

From the Honest Prayer Series

MOTIVATION FOR  
HONEST PRAYER:  
PART II—ITS IMPORTUNITIES  
PREFACE

It was some years ago that first I discovered the prayer truth in this precious Scripture of our Lord's teaching. Only after praying for years for a certain thing, and only after repeated attempts at fulfilling that certain thing, did I finally settle for God's best from Him that did not include that certain thing. If only I had known the realities of this blessed and so helpful divine truth in this teaching from Jesus, much sorrow and pain would have been avoided.

Therefore, we send out this important and essential study on motivation for honest prayer with the assurance that its truth will correct and comfort those of Jesus' disciples who need this instruction on honest prayer. May He bless this effort to His glory!

We must from the very nature of our appreciation and respect, take renewed notice of the help from Mrs. Norma Calvert in finalizing this published study. Some years ago she proofread our initial publishing draft. Her dedication and time spent has gone unused until this present publishing, when now we are using her proficient corrections and suggestions to our exposition. We thank her and her Savior for that long ago work "just" now used.

## MOTIVATION FOR HONEST PRAYER: PART II—PRAYER'S IMPORTUNITIES

<sup>5</sup>And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;

<sup>6</sup>For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?

<sup>7</sup>And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.

<sup>8</sup>I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

<sup>9</sup>And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

<sup>10</sup>For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

<sup>11</sup>If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?

<sup>12</sup>Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

<sup>13</sup>If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Luke 11:5-13 KJV

Jesus is in the midst of answering the question of a disciple found in verse 1, *Lord, begin to teach us to be praying.* Part I—Opportunity for Prayer constituted the first portion of His answer; He disclosed several

opportunities for prayer, which were meant to answer a disciple's quest to learn to practice prayer as a daily part of his life. Jesus now adds importunity to opportunities for prayer as also a motivation for more prayer. Jesus encourages continuous prayer, even in areas not fully covered or provided for in His list of opportunities just given in verses two through four. One's continuous habit of prayer is the main thrust of Jesus' answer found in our Scripture text for this section, *Luke 11:5-13*. Christ seeks to impress upon us that continuous prayer will be rewarded, and through that promise of finding what we seek in prayer and having opened to us on what door of prayer we knock, He intends for us to be induced to more constancy in prayer.

### **Specifics and Speculations in Prayer**

Christ answered this disciple's desire to learn to pray more, first by giving the specifics of prayer in *verses 2-4*. He dealt with *asking and receiving*. In those definite and well-defined areas we are to pray regularly and have from God those requests. They are opportunities for prayer. Christ named several explicit prayers that shall always be answered by God with an affirmative. These are promises that are more or less guaranteed by Christ, that is, when we pray according to His instructions found elsewhere in the Scriptures. When prayed in sincerity, and when prayed in keeping with the fundamentals of an abiding relationship with Him, those specific requests will be granted. *He that asketh receiveth*.

But now Jesus moves to prayer that is not *asking* according to specifics, but is *seeking* to *find* and is *knocking* to have *opened*; this is an altogether different sphere of prayer. There arise in the lives of men various circumstances of Providence, which bring God's children to ask for things not covered in Christ's list of opportunities in *verses 2-4*. One can imagine all kinds of numerous requests for help from God that are not in that list of our opportunities. They might fall under their broad categories, but they are not really in the list of things that we are promised when we pray. For example, Christ has promised to *give us day by day our daily bread* when we ask. Now we know that our employment fits broadly under that category. Our jobs are the means for God to supply us with our daily bread. But what of a change in employment? When confronted with an opportunity to change jobs, when challenged with two jobs to choose between, should we ask God for this one or that one? Or perhaps by way of another example, what about one's desire to serve God as a missionary. One wants to go to Africa, but finds it very difficult to raise support for such a work, or discovers that the Mission Board has no present need. Therefore, he begins to pray and *seek* from God, "Lord, send me to Africa; open a door." Where is the promise concerning this in the list of opportunities for prayer in *verses 2-4*? One might answer back, "Well, it is in the area of *Thy kingdom come*, that is, of service. Surely God will answer affirmatively that request." But has God really promised specifically to say "Yes"

to every such request to serve Him? What if it is not God's will to send this would-be missionary to Africa, but to India? Many similarly ask God for much and never receive what they ask for. Why not? Does He not promise, *Ask and ye shall receive*? But that "asking" applies only to specific requests. There are areas of speculation in many of our prayers because we have no specific Word from God on them. We surmise a thing as being good. It appears to be good to us. From our vantage point it is proper for God to grant a particular request, but it receives a definite "No!" from Him. He never grants it. Why? Jesus anticipates these kinds of difficulties in prayer, as well as the possible discouragement to continue in prayer that they might cause; therefore He provides us the answers to these kinds of difficulties about prayer in our text, *Luke 11:5-13*.

**First**, Jesus deals with prayers that *seek to find* what is not fully known as God's will (*verses 5-10*). **Second**, He takes up prayers that *knock* to have doors opened that have no promise from God upon them (*verses 11-13*).<sup>1</sup> In both cases—either *seeking to find* or *knocking to have opened*—the Holy Spirit<sup>2</sup> is the key to understanding the Lord's answer for the aforementioned difficulties about prayer.

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<sup>1</sup> A review of the analysis of these verses in Part I—Opportunity in Prayer, *Analysis of the Text*, pp. 6 ff. might prove helpful.

<sup>2</sup> As the Holy Spirit is the ultimate goal and supreme answer to prayer, *v. 13*.

## Guarding Against Discouragement in Prayer

Since Jesus is seeking to motivate us to be more in prayer, He anticipates our possible discouragement because of the “No” or “Wait” that we sometime receive. A “No” and a “Wait” are a real part of the prayer experience. Therefore, He will teach us that every “No” is really a “Yes,” and that prayer will result always—whether a yes or no is received for our specific request—in the very best affirmative action possible by God.<sup>3</sup> Jesus is providing a baffle against discouragement by showing us that prayer always is answered affirmatively,<sup>4</sup> if and as we really continue in prayer. A continuance in prayer is the key. Jesus now illustrates this kind of continuous prayer to God, calling it importunity in prayer. Whereas Christ had just given our opportunities in prayer in *verses 2-4*, now He gives to us our importunities in prayer in *verses 5-13*; and Jesus shows how God will handle all requests from His children, even those prayers that are not respectful of His ways and will.

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<sup>3</sup> Cp. Paul's same word of affirmative approval as relates to all matters, prayer or otherwise in *II Cor. 1:20*, *For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us*. Every action, or what seems to us sometimes to be inaction, by God is really a *Yes* and an *Amen* for our best good and for others' best good and for His best good.

<sup>4</sup> See this truth expounded in our free publication, Honest Prayer to the Honest God, pp. 21-25.

To explain and to follow Jesus' own rationale concerning this kind of importunate prayer, we shall examine *Luke 11:5-13* directed by the following stimulating and unfailing truths:

**First**, Importunate Prayer Oftentimes Seems to be

Required by Circumstances, verses 5-8.

**Second**, Importunate Prayer is Sometimes

Revised by Continuance, verses 9-10.

**Third**, Importunate Prayer is Consistently

Rewarded with Care, verses 11-12.

**Fourth**, Importunate Prayer is Divinely

Rewarded with Communion, verse 13.

## I. FIRST, IMPORTUNATE PRAYER OFTENTIMES SEEMS TO BE REQUIRED BY CIRCUMSTANCES

<sup>5</sup>*And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;*

<sup>6</sup>*For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?*

<sup>7</sup>*And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.*

<sup>8</sup>*I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.* [Added emph.] *Luke 11:5-8*

### What is Importunity?

Jesus introduced importunity in prayer through a parabolic illustration of it, and in His explanation of the parable in *verse 8*, *Yet, because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth*. His subsequent teaching through the remainder of our text to *verse 13*, is meant to motivate us to continue always in prayer by explaining and clarifying this kind of importunate prayer in which all Christians take part. The word, importunity, is taken from the common word for “modesty, reverence,” but it has the negating alpha privative prefixed, giving it the opposite meaning of “no modesty, no reverence.” Jesus’ illustration



concerns actual “impudence” in prayer. We might render this Greek word as “irreverence” in the use of it by Jesus in *verse 8*. Our prayers are sometimes really “irreverent” toward God as far as His eternal purpose and eternal love are concerned. Therefore, the word, “importunity,” is a very bad word; by that I mean, it connotes a bad attitude, a thoughtlessness, which ideally should never characterize any approach to God. But because of our circumstances and limitations, Jesus sanctions even importunate prayer, lest we not pray at all, and lest we not *find* or not have *opened* the door of God’s help at all. Our sinful and ignorant state hampers our approach to God in prayer; it is not always strictly correct. We fail consistently to understand God’s ways and will in many matters spiritual and physical; and we do not always honor God’s will and purpose in our prayers. That is importunity in prayer.

### **Importunate Prayers and Motivation to More Prayer**

Importunate prayer does not understand what God’s will is in the specific area of a particular prayer or prayers. It is prayer that may, even though it seems to be good to us, be irreverently and thoughtlessly and immodestly prayed, because it disturbs God’s set plans for others or for us. Jesus is teaching us that even that kind of prayer is likely to be prayed by “one and all” Christians at one time or another. We must not become discouraged against praying for what our circumstances seem to dictate must be prayed, even though we might be considered immodest and

irreverent and impudent when viewed from God's eternal scheme of things. The danger of our prayers being out of sorts with God's perfect will is not a detriment to prayer, but it is an encouragement to prayer, according to the teaching of Jesus in our text. Jesus' teaching to us is this: If we will take care of the praying, then God will take care of all the rest. We are to let God move Himself to fit our praying, or move our praying to fit His will; if we continue in prayer for a thing, one or the other will occur. Jesus' word on importunate prayer guarantees it.

### Contrasts in this Parabolic Illustration

This parable is one of contrast. If the friend in bed represents God in the story (he does not, but the overall teaching of the parable contrasts the ways of God.) then one would have God sometimes slumbering, lacking understanding, having to be persuaded by argument, taken by surprise, taking from the comfort of His other children (those already asleep in the story) in order to help other of His children, and on and on and on would the ridiculous pictures go. No! The parabolic illustration is just that, an earthly illustration which is meant to contrast the ways of God with the actions of the persons in the story. God never troubles unnecessarily one of His children in order to help another. He does not have to do that ever. He might choose to trouble one in order to help another if the trouble for the one would end up correcting and helping him. But since God controls everything to benefit each of His children to the maximum, He never is "forced" to do

anything. The friend in bed did not at first care enough for his friend who called at midnight even to help him. God is not like that. He cares always for His children and responds just because He, unlike the friend in bed, is always willing and ready to help us—His children—because He is our true friend; and that friendship is why He always is ready to answer our honest prayers.

### Concerns for Others Lead to Importunate Prayer

This parabolic illustration shows how God understands our limitations in prayer. Obviously, we do not see all that God sees, and because of our rather limited vision of the eternal, God allows us a certain latitude in our prayers, which at times may even border on disrespect and disregard for His plan and purpose. In this parable Jesus tells the story of a man who is visited unexpectedly by a friend very late at night. The friend has been on a long journey, perhaps traveling all day until midnight, and needs something to eat. Since his arrival was unexpected, the host has no bread prepared for the late-night meal. Therefore, he goes next door to his neighbor-friend at that late hour and knocks at his door. His neighbor-friend is already in bed, has bolted the door, the children are finally at rest and would be disturbed if he rises; therefore he speaks from his bed through the closed door, "You are too much trouble. Wait until morning; I cannot rise and give it to you now." But the man continues seeking and knocking at his door. He does not have to say anything more but just stood

outside the door and continued knocking. The neighbor-friend inside realized that this might go on indefinitely; therefore he arose and gave to him the three loaves, not because of his friendship, but because of his *importunity*—irreverence, immodesty, impudence (*verse 8*). What made the request effectual and successful? It was his thoughtlessness, his impudence, his disregard of the time, place, and persons involved that brought to him his desired request. What does this teach us concerning our own prayers which may be just as thoughtless of God, just as impudent and irreverent of His will, plan, and purpose? It was the concern (love) which the importunate seeker had for his needful friend that made the difference in this illustration of importunate prayer.

God allows from us the same kind of rude and thoughtless disregard for His sensitivities and for His eternal program, and even encourages these kinds of prayers from us. We cannot see His elect nor His Providential Government agenda.<sup>5</sup> We know neither the bounds nor the schedule of His provisions for His own people. For these reasons God encourages us to pray for the good of others. That is the only gauge for

<sup>5</sup> *Deuteronomy 29:29, The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, thus are we limited in always knowing His will and plan that is happening right around us. But this verse continues, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law, which law (Word) contains the parameters of our responsibility in works, in attitudes, and in our prayers.*

a proper estimation of the value of any prayer. Assuredly, it would be great if we all could pray in perfect accord with the will of God. And there is great value in and great rewards accompanying that kind of praying. Jesus gave us certain guidelines for that very reason in *verses 2-4*, and elsewhere in Scripture, just to assist us in praying in the will of God. But we are down here, and we see not the infinite, but only the finite. We see not the overall picture from the heavens, but only see the immediate world around us. We see the hurting, the crying, our neighbor-friends' needs for *three loaves at midnight*, so to speak. Jesus says to go ahead and pray for those things as we see need. We are even to be immodest and impudent and attempt to force God through prayer to give what we desire and what we have determined would be good and needful for Him to grant.

Human need may be the only criteria that we have for much of our prayers. We shall not be reproved for praying immodestly or even irreverently as far as God's great program is concerned, if the prayers we take to heaven's throne are for others' needs as we honestly see them. We can pray for mercy for the hurting, for grace for the undeserving, and for love gifts for the unloving. God's will for us is to be asking for those needs that arise, to be seeking for those things required, and to be knocking at His door of provision when confronted with the needs of others. Christ would rather have us swept up in the

quest to help someone else without regard for God's plans or program than to hesitate "lest we offend God with a request too brash, too bold, or too insensitive of His eternal will and program." We do not need to know God's eternal plan or eschatological timetable or governmental counsels. All we need to know is our neighbor-friends' needs, and that we may *trouble* God at any and at all times with honest prayer for honest needs.

### **Propriety in Prayer**

But on the other hand, God should be approached in reverence always and with regard for His will and way and Word when possible. All prayers should be appropriate and in general conformity with what is proper and fitting for God to grant. The parabolic illustration contrasts what ought to be modest regard with what is a flagrant disregard for God's best for His other children. We should never approach God in prayer asking from Him what we know will only bring discomfort and disarray to other of His children, as brought upon the man asleep and his children in the parable. In that story the importunate seeker humiliated the one friend by placing the priorities of another of his friends ahead of the other. We are never to do that with God. We should never wholly disregard God's dignity for the benefit of any man, even for our most beloved family or friends. The picture in Christ's illustration is of our annoying, or having

an inclination to spite, God in order to help man. While we may do this in prayer, it should not purposely be done as in the parable. God's ways are not to be knowingly or purposely disregarded in our prayer lives. But this parable teaches that when we are intensely caught up in helping others, loving others, serving others, that even irreverent and flagrant disregard of God's comfort—His plan, purpose, and program—is a part of our prayers, then that prayer *seeks* and *finds*, *knocks* and *is opened*.

Christ's teaching by way of contrast would direct our praying to be always decent, seemly, decorous, and proper as far as we understand the will and way and Word of God. We must ever regard God's ways and will as higher than ours, for indeed they are. Christian's prayers are to conform to the accepted standard of what is right or fitting as is regarded from good motives. True prayer seeks observance of the proprieties and keeps within the bounds of what is appropriate or fitting to a son's relation to his Father. Our prayers of seeking something of our Father God are to be only of good taste, and not just from the immediate urgencies of any given situation. It is foolishness to demand of God what is not reasonable, no matter what the situation. It may not be immediately possible to discern what is up to His perfect ethical standards when we ask of God in prayer; therefore a *Thy will be done* is always in order in such cases.

### Choices in the Parabolic Illustration

Another great truth concerning choices is presented in Jesus' parabolic illustration. The man who did the *asking, seeking, and knocking* at the door of his one friend had another friend. Actually, he made a choice between the two friends. The one friend came to his home at midnight, tired and hungry, needing refreshment. The other friend was in bed, locked up for the night, also needing refreshment. He had a choice to make: let the one friend remain hungry until morning or until bread could be made—possibly about three hours—or disturb his other friend who was already in bed, possibly asleep already. Which friend should he have inconvenienced? He chose according to the cultural custom of his day. In the East a guest in one's home receives priority in any question of comfort. The Bible has examples of the Eastern extremes of this kind of priority; therefore we should expect that this story of real life in an Eastern culture would have the choice made as Jesus told it. But given all that, still Jesus means to illustrate the occasional inconsistencies of our requests in prayer for others and with God's dealing with them. The friend in bed made a choice to allow himself to be inconvenienced rather than to leave his neighbor's other friend to remain hungry. That is often the way of importunate prayer to God. God has ten thousand times ten thousand requests which all intermingle with each other. Some



pull against the other. If He should answer one worthy request exactly as requested, then its ripple effect would bring disaster down the line to another of His dear children who is *asleep at midnight* so to speak. God must make choices when these kinds of importunate prayer come before Him.

### Another Parable

Several years ago a major corporation advertised a very good job opening which required special skills and education. The ads appeared nationwide seeking the best and most qualified man for the position. There were five men in the United States who did meet very well the qualifications required for the job. Two of the five were Christians, both needing employment, and both praying regularly and fervently for jobs. They both saw the same ad in different cities, and both applied for the same job. Notice God's position. He hears the *asking, seeking, and knocking* at His door at midnight, so to speak. "Lord, give me this job, because my family needs this. Amen and Amen!" And He hears this from both of His beloved children. Obviously, He cannot immediately say "Yes" to both. God will make a choice. He will give the job to only one, or perhaps to neither, but He cannot answer these two prayers exactly as these two Christians have *asked, sought, and knocked*. This is why Jesus gave the parable and its subsequent teaching in *verses 9-13* of our text.

These verses show to us God's way of handling such a circumstance as just described. The illustration of the two jobs, and indeed, the two friends in the parable, are over-simplifications to be sure. God's prayer requests intermingle ten thousand times ten thousand more conjointly than either the parabolic illustration or our illustration of the two jobs. The ripple effect and the causal compounds of every action among men are multiplied millions more difficult than the simple choice between two simple requests. But to be sure, all the functional workings of prayer and their final issue fit into God's daily Providence and eternal plan. That is why Christ teaches us to continue *asking, seeking, and knocking* in prayer.

## II. IMPORTUNATE PRAYER IS SOMETIMES REVISED BY CONTINUANCE

*And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

*For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*  
*Luke 11:9-10*

The *And* which begins *verse 9* is signally important. It connects these two central verses on prayer to the immediately preceding illustration. This *asking, seeking, and knocking* in prayer has just been illustrated for us in the importunate asker, seeker, and knocker in Christ's parable.

### Real Importunity

First of all, it must be noted that the *ask*, the *seek*, and the *knock*, of *verse 9*, and the *asketh*, the *seeketh*, and the *knocketh* of *verse 10* are all in the continuous present tense in the original manuscripts. The main thought overall is the continuous *asking*, the continuous *seeking*, and the continuous *knocking* without letting up and without restraint. Jesus is emphasizing prayer that is perpetual and never-ending. It is a never slacking, and even an importunate, *asking, seeking, knocking* which insists its own way before God, at least in its beginnings. That was the picture presented in the parable also.

## The Progressive Element of Ceaseless Honest Prayer

Furthermore, there is a progressive element in the three varieties of prayer here given by Jesus. It goes from asking which is the statement of our requests, to seeking which is our wrestling with God and our constant efforts to get close to God in our *asking*, to knocking which may be our importunate disregard for God's comfort or rationale—i.e. God's eternal counsel, will, plan, and program—in our *asking* and *seeking*.

The promises of *verse 10* are progressive. **First**, one *asks* and simply *receives*. **Second**, one *seeks* and *finds*. **Third**, one *knocks* and has it *opened* unto him. **First**, the reception for *asking* is a passive act of having it handed to you. **Second**, the *finding* is the pleasure of discovery and excited surprise in His personal and present response. **Third**, the *opening* of the door is the freedom and unrestrained access to the favors and treasures of God's storehouse. Again, note the progression: first, it is only things that we *ask* for and *receive*. But secondly, constancy in prayer moves the petitioner up higher, because it is God Himself that we *seek* and discover in prayer. Until thirdly, at the highest point of prayer, it is God's richest treasures in Himself and of Himself that are behind that prayer *door*, but are unreservedly opened up to us as we *knock* in prayer. Those are the successive promises

associated with constancy in prayer which motivate Christians to more and more prayer.

### The Progressive Maturation of Prayer

This importunate prayer is the constant casting ourselves before His throne without regard for His other considerations no matter how important or profound they might be. Yet these verses assure our having His door of blessings opened in the end. **First**, Christ is encouraging us to be *asking* for what He promises is ours; this we will *receive*. **Second**, we are to move up from *asking* for what is literally promised to *seeking* out God personally and drawing close to Him in obedience—perhaps fasting—with His personal holiness in mind and care for His close Presence; this (Him) we will *find*. **Third**, we can move up to *knocking* at His prayer door with requests that may have mostly human need in view, but will have become infected with the promises of His Word (*asking*), and influenced with the contagion of His presence sought (*seeking*), finally to be found at His door, awaiting His response (*knocking*). This ideal in prayer may begin without regard to what might be inconsistent with God's eternal considerations, but through this continuing progression, entrance is made into God's innermost loving will. God would have us pray to Him for what we consider human needs that can only have a supernatural fulfillment, and let Him take care of the rest. Constancy in prayer—*asking and receiving, seeking and finding*, and

*knocking and having it opened unto you*—changes the petitioner and thus his praying. The *asking* from His Word, and the *seeking* in His Presence, will in the end find us *knocking* at His opening divine door of heavenly and spiritual delights, namely, His perfect will (*it shall be opened unto you*). God never opens any door outside His marvelously beautiful will.

We are to be continuously *asking* God, *seeking* God, and *knocking* at God's door of stored reserves of Himself. It is He that we *ask* for, *seek* after, and *knock* at to open. This is a blessed motivation to pray above all other motivations for prayer, namely, the reward that is the Presence of God Himself.

### The Value of Continuous Importunity

Jesus' language draws attention again and again to the continuous nature of true prayer. In the parabolic illustration, the friend continued to *ask*, *seek*, and *knock* at the friend's door. In the verses following it was an *asking*, *seeking*, *knocking* continuously in a constant present tense. He who continues *asking*, continues *seeking*, continues *knocking* will be continuously *receiving*, continuously *finding*, and continuously having it *opened* unto him. Christ means to make clear that the real value of importunity is the continuousness of it. To be purposely immodest or irreverent toward God in prayer will never really profit. All prayer must be in God's will to be answered affirmatively. If our prayers are in total disregard of God's purposes they will not

be answered precisely as we have prayed them. This we touched on under the previous point. But more is involved. Here is a person who begins praying for a certain thing that is entirely out of the realm of possibility for God to grant and yet remain righteous. But to the one praying it seems good. Jesus promised even for that person if he keeps on *asking* God, keeps on *seeking* God, and keeps on *knocking* at—contacting and touching—God with his request, he will *receive* God, eventually *find* God, and have God *opened* up to him continuously as well. That will have changed his praying.

This is an aspect of real prayer that is most important. What Christ says is that the reception of God, the finding of God, the opening up of God to one in prayer will gain the prayer. Over a protracted period, through continuously receiving, finding, touching God Himself through prayer, the prayer will have been slowly changed by that same continuous reception, finding, and contact with God. God will change the prayer from what was first prayed into what God will finally grant. This is the promise made for continued importunity. The constant contact with God in prayer will change the prayer to fit God and will not in the end be at all what the seeker first thought was good. Thus, the guarantee of affirmatively answered prayer is possible because continuous contact with God assures a God-oriented prayer, which will be in accord with what

is eternally good. What was first prayed for was perhaps a *stone*, a *serpent*, or a *scorpion*; but what was finally granted was *bread*, *fish*, or *eggs*. We will have changed our prayers because of the influence of a continuously received, found, and touched God through prayer. That is, all who *asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened*, only because we have continuously prayed in the Presence of a God Who changes all who regularly and continuously attend His Presence.

In my own life there have been prayers that I have prayed for years. I have asked God, sought God, and touched God with these requests. Yet some of my requests have changed over the years from what they were originally. Slowly, God granted my prayers by changing my prayers and me into what He desired in the first place. What He desired was good. What I began asking years ago was evil, though at first it appeared to me to have been good for His glory and for me. But through continued contact with God on these very issues, God changed my thinking into His thinking. Finally, in the end I received what I was asking for; I found what I was seeking; I had opened to me that door at which I was knocking. Through continued prayer, I received the finest gift, I made the greatest find, I had opened to me the most cherished door—God Himself and His perfect and loving will. Amen.



### III. IMPORTUNATE PRAYER IS REWARDED WITH CARE

*If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?*

*Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?*  
*Luke 11:11-12*

Again these verses begin with the small but important conjunction, *and*. Though not in the King James Version, it is in the Greek, and appears in the American Standard Version, *And*. This *And* connects these verses with the preceding importunate prayer which is promised affirmative reward in *verses 9-10*. Christ has promised in *verses 9-10* that every one who continuously is *asking* God, *seeking* God, and *impacting* God (*knocking*), will continuously *receive*, *find*, and have *opened* to him what is prayed. Through the constancy of the importunate prayers God will adjust and correct our prayers as we draw closer and closer to Him through prayer. Over the course of time, while praying importunately, God will amend those prayers that were in error with His ways into what will be His exquisite delight to grant. But now with these two verses Christ explains and conditions this whole concept of answered importunate and immodest prayer with certain limitations.

These two verses show to us why God must change our prayer in the very process of our praying as related in *verses 9-10*. Jesus uses three illustrations that have to do with a child's requests to his father. Christ is saying that our requests are somewhat similar to these three illustrations when we pray to our heavenly Father. Also he used three different items of food, which resemble certain dangerous creatures and objects that would prove hazardous to any child. There is *bread* asked for and a *stone*. There is *fish* sought and a *serpent*. There is an *egg* desired and a *scorpion*. The *stone* resembles a loaf of *bread* as it was baked in those days. The *fish* referenced is similar in appearance to the type of *serpent* suggested. And an *egg* is close in appearance to the certain kind of *scorpion* when its tail is curled up under its off-white shell. Jesus is saying that God grants nothing that would harm His children, continued importunate prayer notwithstanding. He uses these resembling things to stress the difficulty His children sometimes have in determining what to ask for in prayer. God promises that we shall *receive*, *find*, and have *opened* to us what we pray for, but only in accord with what is best for us, namely, only what the filial love of our heavenly Father wills.

We children of God are as our own little children. Many small children might ask for a *rock*, thinking it to be *bread* because of its similarity in appearance. Or the child might seek to have a *serpent*, thinking it a *fish*, or might reach out to get an *egg* only to be bitten

by a resembling deadly *scorpion*. In all three cases, a *stone* eaten, a *serpent* possessed, or a *scorpion* held, great danger would come to a child under those circumstances. Earthly parents watch out for their children. They do not give them hurtful things even when they *ask, seek, and apply* for them. Our children, through their weakness of understanding, may ask for what is really evil for them. We will not gratify their ignorance by giving them what they ask for if it would harm them. Likewise, neither will our heavenly Father give to us what is not suitable for us. He knows what we truly need and what is truly good for us. When we ask for what is *bread, fish, or an egg*, we can be sure to receive those sorts of good gifts of kindness from our heavenly Father. If, however, we in prayer ask any particular thing of God that may seem to be good and we receive it not, we may be assured that it was evil for us. What is good and profitable to us or to someone else under different circumstances might be evil for us in our present condition and place in life. We may conclude that such requests that do not result in our receiving them were only what we thought were good. We had asked for a *stone, or a serpent, or a scorpion*, while we thought we were asking for *bread, fish, and eggs*. The truth is that God answered our general desires for some good by denying our specific request. We *asked* God and *received* from God. We *sought* from God and *found* God. We touched and *contacted* God and He was *opened* up unto us.

Our heavenly Father, though He hears us crying for certain things that He knows would be harmful and in the end difficult for us to handle, will not give us those things. Even though our mouths *ask* Him, and even though our souls *seek* Him, and even though we gain constant *contact* with Him, He may deny the request. But He will grant the general design of our prayer, which design is to have what is good for us and good for Him. But let it be clearly understood that the promise is plainly given. When we ask for what is good and wholesome for us, and profitable for our welfare, and advantageous for our service to Him and for His own glory, we may be sure that God will be sure to give us our prayer's request. As an earthly parent will not deny anything to his children within his power to give if it would benefit them, so God will never deny what is good for His own children. He hears prayer and grants affirmative answer to His own.

*For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*

*Psalms 84:11*

#### IV. IMPORTUNATE PRAYER IS REWARDED WITH COMMUNION

*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*  
*Luke 11:13*

Jesus finalizes His motivating teaching on prayer by promising the ultimate reward of prayer, namely, His Indwelling Presence in the Person of the Holy Spirit. He it is Who works the change in our importunate prayers and in us while we are *asking, seeking, and knocking* to obtain even *evil stones, serpents, and scorpions*. The Holy Spirit's communion influences our prayers for good when a continuous prayer life is lived out. He will make our prayers into the image of Jesus' prayers, that always sought of the Father what pleased the Father. Though we are not in perfect accord with God as was Jesus, still through the Holy Spirit our prayers can be truly *in the Spirit*.

*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.*

*Ephesians 6:18*

*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

*And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*  
*Romans 8:26-27*

Prayer in the Spirit is a reality for all regular and continuous supplicants at heaven's door. He Who inhabits the place will make His life within them a reality through prayer. Their prayers will be changed to match His mind as He permeates their souls. Then He Who knows the mind of the Spirit will hear and answer affirmatively because He maketh intercession according to the will of God.<sup>6</sup>

This communion with the Holy Spirit is the ultimate affirmative answer to all true spiritual prayer. No greater answer could be granted. When this disciple asked Jesus for motivation for prayer in verse one, this promise of the Holy Spirit Who is given to all askers, seekers, and knockers is the grandest motivation possible. Is it not the end of all prayer, is it not the desired result of all prayer, is it not the very best that we could get from God? No matter what the circumstance or difficulty, is not what we ask and seek from God the very best He has to give to us? Of course it is! God's very best answer to prayer is the Presence of the Holy Spirit. God Himself within the soul of the supplicant is the most resounding "Yes" ever returned to the seekers of God's blessings. He is the revered reward of all the *asking*, all the *seeking*, and all the *knocking*.

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<sup>6</sup> *Romans 8:26-27*

Jesus contrasts God with us as we give to our children good gifts. *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that are continuously asking him.* Note the underlined present tense from the Greek. The highest attitude in prayer is that which *asks* and *seeks* and *obtains* the Holy Spirit as an abiding Presence within one's life. "That is where we begin, and when we receive the Holy Spirit at first are born again; but the prayer life is the life that is always seeking and always receiving; the filling, the infilling, the overflowing of the Spirit."<sup>7</sup> That comes as we continue in prayer constantly. He then fills one's life with His power and discernment, with His beauty and comfort, and with His wisdom and understanding. Through that process His Presence affects the same prayers through which His Presence was so keenly known. Selah!

It is because spiritual things satisfy most that Jesus Christ ended His teaching on motivation to real prayer as He had begun, namely, on a note of spiritual communion. He began with approach to God as our *Father*, thus establishing the relation between His children and their heavenly Father as a mutually profitable interchange of thoughts and emotions in prayer. Jesus first named earthly needs (*verses 2-4*), but reaches the highest level of

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<sup>7</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

motivation in this last verse by promising communion with the Indwelling Christ, the Holy Spirit of God, through prayer. The more of heaven there is in the soul, the less will earthly things content. "The joys of God's Spirit are heart-filling and heart cheering."<sup>8</sup> This is the ultimate life of prayer, to escape this earthly scene with all its trials and tribulations, its demands of the temporal and things, its temper of greed and material worth—all those things can be left behind. All those things can pale into insignificance. All those things—even those things which hurt and blight and scathe and injure us—become much less important, and not so much worthy of notice, when His joyous Presence becomes reality through honest prayer. Amen!

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<sup>8</sup> James Comper Gray, Gray and Adams' Bible Commentary, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, n.d.), p. unknown