

Study 6. Faith Filled Boldness

Growing Faith in God Series

Warm-up Question: Aside from God and your parents, to whom would you go to when you have a pressing need? Why would you choose to go to this person?

Alternative Warm-up: If you have children, what are some tactics they used when they wanted something from you? If you do not have children, do you remember what tactics you used to obtain what you wanted from your parents when you were young? Share your stories.

While Josh McDowell was attending seminary in California, his father went home to be with the Lord. His mother had died years earlier, but Josh was not sure of her salvation. He became depressed about it. The thought obsessed him. "Lord," he prayed, "somehow give me the answer so I can get back to normal. I've just got to know." It seemed like an impossible request. Two days later, Josh drove out to the ocean. He walked to the end of a pier to be alone. There sat an old woman in a lawn chair, fishing. "Where's your home originally?" she asked. "Michigan—Union City," Josh replied. "Nobody's heard of it. I tell people it's a suburb of..." "Battle Creek," interrupted the woman. "I had a cousin from there. Did you know the McDowell family?" Stunned, Josh responded, "Yes, I'm Josh McDowell!" "I can't believe it," said the woman. "I'm a cousin to your mother." "Do you remember anything at all about my mother's spiritual life?" asked Josh. "Why sure—your mom and I were just girls—teenagers—when a tent revival came to town. It was the fourth night—we both went forward to accept Christ." "Praise God!" shouted Josh, startling the surrounding fishermen.¹

One of the significant mistakes that Christians often make is that we don't ask God for specific things. God delights in giving us precisely what we have asked for showing us His power and His ability to be Jehovah Jireh, our Great Provider. In one place, Jesus said, **"Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be complete"** (John 16:24). A friend of mine, Christene Sakakibara, told me of a time when she needed bunk beds for her two children. She went to the store and found out the price. Then she went to the Father in prayer and asked him for the specific amount in Israeli Shekels, (we were living in Israel at the time.) Not long after her prayer, a check came in the mail with the exact amount of shekels. I can't remember the amount but it wasn't rounded up to the nearest ten, it was the exact amount she needed, the exact amount of shekels. When she later talked to the person who gave her this gift, to thank them, the giver responded that the Holy Spirit had told them to give that exact amount, not a shekel more or a shekel less. Our faith is built up when God answers specific prayers. But what happens when there seems to be no answer at all, and you doubt that God hears your prayers of faith? Jesus taught a parable to encourage us and teach us what we should do in this type of situation:

⁵Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷"Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the

¹ <http://net.bible.org/illustration.php?topic=1141>

bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs (Luke 11:5-8).

In the Scripture above, we have the story of a traveler that had arrived at his friend's house in the middle of the night. Perhaps he was on a journey and decided to stay the rest of the night with a friend as he passed through a particular town. During the summer months in the Middle East travelers often journeyed late to avoid the heat of the day. The problem was that his friend had no bread to feed him. It was a sacred obligation to give hospitality and food as well as a place to sleep. What should the house owner do? No bread to put before his friend was a big embarrassment to him. He did have a friend that he thought might get up and give him some bread. It was common in the Middle East at that time for whole families to sleep together in the same room. Even today, in some countries in Asia, this is not uncommon.

In 1976 I traveled overland with a friend across Europe and through the Middle East into Asia. At one particular town there were no regular hotels that we could find, and upon inquiry, we were invited to stay where many other Asian travelers were visiting. The time was already about 10:00 p.m., and we were exhausted from our travels on a rickety bus over mountain ranges. It seemed pretty cheap until we went to the room in which we were to stay. It was a large room with about twenty other people sleeping on the floor on a very thick pile carpet or a sleeping mat. Naturally, we were shocked to find that we were sleeping in the same room with many others already asleep on the floor. It was a communal sleeping room. There was no furniture in the room, just a wood-fired stove in the middle to keep people warm. It was quite an experience to sleep with about twenty other people in the same place! To Westerners, it seems odd that many people would sleep in the same room, but for people in the Middle East and Asia, it was not abnormal. Jesus describes a man woken up after midnight one evening who had a similar situation where his family all slept together. Getting up to give him food meant that he had to be careful not to step on his kids in the dark, get the bread, all without waking his household. □

We can picture the man having to get up in the middle of the night, careful not to make too much noise. We can imagine him speaking in hushed tones down to his friend, perhaps through a window, hoping that his friend would understand as to why he could not get up and give him what he needed. He said, "My children are with me in bed; I can't get up and give you anything." That sounds like a final answer. However, that was not the end of the story.

William Barclay in his commentary says:

"In the east, no one would knock on a shut door unless the need was imperative. In the morning the door was opened and remained open all day, for there was little privacy; but if the door was shut, that was a definite sign that the friend did not wish to be disturbed. But the seeking house owner was not deterred. He knocked and kept on knocking."²

In telling this parable, why do you think Jesus chose to include in this story a man who was reluctant to get up and help his friend? What do you think Jesus was trying to illustrate by this character's actions and the way he responded to his friend?

² William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, Gospel of Luke*, Saint Andrew Press Publishers, Page 145.

Andrew Murray, the writer of the book *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, makes an excellent observation regarding this passage:

“What a deep heavenly mystery persevering prayer is! The God Who has promised and who longs to give the blessing holds it back. It is a matter of such deep importance to Him that His friends on earth should know and fully trust their rich Friend in heaven! Because of this, He trains them in the school of the delayed answer to find out how their perseverance prevails. They can wield mighty power in heaven if they simply set themselves to it!”³

What keyword in the passage we have read (Luke 11:5-8) stands out to you like the ingredient that Jesus wants us to have in such a situation, imagining yourself as the friend who is the petitioner?

The emphasis is on the word *boldness* in verse 8 (NIV) or *importunity* (KJV). The Greek word *Anaideia*, translated in the NIV into our English word "boldness," means to be without shame. The Key Word Study Bible says this Greek word means: “Shamelessness, unabashedness, audacity. The word describes the brazen persistence displayed in the pursuit of something, an insistence characterized by rudeness and a lack of compunction.”⁴

The King James Version translates *Anaideia* using the English word “importunate.” Webster's New World Dictionary says that the word importunate means: urgent or persistent in asking or demanding; refusing to be denied; annoyingly urgent or persistent, troublesome. □

Why would Jesus use this word? What does He want us to understand about prayer by approaching God with shamelessness or audacity?

The man or woman of God has to have faith and persistence that will not let go of God until one gets what he or she needs. This kind of bold faith pleases God. Surely the point of the parable is that the man kept on knocking on the door and would not let his friend fall back asleep until he received the bread he needed. What the Lord teaches in this passage is that if a grouchy friend can be persuaded to get up and give his friend some food due to some shameless, brazen persistence, **how much more** will God, who longs to feed and clothe His people do when they ask Him? Surely this story has been given to us to encourage us to prevail in prayer and not give up. If importunity and shameless audacity can be used to bring one's needs before a man who was angry at being inconvenienced, how much more will God do for us? God is infinitely kind and ready to do good to us, and much more willing than we are to do good to one another. Our Father is not angry at our importunity.

This whole idea of faithful persistence is so important to the Lord that He gave us another parable, hoping to encourage us to pray through any apparent obstacles:

³ With Christ in the School of Prayer, Andrew Murray, Whitaker House Publishers, 1981, Page 64.

⁴ Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN 37422. Page 1585.

¹Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ²He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. ³And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' ⁴"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!' " ⁶And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1-8).

What is the point of the parable? Why does God use the character of an unjust judge? Does He want us to think of Him as an unjust judge?

The purpose of the parable is very clear from the beginning—that we should always pray and not give up. This judge is the very opposite of the Father. The judge that Jesus talks about in this parable is a character who does not fear God nor listens to any man, and indeed not a woman whom the judge probably regarded as a second-class citizen, and a widow at that! In the Middle East at that time, women did not have an equal social status to men, and it would not be surprising for her to be ignored, as widows were marginalized in society at that time. In Scripture, the widow is the very epitome of a person who has no one on whom to rely.

We don't know what her situation was, but it was urgent enough for her to come to the only person in the city who could dispense justice on her behalf—the unjust judge. How did she pursue her case? She was incessant in her coming to him. We should not think for a minute that she set up an appointment or entered the courtroom while other cases were on. No, this woman kept confronting him at all times of the day. Perhaps she would even show up where he lived; maybe she would follow him as he went around the market. It became embarrassing for him, for when he wanted quiet time with his friends the poor widow would show up and plead her case. He finally gave her justice because she was wearing him out. R. Kent Hughes, in his commentary, mentions that the Judge uses the phrase, “wear me out” to describe how he felt at the widow’s continual pleading. Hughes writes,

“The literal translation of “wear me out” (“blacken my eye”) conveys even better his frustration. This phrase was a boxing expression (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27). Her persistence had been “punching him out,” probably in the sense of public embarrassment, giving his reputation or prominence a black eye.”⁵

This kind of persistence speaks of urgent desire. There was no other way but to persist in her claim. God does not hear prayer because of one's eloquence, or even the amount of times you come back to God to remind Him of your need. It is the desire and expression of one's need that is heard by God. When a person knows the promises of God and the character of God, he or she can persevere in prayer because his or her faith rests in a God who is the opposite of the judge in the parable. The judge was the only way that the widow could see to get through her situation,

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word Series, Luke Volume Two*, Published by Crossway Books, Page 186.

and since she saw him as her only hope, she continued to plead and would not give up. E.M. Bounds, a man who has written much on the topic of prayer, comments on this passage:

"God waits patiently as His elect cry to Him day and night. He is moved by their requests a million times more than was this unjust judge. A limit is set to His waiting by the persistent praying of His people, and the answer richly was given. God finds in His praying child the faith that stays and cries, and He honors it by permitting its further exercise so that it is strengthened and enriched. Then He rewards it by granting its request in abundance and decisively." ⁶

The Lord designs some situations that cannot be avoided except a person persist in prayer. Since there is no way around them, we must find a way through them. We learn as children how to get our way with our parents, how to cry enough, how to moan and manipulate, how to twist the truth to get what we want. Our obstinate childhood manipulations need to be left behind at the cross of Christ. We cannot use manipulation with our heavenly Father; He cannot be exploited to our advantage, for He knows all. Henry Ward Beecher said, "The difference between perseverance and obstinacy is that one often comes from a strong will and the other from a strong won't." Christian maturity requires us to persevere in prayer with God.

In some instances, we find ourselves facing situations that require more than a quick prayer before bed. What is the level of intensity for your need to be met, how much do we want what we are asking? Hannah, a woman who was barren, reminds us of how her desire was expressed to God in prayer. When she began to pray in the Temple in Shiloh, she was so passionate and full of heart in her supplication that she was accused by the High Priest Eli to be drunk. She responded to him by saying, **"I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord"** (1 Samuel 1:15). What did Eli see that caused him to surmise that Hannah was drunk? She did not hold back in expressing herself to God. When there is strong desire behind the need, this is the kind of prayer that touches His heart. Has your need touched your heart as it did the widow? How can we expect to touch God's heart with our need if it has not touched our heart? A.W. Tozer once said, "When we become too glib in prayer we are almost certainly talking to ourselves."

What is your most urgent prayer need today? What one thing, more than any other, would you long for the Father to answer?

Jacob illustrated this kind of faith when he needed a breakthrough concerning his brother Esau's hatred of him. More than twenty years previously Jacob had managed to steal Isaac's blessing and birthright away from Esau. The blessing and birthright were supposed to go to the firstborn, who would have been Esau, but through deceptive means, Jacob stole the birthright and blessing from Esau. Now Esau was looking for revenge as Jacob was returning home to Canaan. With Esau on his way with 400 men to do him harm, Jacob cast himself on God, and an angel appeared in the form of a man and wrestled with Jacob all night:

²⁴So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip, and his hip was

⁶ E.M. Bounds, *The Classic Collection on Prayer*, Bridge-Logos Publishers, Page 44.□□

wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. ²⁸Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome" (Genesis 32:24-28).

Why should we have to struggle with God?

I don't believe that we are being told here that we need to twist God's arm behind his back, so to speak, to get Him to give us what we need. God is ready and willing to give, but some things do not come without some energy, passion, and persistence. Remember that God loves to see faith displayed and surely He is training us for eternity to exercise faith. Faith in God is power in the spiritual realm. Not faith in faith, which will bring us nothing. Faith has to be in the right source—God Himself. The struggle is often against unseen spiritual forces that seek to prevent our answers from coming. Paul, the apostle, wrote, **"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12).** In this passage about Jacob's struggle, it is clear that Jacob was not struggling with demonic forces, but he was struggling with a spiritual being which Scripture says was the Angel of the LORD—Jehovah Himself (Genesis 33:28, 30). It is interesting to note that the Angel of the Lord said that Jacob had struggled with God **and with men** (Verse 28). I take it to mean that Jacob's struggle was a spiritual struggle for God to overcome Esau's anger and hatred, otherwise, why would the Angel say that Jacob had struggled with men? Jacob's fighting with the Angel of the Lord was a physical struggle, but it was also symbolic of wrestling in prayer. There are many things we may have to struggle with while in prayer. What do we wrestle or struggle with when we pray?

We may have to struggle against our inner desires. Is what you are asking for in accordance with God's will as outlined in Scripture? Does your desire contradict any scriptural principle? We need to be honest to search our own heart. Does this mean all prayers must be self-less, or that we cannot ask for anything for our individual needs or desires? Absolutely not! Our Heavenly Father *longs* to give good gifts to His children. In His wisdom, however, He may withhold an answer to prayer because of our motive or because it may be that the thing we ask for would prove harmful to another or ourselves. Some things we may ask for are morally neutral, that is to say, they are things that are not harmful in themselves. For example, a person may need financial provision and pray for a financial blessing. If that person were given a significant amount of money, he or she could use it for good, or it could be a stumbling block if they chose to use it in the wrong way and did not have the spiritual maturity to handle the financial gift they were given. Our motives and desires are under our control, and we are responsible for them.□

We may also have to struggle with opposing forces, such as demonic influences. For example, when we pray for a loved one or a family member to come to faith and knowledge in the saving power of our Lord, Jesus Christ, we know that we are asking for something that is accordance with the Father's will. However, that person may be willingly giving himself or herself to a sin that is holding them in bondage to the enemy through disobedience. This type of stronghold is one example of a need to struggle and wrestle with God in prayer. Through prayer, we partner with God in bringing His will to pass on earth as it (already) is in heaven.

We may need to struggle with our own physical and emotional weakness. How tired Jacob must have been! Surely he must have been tempted to give up, but he chose to persevere, and God honored that. How close are we to the answer when we sometimes give up? We may never know. Don't let weariness or discouragements batter you emotionally so that you cave in instead of continuing in prayer. Choose to believe that *God wants* to answer you, and hold on as Jacob did until you see the answer.

When God wants to lead a person to great faith, He will sometimes test the person's faith by silence. The delay in His answer is orchestrated for our greater good and our training in patience and persistence, which will ultimately build greater trust. In such instances, His answer comes to us in His timing. A way that also builds qualities which are more priceless and enduring than the very thing which we are asking. We are called to persevere and prevail in prayer as Jacob did. Jacob's need was too critical for him to give up. He needed to see his brother united to him. He had to struggle with God over Esau's heart, and I'm sure, his soul too, for Jacob needed to have a heart change for what God had purposed in his life in the promised land of Canaan or Israel. His hip out of joint was symbolic of him no longer resting on his resources, but on God's power. He was brought to a new place in God through overcoming prayer and intercession. Prayer was his only recourse. God loves to see us dependent on Him. It is a great lesson to learn how to cast our all on God and depend on Him for our needs. The Father loves to see us exhibit persevering faith in Him.

In the early 1800s, here in America, a man by the name of John Derby heard of a gold strike on the west coast. He borrowed some money from some interested friends and staked a claim. He found a vein of Gold and mined it successfully. He had paid back his friends and covered his investment when the gold ran out. He decided to get out while the going was good. He sold the mine to a man who carried on digging where John Derby had left off and hit the biggest gold mine in the West. If only Derby had carried on and persisted just a little further, he would have obtained great riches! We don't know how many blessings we have missed because we have not persevered when the going gets tough.

When the going gets tough, do you give up or do you naturally persist?

“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. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened (Luke 11:9-10).

Jesus implores us to ask first of all, and then to add action to our asking by seeking, but also to add knocking, which speaks of persevering in our asking and seeking. Our English language does not give the Greek justice in this passage. The Greek text reads "keep on asking, and it will be given you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. He is carrying on this thought of persisting in prayer, trusting and believing that you will receive the very thing you are asking. What a promise this is! The Lord says that if we keep on asking, it will be given to us. He is faithful to His Word, and it is impossible for Him to lie to us (Hebrews 6:18). Do you genuinely believe that God the Father wants to answer you when you pray?□

C. H. Spurgeon once said, “Because God is the Living God, He *can* hear; because He is a loving God, He *will* hear; because He is our covenant God, He has *bound Himself* to hear.”

In closing, let's pray together for any prayer needs expressed earlier.

Prayer: Father, please help us not to give up but to persevere in prayer that we may receive gifts from your hand. Teach us to pray, and not grow weary. Strengthen us through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

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