image of getting an answer to prayer? I think if we're honest.

And it's set next to the verses at the end that portray God as the most caring Father imaginable. Seem at odds, perhaps. But when somebody says to the Lord, teach us how to pray, this is the way He does it.

This is what He wants to emphasize. I like the Lord's teaching because oftentimes He's meant to startle us. And I think startling teaching, teaching that just puts us all to sleep.

It's when it makes us think. It's when it kind of grates. That doesn't sound consistent, but it gets you thinking.

But you know what, brethren? From our perspective, this is the thing. Oftentimes, Scripture speaks from our perspective and Jesus teaches from our perspective. You know, one sinner who repents over 99 who don't need repentance.

Well, is there anybody, 99 out there, who don't need repentance? But you see, it's all from our perspective. You get these righteous people who don't need repentance. Well, are there really? Well, yes, there are really from man's perspective.

That's how it appears. Brethren, this makes total sense. Think about your own prayer life.

Think about my prayer life. Is this not exactly the way it appears to us at times? Do you not find yourself asking God for something? And it often does seem like a friend who won't get up because what? You're asking God. You've been there.

You're asking God for something and there's no answer. And in fact, the answer may be negative. Like the Syrophenician woman.

She wants her daughter healed of the demon and it seems like she's getting rejected. Like, don't bother me. Isn't that the way? You're a dog! But you know what? Her persistence.

What happened in the end? But see, this is sometimes how it does seem like a friend who doesn't want to get out of bed. And then he does. Because you keep asking.

God says through the prophet Isaiah, don't give Me any rest. And there are prayer warriors. There are people who take prayer serious.

Or more so, they take what they want serious. They need that bread. And they keep going and they keep clinging and they keep hanging on.

Like the Syrophenician woman. And you know what? It does, to our perspective, seem like you've got somebody in bed that doesn't want to get up and they don't want to be bothered. And yet, they do get up.

But only if we keep on knocking. We've got to keep on knocking. That's clear.

Do you know what Jesus is teaching us by this parable? That if this guy would have given up after the first rejection, what would have happened? What would have happened? No bread. That's exactly right. He wouldn't have had any bread.

That's what's being taught here. We've got to keep going. We've got to keep knocking.

Jesus is teaching that if this guy would have just gone home... Brethren, that happens. We've got a lot of people that pray for things and they may pound on that door once or twice and then they just give up. And Jesus knows.

He knows His Father. And He says, My Father is more willing to give to you than any of you are willing to give to your children or grandchildren. But, for purposes that are God's, He wants persistence.

Basically what it's saying, somebody mentioned today about a thankfulness for immediate answers to prayer. But you know what Jesus is teaching by this? Oh yeah, that's true. Sometimes there are immediate answers to prayer.

But what He's teaching by this is that if we're really going to learn how to pray, Lord, teach us to pray. Here it is, boys. Prayer 101.

You better learn about persistence and importunity. You've got to keep going. And you know this word can even be translated shamelessness.

It's like the idea that somebody could almost become embarrassed by asking too much and receiving a no. This is a crucial lesson about prayer. Persistence in prayer will prevail with God where giving up will not persist.

Brethren, I'm telling you this. What Jesus is teaching us, now this is where I don't want you to misunderstand me. Jesus is saying, don't take no for an answer.

That is exactly what He's teaching. He says don't accept denial. Refuse to take no.

Importunity, press it. Now, somebody says, well, hey, I remember there's some place, in fact, I think James may have mentioned it last week, where Paul had a thorn in the flesh and Paul prayed three times that that thorn would be taken away and God said, no, Paul, I'm not going to take it away. Now, okay, but think with me.

Did Paul stop at praying once? He did not. Because he knew the art of prayer. Did he stop at praying twice? He did not.

And now, look, yes, we may get to the place where God clearly teaches us that something we're asking for is not coming. But even Paul didn't take no for an answer until he was taught by Christ that no was the answer. Brethren, a lot of people give up not because God has convinced them that no is the answer.

They may take the initial silence as that being a no, but what Jesus is saying is don't take that initial silence as being a no. And you know what? Unless you actually have some kind of supernatural, some kind of God speaking or impressing or God convincing you that something is absolutely a no to where you get to the place just like He did where you quit, I would say, brethren, listen to Jesus. Listen to Him.

Brethren, do you follow me in this? This is what He's stressing. God has His reasons for not answering prayers immediately. But I'll tell you this, it is not a reluctance on His part to give.

Now here's the second thing. This passage is not about Christians not knowing how to pray as they ought. I know, yes, yes, you can go to Romans 8. I'm just saying this.

When those disciples came to the Lord and they said, teach us to pray, He didn't say, well, boys, you know one of the big problems is you never know what to ask for. You're always asking for the wrong thing. You just don't know how to pray as you ought.

That is not in His 13 verses of prayer 101. The thing is this, nothing of that sort is even hinted at here. Just look at it.

Look at v. 5. What does the guy want? What does the guy want in v. 5? Three loaves. In v. 8, he gets them. It says whatsoever he needs, but what did he need? He needed bread.

There's no hint that he's asking for the wrong thing. The guy in bed that says, don't bother me, doesn't say, oh, you're asking for the wrong thing. Listen, I know we can ask for wrong things, but that's not what Jesus is presupposing here.

He's not. The guy's asking for a good thing. In fact, if you go a little further here, notice this.

Look at v. 9. Ask and what is the next word? What does it say? Ask and it. What's the it? What you're asking for. Ask and it will be given to you.

Or, we could go further here. V. 11-12. You see, there's nothing here about the child asking for cotton candy.

I know children can ask for cotton candy. I know in a spiritual sense, we can ask for cotton candy. And God, as a good parent, says no.

I recognize that. But you need to hear this for what it's really saying. There is nothing about that here.

The child asks for an egg. The child asks for a fish. The Christian asks for more of the Holy Spirit.

It says for the Holy Spirit, not more. But this is a child asking a father. This isn't a person asking to be saved.

This is a person that's already saved, already possesses the Spirit. This is a person that's obviously asking for the power, the influences, the graces of the Spirit of God to blow upon them and their family and the church. And what do they get? See, they ask for the Spirit.

They get the Spirit. They ask for an egg. They get an egg.

There's nothing here at all. Brethren, this is important because I'm afraid, you know what happens a lot of times? We ask, we get silence. And you know what we can become convinced of? Wow, we've asked wrong.

Yes, when silence comes, should we be searching? Should we be asking? Should we be probing? There's nothing wrong with that. But the fact is, you don't want to just accept the silence and go away. You don't want to ask for the three loaves of bread, not get the three loaves of bread, and then say, well, I blew it.

I was asking all wrong there. What's the problem? You get this, don't bother me. That's what comes from within.

Don't bother me. Wow, bread must not be very important. You can all of a sudden become convinced, well, I'm asking for the wrong thing.

I'm just not asking right. You can immediately conclude, I'm the problem. Like the first message.

It must be by unbelief. Maybe there's just too much unbelief here. What's the problem? We've got to be asking wrong.

We've got to be asking for something that's bad for us to have. You know what? You can just get to feel where there's just so many unknowable, unsearchable, complicated factors in prayer. I just can't figure it out.

I don't know why God's not giving it to me. And Jesus is saying this. It's just like what He said to those guys.

Guys, you would have cast this demon out if you were over here on your knees. And He's saying the same. You can get what you're after if you will persist with God.

And He is very willing to give to you, but there's something in that persistence that He as a Father knows is invaluable to you and glorifying to Him. Persist. That's at the heart of the art of prayer.

And so, promises like we have. You know what can happen? You get to where you have so many unanswered prayers in your life that the promises that we have in v. 9-10. Just look at these promises.

There's no caveats here. There's no exceptions. There's no footnote.

I know you can go somewhere else in your Bible, but listen, isn't it amazing? The Lord teaches us to pray. And He doesn't say, well, here's all these exclusions and exceptions. Wow! So often, Jesus spoke this way.

I tell you, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks receives. You see the progression though. It's keep on asking.

It's keep seeking. It's the one who knocks. There's a progression.

There's opportunity here. We keep going. But you know what can happen? Promises like this.

These are tremendous promises. I mean, a blank check. That's what we've got here.

And look, I'll tell you this, Scripture would guarantee us if you delight in the Lord, you've got a blank check. That's what Scripture teaches us. And here it is.

You can ask. Oh, I'm grateful the prayer meetings here have been filled through all the years. Because I know a lot of you are convinced that we have a God that answers prayer.

We have a Father that is not hesitant. The disciples want the King of Prayer to teach them. Jesus is not quick to point out that the disciples' most basic issue and problem when it comes to prayer is that they just don't know what to ask for.

The issue is what? The issue is always this. We give up too soon. We give up too early.

Okay, here's another thing. This passage is not about how sin impedes our prayers. Again, I know I am liable to be misunderstood.

Listen, I know you can go to Psalm 66. And I know you can go to other places. I know you can read about prayer being an abomination in certain circumstances.

I recognize. But when disciples of Christ say, teach us to pray, He doesn't say a word about you won't get what you ask for if somehow there's failures or imperfections in your life. Just look.

Jesus is speaking to imperfect people. And you see the imperfection of these people in what He teaches them here. Look, I'm not saying that people that cherish sin and idols in their heart and are just overtly, outwardly wicked and rebellious should expect to get anything from God.

That's not what's happening here. I'm saying that Jesus is teaching that God answers the prayers of repentant sinners. Not perfect people.

And yes, unanswered prayer ought to cause us to search if there's any sin in our life. We heard about that earlier. Yes, there is a place to be examining ourselves whether it's a possibility that sin could be.

But that is not where the Lord goes here. Because brethren, I'll tell you this, I know you because you are like Me. When's the last time you had your perfect week? We don't.

And you know what can happen? We ask, there's silence. Don't bother Me is how it feels like. And we can immediately conclude, I barked at my wife, always some flaw, some failure.

And the devil's right there to say, yep, you have no business going. He doesn't want to hear from you. Of course, you're not getting an answer.

Brethren, look at the passage here. Look at v. 2. When you pray, say, Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread. Look at this. Forgive us our sins.

Brethren, there's always a place in our prayers to be confessing our sins. Why? Because we're not a perfect people and these guys weren't perfect people. And he's not saying, listen, the reason you're not getting your prayers answered is because of all that sin in your life.

He doesn't say that. Did he know their failures? He knew their failures perfectly well. And all you've got to do is backtrack and go a little bit forward and you're going to find failures, falls, flaws, overt sin on the part of these guys.

Yet, I know He can sum up their life in John 17 and say they've kept Your Word. I mean, look, these are disciples. These aren't lost people.

But were their lives perfect? No. Were these people that had sin to confess? And then, a pretty cutting thing. Jesus assumes we need forgiveness often when we pray.

We feel it. Nothing we do is perfect. But nothing here indicates that God shuns the prayers of His children because they've had failure or falls in their life.

I'm just saying, could it hinder our prayers? Yes, it can hinder our prayers. But Jesus doesn't even feel the necessity to go there. In fact, listen to this, verse 13.

If you then who are evil... Jesus calls His disciples evil. This isn't just the crowd asking Him. This is His disciples.

Brethren, that's strong language. Yet, Jesus says that the Heavenly Father will give His Holy Spirit to these same evil people if they will but ask. Brethren, all I'm trying to do is encourage you.

I know you're imperfect and I know you don't have perfect weeks. I know you have failures and I know you have flaws. And there is a temptation when God does not answer for us to just shut down.

You can get so paralyzed by this mindset that you are not worthy. Of course you're not worthy! I mean, we remember the death on the cross. That speaks loudly to us.

We're not worthy. But evil people who ask Him... Jesus is not saying they're not Christians. But what's He saying? You're not perfect.

We are a people who in this world, we're being perfected, but we're not perfect. We're still broken in many ages. He's pointing to the fact that this present evil age, we're still here, we're still in this world and we carry about the flesh and we're still tainted with this thing, this corruption.

We still have an evil bent that pollutes us. And our native corruption has not been entirely eradicated. Though new creations, absolutely we are.

But you know we carry about the flesh and sin seeks to reign in the mortal body and we've got to put it to death. But you know this, little children, I write to you that you don't sin, but if you sin, there it is. And right before that, John was saying, listen, what we've got to do if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to

forgive our sins.

What happens? He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. We read that the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sins. Jesus is teaching that these evil people, if they ask for the Holy Spirit, and they keep on asking, we talk about when the Spirit tarries.

We ask, Lord, come. Come in a mighty way. Come bring revival.

Don't give up. Don't give up. Brethren, you're asking for the salvation of your children.

Some of you have had children saved recently, but some of you have not. Here's another thing. This does not teach that God gives us eggs that look like scorpions.

Just follow me here. There's nothing in the passage that seems to indicate that there's confusion over eggs and scorpions. Now, one of my favorite preachers, years ago I heard him say, oh, there's a scorpion that when it folds up its legs, it looks like an egg.

Well, brethren, there's nothing in the passage here that says that eggs look like scorpions or scorpions look like eggs. Fish don't look like serpents and serpents don't look like fish. And if you look at basically the parallel teaching over in Matthew 7, it's bread over against rock.

Now, here's what I want to point out. There's nothing like that. Nothing about eggs that look like scorpions, scorpions that look like eggs.

An egg is one thing. It's a good thing. A scorpion is another thing.

It's a bad thing. It's entirely assumed all through this teaching. God knows the difference between a scorpion and an egg.

Earthly fathers know the difference between a scorpion and an egg. Because if a child asks for an egg, the father doesn't give it a scorpion. He knows the difference.

And the child, you think about the child. The child asking knows what they're asking for. Even if they don't know what all scorpions look like, they know what they're asking for.

They're asking for an egg. Or they're asking for a fish. Or they're asking for bread.

There's no confusion. Nothing about this portion of Scripture implies that the child asks for an egg. And what the father does is this.

He gives the child an egg, which the child asked for, but the egg looks like a scorpion, smells like a scorpion. Aaron, you can probably tell us what a scorpion smells like. It stings like a scorpion.

You see, what you don't want to do is ask for something. You ask for an egg. You ask for three loaves of bread.

And you get something that you chip your tooth on or that stings. And then you spend your time trying to convince yourself that's an egg. There's nothing like that here.

It's like you get what you ask for here. Did you ever notice that with Jesus? What would you have Me give you? Lord, My sight. And you know what they got? They didn't get some weird thing that they could hardly

discern whether it was the thing they asked for.

They got what they asked for. They got sight. We ask for something and we get something that stings.

These verses don't suggest we ought to try to convince ourselves that the stinging thing is really the egg we ask for. Nor do they suggest I ought to just concede that God in His wisdom thought I needed a scorpion though I asked for an egg. Brethren, let's be honest with one another.

Have you ever prayed for an egg? And what you got looked an awful lot like a scorpion? You asked God for something and maybe you didn't only get silence like, don't bother me, but you got something pretty snake-ish, pretty scorpion-esque. You prayed for a husband. You prayed for a wife.

You prayed for a child to be saved. You prayed for your child to be saved. And then you look up and He's only becoming more hardened in sin.

I mean, how much more? See, that's what Jesus is teaching us. How much more? See, I was going through my things. Evan and Charity had asked me to pray at their wedding.

And ahead of time, I just jotted down some notes about the things that I would pray for. It says, Charity's wedding. I prayed that the two of them would have children that would go on to know the Lord.

I've asked the Lord to keep them from falling. I thought about Isaac blessing Jacob. And it says in Scripture, yes, and he shall be blessed.

I wrote down God would take them through the challenges in life, that they would not pursue all the things the world pursues. I prayed humility for them. Their marriage would not be ordinary or mundane.

Songs of Zion would ring throughout their home. It would be a place of prayer and hospitality where the hungry, the homeless, the lost, the needy might be ministered to. My desire was that Charity would be an excellent wife who does Him good, not harm, that they would keep to the way of the Lord, not lose their first love, not be given to anger.

There would be forgiveness, joy, communication. Brethren, when I saw that, I felt like I asked the Lord for that and I got a scorpion. You see, you can look at that and you can misunderstand me.

But see, I recognize this. One of the things right here, He says when you pray, you need to say, Hallowed be Thy name. And I think this, Lord, You want Your name to be greatly exalted.

That's how we pray. We want to see His kingdom advance. We want to see His name is great.

One of the things that He's saying here, don't take no as an answer. You keep pressing in. You keep laying hold of me.

You keep asking. You keep seeking. You keep knocking.

Now look, I know in the end, we can receive answers like the Apostle Paul got after he asked three times. But you know what? God has not told me no to what I asked here. Not yet.

Maybe the day of my death, I'll hear one way or the other. Brethren, have you been there? You've asked God, Please, Lord. But then what happens? We can run out of gas.

And Jesus is saying, No. You have a gracious Father. He is willing to give.

Do I know? Look, do I have any way? Prayer does not in any way contradict or conflict with God being God. But I can tell you this, God as God has said, Son, go teach them how to approach Me. One of the things you want to teach them is that I am far more willing to give to them than any of them are willing to give to each other.

And you tell them to keep pressing in, to keep coming, to keep asking. Listen, importunity begins with the refusal to immediately accept a denial from God. Now this is where I can be misunderstood, but you've got to hear that's exactly what Jesus is saying.

That's exactly what the parable says. Don't take His silence or don't bother Me. No.

If He would have given up right at that point, He wouldn't have gotten it. And brethren, that's one of our big problems with prayer. Jesus sees it.

He doesn't see that sin is the issue. He doesn't see that us asking the wrong thing is the issue. He sees our primary issue with prayer is that we give up too soon.

I remember reading Spurgeon years ago when he said so many Christians, they hit that tree, hit that tree. He was likening the shaking of a tree to bringing the fruit down. And he said so many Christians that give up shaking the tree when one or two more shakes would have brought the fruit down.

If you say, well, I don't believe that. You know, God's sovereign. He's going to do what He's doing.

Listen, that is not what Jesus is teaching. He's not saying God is sovereign so it doesn't matter how much you ask. That would be to miss the whole point here.

He's saying God is very pleased. When we say, God, hallowed be Thy name, one of the things that I greatly desire, I was telling Craig earlier, one of the reasons I greatly desire to see Amy have us pray over her up front in front of you all is because I can say, Lord, we have James 5. You've given us promises. And we did that in front of you all.

Father, hallowed be Your name. Show the church that James 5 is legitimate. This isn't just about what the Egyptians will say if God fails.

What will His people say? We don't want to lose... You know what can happen? We pray and we don't get answers and we can just lose the fervency to pray. We can lose the preciousness of promises like we have here in these passages. Brethren, don't be content.

Listen to Thomas Watson. We do serve a God who likes to delay at our requests. Why would He do that? Listen to Watson.

Thomas Watson was one of the old Puritans. Why would God ever keep us asking and seeking and knocking when He's able to respond immediately? Here's what Watson says. Because He loves to hear the voice of prayer.

You let the musician play a great while before you throw him down money because you love to hear the music. Two, that He may humble us. We may too easily assume we merit some ready answer or that He's at our beck and call like a butler, not the sovereign Lord and loving Father that He is.

Three, because He sees we're not yet fit or ready for the mercy we seek, it may be He has things to put in place in us or in our church or in the world. There are a million pieces to the puzzle. Some things go first to make a place for the next.

Four, finally, that the mercy we pray for may be more prized and may be sweeter when it comes. Brethren, sometimes we pray for something and it almost feels like God gave us the exact opposite. And what Jesus is teaching us is don't cave.

Don't cave to discouragement. You need to come back to this reality. He says, you keep asking.

You keep seeking. Everyone who asks will receive. Brethren, what a motivator it is.

We run out of steam. And again, I'm made of the same stuff you are. I get weary.

I get discouraged just like you do. And I admit it. And there can be times where you just feel like, Lord, why is there so much silence? Jairus, you think about him.

He's got a sick daughter. Lord, I want you to come make her well. But you know what happened? Delay.

What? This woman over here, she needs to be... What's all this? You were coming to help me. And then word comes... Have you ever read? You remember where some of the Benjamites, they were the ones responsible for the Levite's concubine and he cut her up in pieces and he sent it all over. And so Israel gathered together and they did war with Benjamin and you know they got defeated.

And they went to the Lord. And they humbled themselves before Him and they prayed. And He said, go up.

And they went up and they were defeated. I think 18,000 of them were put to death. You ever have that kind of thing happen like Jairus? It's like, Lord, I asked You for this and now she's dead.

Lord, we asked You to come and save Lazarus. Now he's dead. Lord, we asked You.

We saw You. Yes, we realized we messed up. We realized we ran off to war and we didn't seek You.

Now we're seeking You. 18,000 of our people are dead. But you know what? They got the victory.

Or I think about the man. What would you have? Lord, my sight. Wait a second.

I see people like trees. What good is this? I don't want to go through life. I wanted my sight, Lord.

And yet, the Lord wasn't done. Brethren, so often our prayer life is like this. Much more.

I just end with this. How much more? Why does Jesus even talk this way? Well, certainly He means for us to feel secure in the Father's love. As much as He emphasized verses 5-8, we need to be persistent.

It's like, don't bother me. That's how we feel. You've got to admit you feel that way.

Lord, why is there silence? Why aren't You hearing me? We go back to the assurance thing. You can even start to wonder, Lord, am I Your child? And He's saying, through Jesus, He's saying, You are My child. I have a great, great love for You.

My silence is not because of any negation or littleness or slightness of My love for You. Not at all. What He wants us, He wants us to be confident.

And listen, if you're going to have the prayer life like He's teaching His disciples to have, if you're going to keep sustained, you've got to have confidence in a God that hears you. Because He's going to bring things... He is in the business of not exactly giving you precisely what you pray for immediately after you pray for it. That's what's being taught here.

And yet He's saying, listen, people who keep clinging to Him and crying to Him and will give Him no rest, you will get what you ask for. I don't know what the final chapter is on my daughter's life or the things that you've been praying for, but I know what these promises say. Brethren, cling, perseverance, importunity, shamelessness, insistence.

It can even be translated audacity. Audacious that you should be so bold to expect. Brethren, what kind of Father do we have? Father, I pray that You would just help us to be all the more confident in Your willingness to give to us.

I pray for these brethren. I pray that somehow we might be helped in our persistence, in our prayer life. Help us, Lord.

We feel the weakness. Prone to wander, Lord, we feel it. Lord, we feel that we're all too ready at times to give up, to feel discouraged, to feel like You don't want to be bothered by us.

The devil right there, quick to tell us, You don't want anything to do with us. Lord, I pray that You empower the reality, the truth of these words to the brethren. I pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

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