

How to Pray With Life-Changing Boldness

Bill's wife, Jen, suddenly came down with cancer. The doctors diagnosed it as an extremely aggressive type of cancer, and Jen was given just weeks to live.

Because of previous crises, Bill knew what it was like to persevere in faith through sustained trials. He had watched the Lord change both their hearts, excavating and making them stronger, as they endured God's refining fires. So he knew how to wait on God, long-term, for the fulfillment of His promises.

But this was different. This cancer wasn't like some 40-year wilderness to be traversed; it was a killer with a very short fuse. They had only weeks. Bill needed to find a different way to pray.

Thankfully, Jesus taught us through a parable how to pray in situations that necessitate an immediate answer.

Actually, Jesus gave two parables on prayer that are recorded uniquely by Luke. In Luke 18:1-8, He used the parable of a persistent widow to demonstrate how we should pray when waiting for God's deliverance for a long time. (I expand on that parable in my book, *Unrelenting Prayer*.) And in Luke 11:5-8, He told another parable to show how we should pray when we—like Bill and Jen—need an answer from God *now*.

To this parable we now turn—and notice that *friendship* is its main theme:

“And He said to them, ‘Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him”; and he will answer from

within and say, "Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you"? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs'" (Luke 11:5-8).

Let me cast the parable in a modern context. Jim and Kip are good friends who live in Dallas, while Jim's friend, Chris, lives in Kansas City. Due to a sudden family tragedy, Chris needs to make an unexpected trip from Kansas City to Houston. In his hurry to hit the road, he even forgets his cell phone.

As Chris approaches Dallas, it's close to midnight. He's exhausted. Houston is still another four hours away. Suddenly, it hits him: Jim! Jim lives in Dallas!

Chris makes his way straight to Jim's house. By the time he arrives, it's midnight and everyone is asleep. Almost apologetically, he knocks on Jim's door and asks if he can spend the night. And the answer, of course, is, "By all means! Come in!"

Propriety demands that Jim feed his friend before giving him a bed. But Jim isn't ready for the surprise visit, and he suddenly realizes, "We have no bread!" But then he remembers that his friend, Kip, has three loaves in his pantry.

Seating Chris at his table with his wife and kids, Jim says, "I'll be right back!" Slipping quietly out the door, he runs down the street to Kip's place. Knocking on Kip's door, he calls out gently, "Kip! Buddy! Help! Chris just showed up from Kansas City, and I have no bread. Get up and lend me your three loaves."

Kip replies. "Shhhh! It's midnight! Are you crazy? Get off my property, go back to bed, and I'll give you the bread in the morning." But Jim refuses to back off.

Now, to grasp the story, you've got to see this entire

incident shaking down at *midnight*. When Jim first knocks at Kip's door and asks for bread, he's not doing anything wrong. But then Kip goes, "It's midnight. Shut up, get off my property and go back to bed."

When Jim continues to stand and knock—well, we have laws for this kind of behavior. We call it trespassing. Harassment. Disturbing the peace. By continuing to knock on Kip's door at midnight, Jim is now breaking the law.

When you see that Jesus has framed a scenario in which Jim is breaking the law, you come to realize that He is actually advocating *illegal prayers*.

In essence, Jim is serving Kip an ultimatum: "Either give me your three loaves of bread or call the cops." But inside, Jim is thinking, *I don't think you're going to call the cops. I think our friendship is too tight for that. Before you call the cops, I think you're going to pull your carcass out of bed, go to your pantry and get me your three loaves.*

Jim is now straining his friendship with Kip. "Are you just a fair-weather friend? Are you my friend only when things are great, or are you also my friend when things are hard?" For Jim, it's time to cash in on the equity he has accrued in their relational bank.

If you're going to pray like Jesus describes in our parable—illegal prayers—then you better have a friendship with God. Don't wait for a crisis before you start investing in this relationship. Build relational equity with God *now*, so that when the crisis hits, you have a friendship to fall back on.

Illegal prayers are rooted in relational confidence. You know your God and, even better, are known by Him. You have enough confidence in your friendship to believe that long before He gets angry and swats you into outer space, He's going to give you the healing bread He has in His heavenly pantry.

Jim is praying illegal prayers at Kip's door. But Jesus' parable is not the only instance of illegal prayers in the Bible. There are at least two other notable ones.

1) Daniel. An exile in Babylon, Daniel had the daily practice of praying to his God three times each day. But then the king enacted a decree that no one could pray to any god but the king for 30 days (see Dan. 6).

When Daniel heard he could no longer pray legal prayers to his God, he opened his window toward Jerusalem and prayed illegal prayers. This got him into a heap of trouble. But God stood by His man and delivered him from the lion's den. What started as illegal prayers ended in a mighty deliverance.

2) The woman with a hemorrhage. There was a woman in Israel who had a female problem that caused her to hemorrhage constantly. One day she heard that Jesus of Nazareth would be passing through her town. Jesus! Faith filled her heart: "If I could just touch the hem of His garment, I know I'd be healed."

But there was a problem. Moses' law required anyone with that kind of discharge to live sequestered from society (Num. 5:2) as they were ceremonially "unclean" (unfit to enter the temple). Furthermore, Moses' law explained that if the unclean person touched someone else, they also would become unclean (Lev. 15:19). Thus, the law required an unclean person to be isolated from others until the discharge was cured.

And yet, Jesus was thronged by multitudes. How could she possibly touch the hem of His garment when He was surrounded by such a mass? Everyone in town knew her condition, and if they saw her in the crowd, they would thrust her out.

So she got creative. Pulling a shawl over her face to avoid recognition, she bent low and began to shove her way through the crowd. "Excuse me," she whispered as she pushed someone aside. "Pardon me. Sorry about that," she quietly

whispered, as she defiled another person with her touch.

She defiled everyone she touched, breaking the law. By the time she reached Jesus, she had broken the law 235 times (or however many people she had brushed past). That's why, when Jesus tried to identify her, she hid in fear.

How did Jesus respond to her illegal pursuit? "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction" (Mark 5:34).

It's this kind of illegal praying that Jesus advocates in His parable of the midnight visit. He is intimating, "You have a relationship with God. Go illegal. Break the law. Forget the rules. Push the envelope. Violate protocol. Demand attention. Brook no denial."

Jesus' message here is startling: "You're a beloved friend—a child of God. So ditch propriety. Go for the jugular; call the question; press the point; strain the relationship; despise political correctness; contravene convention; test the limits; cross the line; throw caution to the wind; pray illegal prayers."

When you start praying like this, you might want to keep your voice down. Because if your neighbor overhears you, he'll probably fear for a lightning strike. "You shouldn't talk to God like that!"

Your response can be simple: "I wasn't talking to you. I was talking to my Friend."

Disrupting God's Sovereign Timing

The issue for Kip (who represents God in the parable) is *disruption*. If Kip gets up, the kids will awaken, and that will disrupt everything. Kids asleep at midnight are angels; awaken them at midnight, and they're demons.

"Don't wake up my kids!" Kip huffs. "Go back to bed and come

back in the morning.”

The fact is, answered prayers are disruptive. They disrupt the normal routine and accelerate kingdom activity. For example, Jesus’ miracles escalated the domino effect toward Calvary. That’s why, when He healed people, He often pled, “Don’t tell anybody!” The more attention His ministry received, the sooner He would be crucified.

When God answers prayer, divine timelines are disrupted and accelerated. I suppose God is thinking, “I’m going to answer your prayer, but not just yet. Too disruptive. If I deliver you now, it will accelerate too many things. I have a blueprint for this planet. So keep asking, but give Me some time. I’m not ready to tip that domino and answer your prayer.”

How should we respond when God says, “Not yet”? Jesus’ counsel in the parable is stunning: “Push back. Challenge God’s sovereignty.”

We don’t challenge God’s sovereign wisdom or purposes; but Jesus invites us, in the parable, to challenge God’s sovereign timing. When we know what God intends to do, we can press Him for an earlier answer—if our friendship with Him is strong enough.

There is a kind of praying that receives today what God was intending to do tomorrow. As Joseph Garlington said, you’ve got to go to the mat with God.

Persistence

In the final verse of the parable, Jesus said, “I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs” (Luke 11:8). And now we have come to a word that brings this parable alive: *persistence*.

Persistence is the New King James Version's translation for the Greek word *anaideia*. *Anaideia* is a compound of two words meaning "no" and "shame." No shame. The common translations of *persistence* or *importunity* are inadequate. Preferred—and more accurate—are *shamelessness* or *audacity*.

Anaideia is not referring to Jim's knocking on Kip's door without stopping; it's referring to the fact that he's doing it at midnight. It's describing the rudeness and impropriety of Jim's behavior. It's portraying Jim's behavior as impudence, effrontery, nerve or brash boldness.

Look at how Jesus is teaching us to pray! We are to come to God with the relational confidence that we can be audaciously demanding, trusting that our friendship with Him is strong enough to sustain the strain. "If you have a friendship with God," He is saying, "then put pressure on the relationship."

Relationship makes you bold. What good is a relationship with God if you can't lean on it in your time of need?

Praying With Chutzpah

In a moment we will look at Luke 11:8 from Franz Delitzsch's *The Delitzsch Hebrew Gospels*. But first I want to explain why that volume was written as it was.

For centuries, scholars have sought to identify which language Jesus spoke when He taught in Galilee. Until recently, many scholars were convinced He taught in Aramaic. However, recent discoveries indicate that Jesus actually spoke Hebrew when He taught the multitudes. Delitzsch is of this latter persuasion. He insists that the fabric of the Greek in the Gospels points back not to an Aramaic but a Hebrew origination.

He set out, therefore, to write a "backward" translation of the Gospels—that is, since the Gospel writers translated Jesus' words from Hebrew into Greek, he would translate the Greek back into Hebrew, and recreate to his best ability the

original words that actually came from Jesus' lips.

When Delitzsch came to *anaideia* in Luke 11:8, he insisted the Hebrew word that *anaideia* would translate to would be the Hebrew *hutspa*. It means *audacity* or *insolence*. "Because of his *hutspa* he will rise and give him as many as he needs."

Hutspa has found its way into English via Yiddish, which is a ninth-century blend of Hebrew and German. The Yiddish spelling is *chutzpah*. Leo Rosten, in *The Joys of Yiddish*, defines *chutzpah* as "gall, brazen nerve, effrontery, incredible 'guts,' presumption plus arrogance such as no other word and no other language can do justice to." English had no equivalent, so we just grabbed *chutzpah* and added it to our dictionary.

The *Complete Jewish Bible* agreed with Delitzsch and put *chutzpah* in its rendering of Luke 11:8. It's stunning. The actual Hebrew word on the lips of Christ when He gave this parable was *hutspa*. Jesus is telling us to pray with *chutzpah*.

After the word *hutspa*, Delitzsch places a footnote on it with this added clarification: "Lit. 'strong-faced-ness.'"

Chutzpah. Strong-faced-ness!

"On account of strong-faced-ness he will get up and give to him everything he needs." Jesus is inviting us to push back on the sovereignty of God's timing with strong-faced-ness.

If blind Bartimaeus had prayed sophisticated prayers, I question if he would have been healed (Mark 10:46-52). When they told him to shut up, he pushed back with strong-faced-ness. If the Syro-Phoenician woman had prayed dignified, elegant prayers, I question whether her daughter would have been healed (Mark 7:24-30). She had to push back with *chutzpah* to get her answer.

Maybe you have time for safe, polite prayers. But Bill and

Jen, in their fight with cancer, didn't. And neither do I. The hour is too late and our world too desperate for polished prayers. We need God to visit us *now*. We need prayers with strong-faced-ness.

Misty Edwards once asked, "How do you hurry Someone from eternity?" I know only one way: chutzpah. But isn't that illegal? Exactly.

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