

“Holy Impudence [OR] How To Pray”

(Luke 11:8)

Pastor Espinosa

Text (ESV): “I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.”

“I say to you, even if rising up he will not give to him because he is *a* friend, yet because of his shameless insisting, rising up he will give him as many as he needs.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. So there I was -- really not that long ago, about a decade ago -- having had so much experience and training in the faith and yet struggling. I went in to see my pastor with a heavy heart and I knew what I needed to confess: I was neglecting my prayer life. What a sad state of affairs: a man of faith, a man of prayer, coming to confess that he was not praying as he should. My pastor and I went into the sanctuary as was our typical practice, I kneeled and he knelt beside me. I confessed my sin. But behind my confession was unfortunately, an excuse. I was confessing that I was feeling as though my heart was not in it. I was confessing my lack of fervor; my lack of enthusiasm. Such a state of course is worthy of confession, but it is also not an *excuse* for not praying.

My pastor heard my confession and was faithful in pouring out the gospel to forgive my sin, but he was also good about reminding me: “It is one thing to confess a complacent heart, but let us not use this as an excuse: we pray not because we feel like it, but we pray because God commands us to pray, come rain or shine; come feeling great or feeling low. Keep the Word before you brother. Pray because God calls you to pray. Don’t permit your life of prayer to depend on your mood or feeling. Pray because God commands it.” [a paraphrase of the substance of the Rev. Dr. Scott Murray’s counsel]

That is, this pastor knew the proper use of the law. Yes, God’s command convicts us. That is what the law does. It shows us our sin, but God’s law is also there to teach the one who has been forgiven. It guides us and because we still have our sin hanging around our necks, we need its guidance.

It’s embarrassing to admit it, but even though prayer is such a basic thing in the faith, we really struggle with it. Why? For many reasons: one, because we are just *lazy*. The disciples couldn’t keep their eyes open when our Lord was praying on the night He was going to be betrayed. The diagnosis was clear: “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41).” We can have the best of intentions, but our flesh is so weak that we actually fight against praying. There is this part of us that does not *want* to pray. Sometimes we express this as *skeptics*: “Why bother? God already knows what is going to happen!” Other times we express

our *resentment*: “When I prayed for [such and such once upon a time] God didn’t come through, so why should I pray now?” Still in other situations we convince ourselves that we are *unworthy*: “My faith is so weak, why would God even bother listening to me?!” These are all of our sad and immature excuses. We convince ourselves that these are compelling reasons not to pray, but we only deceive ourselves. We think we have good excuses, but we’re only hurting ourselves.

For the record, let’s offer a quick apologetic to the excuses already mentioned:

1. “Why bother? God already knows.” Answer: this is a colossal blunder that makes a false assumption, namely, that prayer is for God’s benefit. Wrong! Prayer is for *our* benefit. Of course God already knows, but prayer exercises faith. Prayer leads us to hold to God’s perfect will for us which exercises what faith does.
2. “But God didn’t answer my prayer before.” Answer: who says He didn’t? The truth which we conveniently forget is that while God *always* answers the prayer coming from the one who trusts in the Lord, He does not, however, always answer as we believe He should.

“But you don’t understand pastor. Things could not have turned out any worse than they did! How can anyone say that this was for good?!” But we don’t know this; we can’t know this. The fault is not God’s; the fault is that we refuse His answer because secretly we believe that we know better than He does. We forget for example what happens when a child of God dies. We assume that the worse thing is that they’ve lost their life on earth. We forget the glory that is given to the child of God. We choose not to contemplate the glorious resurrection that is yet to come. Death is not the worst thing that can happen to a child of God. Why do we so often act like it is? And why do we hold this against God when it is our sin that brings death? And yet we hold to our excuses not to pray.

3. “My faith is too weak.” Answer: But prayer does not rest on the size or power of our faith. Prayer is effective on account of the One to Whom faith clings. Prayer is effective on account of Jesus. And even if your faith is the size of a mustard seed, yet because you hold to Jesus, your prayer is as powerful as any other saint. When you have Christ – and you do – then your prayer is as powerful as the prayer of St. Paul or St. Peter. If you have faith in Christ, then Christ makes your prayer efficacious, not your level of sincerity, not the right combination of your words, nor how many tears you shed, etc. Jesus is key. If you have Jesus – and you baptized child of God *do* – then your prayer is answered and always for good.

But at the end of the day, even when we resolve to pray more fervently, we easily approach prayer in the wrong way. We pray tentatively. We pray like we’re tiptoeing around

God. We pray shyly, bashfully, hesitantly. We can speak to a person very boldly, but then mumble in the presence of God. We are missing something.

You've heard the saying, "The squeaky wheel gets the oil." We are being invited here in our gospel from Luke 11 to be squeaky wheels; to practice sanctified boldness; holy insistence; and with an attitude that says, "I'm not letting anything hold me back!" This gospel does not mean that we should be irreverent or disrespectful towards the Lord. Of course not, but we should care less about our doubts and hesitations; we should throw these to the wind. This gospel account uses a word that is not otherwise found in the New Testament: "impudence, or shamelessness." This kind of prayer – the prayer of the "friend" coming at midnight – is shameless. It doesn't worry about inconveniences. It is laser-like and focused: (1) I have a great need; (2) I know who to ask; (3) So I will ask boldly without backing down; and (4) I know that He will answer. This is the prayer of someone without hesitation; without doubt. It is a description of Jacob who wrestled with God and would not let God go until he was blessed (Genesis 32:26). This is prayer. It is warrior-like.

But from where does such persistence, boldness, and shamelessness in prayer come from? It comes from the Holy Spirit working through the Word against our sin; and against our silly excuses! We easily forget that God knows exactly how desperate we really are, so He gives us the basis for shameless prayer:

"Mankind is in such a situation that no one can keep the Ten Commandments perfectly, even though he has begun to believe. Besides, the devil, along with the world and our flesh, resists our efforts with all his power. ***Consequently nothing is so necessary as to call upon God incessantly and drum into his ears our prayer that he may give, preserve, and increase in us faith and obedience to the Ten Commandments and remove all that stands in our way and hinders us from fulfilling them.*** That we may know what and how to pray, our Lord Christ himself has taught us both the way and the words, as we shall see." [emphasis mine] (Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord*, Large Catechism, Third Part. 420)

I love this quotation from our Confessions! Did you hear that part about "drum into his ears"? Here it is again: ***Consequently nothing is so necessary as to call upon God incessantly and drum into his ears our prayer that he may give, preserve, and increase in us faith and obedience to the Ten Commandments and remove all that stands in our way and hinders us from fulfilling them.*** [emphasis mine]

So we learn a mature view about prayer:

- (1) We do it because God commands it. Who cares about how we feel?!
- (2) We do it because God has attached glorious promises to it: to bless us for good!

- (3) We do it because God Himself (esp. in The Lord's Prayer recorded here in Luke 11 and in Matthew 6) has given us the very words to pray. Now no one can say, "I don't know what to say." When this prayer is used, the best prayer is used! It is yours now Christian!
- (4) We do it on account of our great need! Which great need by the way means that we may also pray from our hearts:

"We must feel our need, the distress that impels and drives us to cry out. Then prayer will come spontaneously, as it should, and we shall not need to be taught how to prepare for it or how to generate devotion...This we must know, that all our safety and protection consist in prayer alone. We are far too weak to cope with the devil and all his might and his forces arrayed against us, trying to trample us under foot. Therefore we must carefully select the weapons with which Christians ought to arm themselves in order to stand against the devil...But by prayer alone we shall be a match for [our enemies] and for the devil." (Tappert, 423-424)

With such an understanding about prayer, we are equipped to pray like the guy in the parable. Interestingly, Jesus teaches this invaluable parable on account of the "shameless" prayer of the disciple in verse one. The event is remarkable: a man – only a man, a sinner – doesn't just make any request, but his request is worded as a command to the Son of God (talk about a confident and bold spirit!): "Lord, [I command you] teach us to pray!"

In this spirit Jesus tells about the guy in the parable. The story does not take place necessarily at "midnight," but "in the dead of the night." The friend he visits is fast asleep in bed. Talk about bold! The cultural context isn't explained in the text, but the audience was aware: among the Jews one person never provided hospitality without the village acting together (Just, *Concordia Commentary: Luke 9:51-24:53*. 470). It would have been shameful if the sleeping friend had turned the other friend away. He was practically obligated. But so is the Lord. He has promised us grace; He has promised us mercy in His Son; He has committed to being our God of love. He's obligated Himself. We have His Word on it. So the parable really *is* quite applicable. God has in effect – as far as you are concerned – painted Himself into a corner of grace and mercy.

When I was a teenager, my dad's philosophy was that during the school year we could not work a part-time job. School *was* our "job". That's just the way it was. So I didn't have any money. I was dependent on what my dad gave me. But there were times – even as a teenager – that I knew I could just "drum into his ears" my requests. When I did, most of the time (not all of the time) -- but most of the time -- he granted my requests, and when he didn't it was for a good reason and most certainly for my good (at least in his sincere way of thinking).

Our Lord makes a similar point: "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?" (Luke

11:11-12). Meaningful comparisons by the way, as some fish could appear as a snake and the coiled white scorpion certainly from a distance appeared as an egg. But the point of comparison that the Lord made was: "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!" (Luke 11:13)

Jesus just gets to the greatest possible gift: the Holy Spirit. God's gift for a living faith! God's gift to us given in our baptism into Jesus so that we may now know -- among other things -- the real scoop about prayer: that our Heavenly Father really does have our best interests in mind even when we don't understand what is permitted to happen. But He does, because He is omnipotently kind; and He is utterly trustworthy and will never break His promises to bless us (even through trials). And even more, we know we can be bold, because Jesus was already bold for you and me.

He prayed for us, went to the cross for us, shed His blood for us, gave His life for us, paid for the debt of our sin, removed our curse; conquered our death. And in glory, continues to pray for us. This is the Savior we have...so yes, we may pray boldly to Him...shamelessly, as if all of our sin were gone and in His eyes -- and as far as He is concerned -- it is. So equipped with the Holy Spirit who even prays for you, resting on God's mercy and kindness; knowing His complete trustworthiness, and trusting in why this is all guaranteed: on account of Jesus...pray away; be warrior-like, be like Jacob and grab hold of your Heavenly Father, come even in the dead of night; don't worry about waking God up from a deep sleep, because He is always ready to receive your prayer; and pray with persistence: ASK and do not stop ASKING, SEEK and do not stop SEEKING, KNOCK and do not cease KNOCKING, because Jesus has opened the kingdom of God for you. He asked, He sought, He knocked for you: "Father forgive them (Luke 23:34)." The prayer was answered, so pray, pray with boldness; pray with persistence! Pray. It's not for wimps, but for warriors; for those who know the greatest "shamelessness": "The Lord will hear, the Lord will answer, and the Lord shall bless me!"