

# “How to Deal with Unanswered Prayer”//Luke 11:1, 6–10; 18:1–8 // Ask 1

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**VIDEO:** Christmas at DPAC:

- **Summit Church, could we put our hands together...?**
- **6 services**—that was **what it looked like** from the stage. **One of my prayers for this church has been that as God makes us bigger,** we would never lose that primary sense of mission we had at the beginning, that we exist to bring people to Jesus
- So, **it encourages me when I see how enthusiastically you respond** in bringing people to an event like this, and when we **get to that moment and I see so many lights go on**—I wish you could have seen it from my perspective. It was overwhelming.

For those of you who had someone there and they raised their hand, go to [summitrdu.com](http://summitrdu.com) for details on how to follow up

**That was a great way to bring an end to the YODM.** In 2017, we did several things to take our disciple-making efforts forward. It resulted in around **600 people being baptized and 50 new small groups** being planted.

But that was so 2017. This is 2018. So, we have a new focus. We **haven't stopped making disciples**, of course—that's the core of our mission—but this year we are going to do some **special things to emphasize another thing** core to what we do:

- **2016** we called “the Year of the Bible,” 2017 was the YODM; **after a lot of prayer and discussion**, our pastoral team wants to put forward **2018 as the Year of Prayer.**

Works Consulted:

“Getting to Know God Through Prayer,” Craig Groeschel

“Desperation,” David Platt

“Boldness,” David Platt

“Speed Dial,” Andy Stanley

- **Like with the Year of Disciple-Making, that doesn't mean that's all I'll preach about or focus on...** just that we have some special initiatives we'll be doing this year to develop both your personal practice of prayer as well as our corporate experiences of it. *The first of which is the handout you received on your way in today. It's a daily prayer guide - which also follows right along with our bible reading plan - with space for you to write notes and things to pray for.*

**You ask, Why the YOP? There are lots of reasons,** but let's just get right to the heart of it: **Most of us don't have a healthy and robust prayer life.**

**Theologian D. A. Carson** says that if you really want to embarrass the average Christian—just ask them to tell you about their private prayer lives... **Many of us can impress others** with our Bible knowledge or our evangelism stories but our private prayer times are embarrassing.

**What's scary about this is that Jesus told us that** “apart from him we can do nothing,” and the main way we access his power is through prayer.

**Luke 11... (BTW, if you're looking for a good New Year's Resolution: Bring your Bible each week.)**

**Luke, who wrote the Gospel we are going to study this week and next, goes out of his way to show us** that the source of even Jesus's power was prayer.

Jesus had declared (John 5:19), “(I) do nothing by himself, I only do what I see my father doing...” That meant that **Jesus's ministry was**

**not of his own initiative**, but he depended on the power of the Father in him and through him. And that was a power he accessed through prayer.

And so, Luke shows us that **Jesus's whole life was saturated** with prayer.

- He shows Jesus praying at his baptism, Luke. 3:21
- In chapter 4—praying through his temptation.
- In 5:15-16, he tells us that Jesus often got off alone to pray;
- In 6:12 he reveals that before Jesus chose his disciples he spent the night before praying
- In 9:18, **before he presented the disciples with the do-or-die** question, *“Who do you say that I am?”*, he spent the afternoon in prayer.
- After **they made their declaration, putting their lives at risk**, Luke tells us that he took them up on a mountain to spend time in prayer (9:28–29)
  - In 18:1, Luke tells us that Jesus taught his disciples **always** to pray.
- In **Chapter 11**, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. **(It's interesting to me that after all they'd seen**—all the miracles and the sermons—that's what they wanted to learn more about. Not, “teach us to preach,” or “teach us to do miracles,” but “teach us to pray.” They **recognized it was the key to everything**.
- In 22:32, Jesus **promises Peter he'll pray** for him during his hour of trial
- In 22:40—Jesus commands **his disciples to pray** so they will not fall into temptation;
- And in 23:46—Luke shows us that **Jesus's last breath at the hour** of his death was a prayer.

The point Luke seems to be making is this: **If Jesus—God in the flesh—felt like he could do nothing on his own**, and so was driven always to pray, why do we go throughout our lives with so little prayer? Do we **think ourselves more capable** than Jesus?

**In Luke's second book**, the book of Acts, he demonstrates that prayer was the foundation of the early church's ministry, and the secret behind all their growth:

- Acts 1:14—they all joined together constantly in prayer;
- 2:42 that they devoted themselves to prayer
- 4:24—they prayed for an outpouring of signs and wonders in persecution;
- Acts 6 says the Apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the *word*. Both were considered ministries of the church. It wasn't that preaching was the real ministry and prayer was only done in preparation for it. Prayer was the ministry.
- Acts 9:40—Peter prayed for the sick
- In 12:5—church Prayed for Peter to be released;
- In 13:2—they are praying when God raises up missionaries
- In 14:23—they appointed elders through prayer;
- ~~In 16:25—Paul and Silas pray when they feel forgotten in prison;~~
- Luke concludes the book by describing Paul's ministry as preaching, healing, and praying.

**You can literally find the church in prayer in every single chapter of the book of Acts.** It was fundamental to what they did.

**Here's my concern: What was fundamental for the early church has become supplemental in the Summit Church.**

- We look at prayer as something we do *on the way to ministry*. They looked at it as the ministry.
- And it shows. **Acts 2:** Pray for 10 days, 3000 people get saved...
- What we find in Acts is that It is more important to talk to God about people than people about God.
- JUST ASK

***So, why do we find it so difficult to pray?***

**Most of us would point to a problem with our self-discipline:**

- We don't pray enough for the same reason we don't work out or eat enough alfalfa sprouts—it's a lack of self-discipline.
- And so, **you're thinking this is my attempt** to get to you make prayer a New Year's resolution.

**But this weekend I want to put forward** a different primary reason you don't pray. It's a little painfully honest, but it's the truth.

**For many of us, we're just not sure how much good** prayer actually does.

- Nobody wants to admit this in church, but see, **sometimes you pray and things happen**; but sometimes you pray and they don't; and sometimes you don't pray and the thing you forgot to pray for happens anyway.
- *This is **why many of you struggle** with praying.*

**So, it's encouraging to me that, in Luke 11, when the disciples ask** Jesus to teach them to pray ("Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray." Luke 11:1) after giving them some initial instructions about how to approach God (which we'll look at next week), he tells a story that deal with our primary obstacle to praying: **unanswered prayer.**

- **Like I said, for many of you, this is the reason you quit praying**; maybe the reason you gave up on church and God altogether—you prayed a prayer that you thought surely any loving God would answer, and things didn't happen like you thought they should, and you can't make sense of that.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly Jesus was aware of that frustration. He recognized it as our primary obstacle to praying effectively.

- **Good news: That means there's not something wrong with you.**  
*Can you just take a minute and let that settle in? Your doubt*

doesn't mean you are a strange, evil, unbelieving person—or not cut out to be a Christian.

- This is a natural question, and Jesus **recognized this would be our biggest hang-up with prayer** so the 1<sup>st</sup> thing he does is tell a story to address it:

**Luke 11:5–11** <sup>5</sup> And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves,' <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; (unfortunately, **in first century Palestine** there were no 24 hr grocery stores to go to; no **late-night Taco Bells** (or I guess it would have been Falafel Bells).

And, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, **hospitality was huge**, so this guy doesn't want to send his midnight guest away hungry).

<sup>7</sup> and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'?

Alright, a few other details to help you make sense of this story:

- First, in a country w/o electricity, "**midnight**" is really the "middle of the night." Not like in Chapel Hill, where midnight is still 3 hours before bedtime. They went to **bed at sundown**, so by midnight this guy has been asleep for about 4 hours. This guy is **well into REM**.
- Then, notice, it says that he's **in bed with his children**. (In those days, people lived in one-room houses with one big bed area, and everybody slept together. So, **IOW, to get up to get bread**, he's got to wake everybody up.
  - **Parents, I don't have to tell you how irritating it would be to have** finally gotten all 5 of your kids down in your one room apartment; and **then all of a sudden, some dude** starts

<sup>1</sup> Andy Stanley, "Speed Dial," from *Permission to Speak Freely* series, preached at North Point Community Church.

banging on the door, “Hey, I need some bread.” (I remember when our kids were young and we got them down—no one breathe!)

- BTW, I love how Jesus starts the conversation: “*Friend*, lend me 3 loaves.” That’s a good word for him to use, because when you are waking someone up at midnight the whole friendship is on thin ice.
- **3<sup>rd</sup> detail to notice:** The man making the request here **doesn’t have an emergency**. He’s not like, “*My wife is fallen... and she’s bleeding out the ears!*” He’s like, “Hey I had some guests come and I don’t have enough pop-tarts!”
- Finally, the **request he puts forward is exorbitant**. In those days, **bread loaves were huge**. One loaf would have been sufficient; but this guy asks for 3...

<sup>8</sup> I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend (in fact, after this he’s probably not his friend anymore), yet because of his impudence (some translations say ‘boldness;’ ‘shamelessness;’) he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

- He gets his request not because the other guy loves him as a friend, but **because of his boldness and persistence in asking**.

Then Jesus says, <sup>9</sup> And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

- The whole **analogy of knocking reinforces this idea of persistent asking, right?** When you knock, you don’t just walk up to the door and hit it once...
- **If Veronica and I hear one single, solitary thump** in the middle of the night, we assume that **one of our kids has fallen off** their bunk bed, not that someone is knocking.
- **Jesus says, “Knock, and if no one comes to the door, keep knocking.** Let them know it’s no use—the lights being off don’t fool you. You know they’re home, and you know they know you know they’re home, and you’re not going away—because you are

*just one of those kind of people, and so they might as well get up and answer.”*

You say, “Well, how does this jive with the whole idea of God’s sovereignty? I mean, if it was God’s will to give the request, why not give it the first time we ask for it?” **I am not sure...** I have a couple ideas I’ll share in a moment, but the point is clear: God only gives some things in response to ongoing, patient, persistent prayer.

Or, you could say it this way: **God delights to share his power with those who are bold enough to bother him.**

**Now, really quick, flip over to Luke 18...** Because I want to show you how Luke records this same essential teaching twice, since this is such a common problem, and the answer is he’s giving us is so counter-intuitive it’s hard to get your mind around.

**Luke 18:1** And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. [2] He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. [3] And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ [4] For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, [5] yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’”

Then Jesus says, **unbelievably**, “This is like praying to God.”

- **(You see, let me tell you something about parables.** When you listen to a parable, you are usually thinking, *OK, somebody in this parable is me*. And somebody in this parable is God. (That’s how parables work.) **This one’s a little confusing**. Because the disciples are like, “OK, which one is us? We have to be the needy old widow, but that would make God ...*Woah. Wait a minute.* You’re saying that God is like a grumpy old judge who doesn’t care really

care and only gives this woman what she wants because she won't stop annoying him?"

- I mean, seriously—I wouldn't want to be the one making that comparison—who but Jesus could get away with that analogy?
- I mean, the point is really straightforward: If you want something from God, you just keep banging on the door. Eventually he'll respond to you, not because he loves you, but because you just bother him to death.
- RIGHT? IS THERE ANY OTHER WAY TO READ THIS?
- **But Jesus's point, you see, is not to compare God to an unjust judge but to contrast him with one:**
- He is saying, If even an unrighteous, selfish judge would grant answers because of persistent asking; and if even a sleeping, stingy friend will eventually get up and give us our request, **HOW MUCH MORE will our Heavenly Father, who does love and care for us and constantly watches over us, give us what WE need when we come persistently to him and ask him?**

**Back to Luke 11.** Through these parables, Jesus teaches us 4 important things about how we should pray

### 1. Desperately<sup>2</sup>

**Both of the characters** in these stories are desperate. Both are entirely out of options. The **hungry man** has nowhere else to get bread; the **wronged woman** has nowhere else to turn for justice.

**One of the things that keeps us from praying** is our failure to recognize who utterly desperate we are for God's help.

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<sup>2</sup> Much of this has been inspired by listening to and reading Tim Keller's sermons on prayers. I am quite sure that somewhere I've heard him use some of these words, "Desperately, boldly, trustingly," etc, but I can't remember where.

**As Americans, we are the 'can do' people:** we are a people who assume that with enough time and energy we can figure out the solution to anything.

- *I mean, it's right there in our name. **Ameri-CAN.** We aren't the Ameri-can'ts.*
- We have ***Books for Dummies*** on every possible subject; (I even have one on God) because the idea is if we can just figure out the technique, we can become capable at whatever we need to be...
- **We are a DIY people, and that's good.**
- **But it's deadly when you** are dealing with a God who says, 'Apart from me you can do nothing.'

**Paul Miller, who wrote a book called *The Praying Life*** (which we are reading as a staff and I'd heartily commend to you—it's the best book on prayer I know of), says, **"If you are not praying** (is this you? Do you struggle to maintain a robust prayer life? Here's your diagnosis), **then you are quietly confident that time, money, and talent are all you need in life. You'll always be a little too tired, a little too busy to pray. But if, like Jesus, you realize you can't do life on your own, then no matter how busy, no matter how tired you are, you will find the time."**<sup>3</sup>

**My wife and I have experienced this in parenting.** When I became a parent, I read just about every possible book on Christian parenting because I'd been thinking, **"If I can just figure out this parenting thing,** I'll be able to guarantee my kids turn out right."

- But maybe the most impacting **book** I read was by **Elyse Fitzpatrick**, who has been here, called *Give them Grace*: This is what Christian books on parenting are trying to do... give you a formula, and tell you that if you follow it, it will guarantee success in parenting.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Miller, *A Praying Life*, 37

- But she points out that **God was a perfect father** and 1/3 of angels and the two humans he created rebelled...
- She's like, "So, you think you'll be able to out-technique God?"
- She says the **really dangerous problem with thinking there is a foolproof way of parenting** is it keeps us from the one thing we most need; that is, to **cast ourselves down** at the feet of Jesus, looking to him for his mercy in our kids' lives. To do what we can't do.
  - "I did my best parenting by prayer. I began to speak less to the kids and more to God."
  - Prayer is not just preparation for the ministry of parenting; prayer is the most important element of parenting
- She pointed to this passage in **1 Peter, 5:6–10, where Peter says**, "*Humble yourself (in prayer), under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him for he cares for you.*"
  - **Who does the exalting?** God does. Hope in him.
- **My hope for my kids is not in my parenting skill...** even the skills I learned from the Bible, but in the grace of God, who will HIMSELF raise them up.
- **My hope for my marriage** is not in good Christian techniques in relationships (as important as those are). At the end of the day my hope is in God's grace.
- Our **hope for success in mission** lies not in a superior strategy or our talent, but entirely in God's grace.
- **No skill, not even biblical skill, is sufficient.** "*Cursed is the man who trusts in man...*"
  - **One of the ironic ways we can "trust in man" is when we learn all the biblical principles and think that those by themselves guarantee spiritual life.**
  - **Jesus didn't save us by teaching us principles but by giving us resurrection power.**
  - **It is a tragedy to master the principles and then forget the dependency in relationship that gives them life.**

- **Our hope is in the mercy of God, who will himself lift us up and establish us.**
  - ~~She said, "I wasn't even counting on the quality of my prayers to be their salvation. Because my prayers in this season were often nothing more than vocalized unbelief. I was counting on the fact Jesus had promised to pray through me. My prayers were faulty; his prayers were perfect and complete.~~

~~Our only hope is in the mercy of God.~~ **If we get that, we will pray "desperately."** This realization by itself has enabled Veronica and me to have a more regular prayer time together.

- **For years Veronica and I struggled to have a regular time to pray together.**
- Now that we have 4 kids approaching the teenage years, we pray together all the time. Seriously. It's not discipline, it is desperation. **(The core of effective prayer is desperation, not discipline.)**

**And let me just say this practically before I move on to #2:** Some of you should probably focus less on setting a long, morning prayer time, and more on just teaching yourself to pray about everything because of how much you need God's help.

- **An established morning and/or evening time is good**, and of course it is awesome if you do it for a long time, but even better is **learning to pray over everything** throughout the day.
- **One of my prayer heroes** used to say he never prayed for longer than 20 minutes at a time, but he never went 20 minutes without praying.
  - **I think that indicates a healthier attitude** toward God than the person that prays for an hour out of self-discipline but then charges throughout the day not thinking much about their need of the power of God.
- **Maybe a long prayer time won't work for you.** Your mind starts wandering. You start out praying for missionaries and end up

thinking about Stranger Things, or kneel down to pray by your bed and wake up 2 hours later. Guilty.

- **Maybe you need to write your prayers out.** *What I do is have it on my phone, divided up into various days, and I keep a running list of things that are overwhelming me and I slide those things into the various days. Some of your names are on that list.*
- **Some of you like to sing, and maybe you could sing your prayers to God.** Others of you, you can't sing worth a lick, and God would probably say, 'Please don't sing your prayers to me. You'll want to stick to writing.'
- **Some of you should try praying out loud,** even by yourself as a way of keeping your mind focused. You say, "But I feel weird." That's how Jesus prayed, so get over yourself.

**The form is less important**—prayer at its core is a desperate conversation with your Heavenly Father where you tell him all that you need, all that you're afraid of, all you are worried about, all you can't handle because you know how much you need him.<sup>4</sup> **More on that next week.**

## 2. Boldly

**The 2 people in Jesus's parable come with extravagant, big requests.** And Jesus says, "If this is how they came to a stingy friend and an unrighteous Judge, how much more boldly should you come to your Heavenly Father?"

As I noted, the two stories Jesus told are **comedic for their hyperbole.** **He's not comparing** God to a slumbering friend or an unjust judge, he is contrasting him with one:

- This woman **approached as a stranger**; we come as beloved children

- She had **no right to claim** in court; we have the blood of Jesus by which we come *boldly* before the throne of grace
- **The judge we approach is not one who doesn't care about justice or us**; no, the Judge we approach is a Father who cared so much about us that he climbed out of his Judge's chair and satisfied the demands of justice for so he could share with us the riches of his kingdom
- **The friend we approach is not asleep**: no, he's so attentive to us that he knows how many hairs on our heads and when even a single sparrow falls from the sky; one who did not just give us loaves of bread from his cupboard, he gave us the bread of his own torn flesh.

And when we **understand this**, we pray boldly.

You **know who naturally approaches me most boldly? My kids.**

- **I open my eyes at 3 a.m. "I want some water."** Who else could get away with that?
- **If you do that...**
- Even if it were my wife... wouldn't call the police, but I'd say, "Can't you get it yourself?"
- **But when it is one of my kids, I do what any good dad would do.** I say, "Your mom is right on the other side of this bed." No, I get up.

My kids approach me with **undaunted confidence** in my goodness toward them.

- **That's how God wants us to approach him.** We are like children who are welcome right in their Daddy's bedroom at whatever hour of the night with whatever need we have.

**Look at how he presses that point in Luke 11:13, Jesus says, "If you, who are evil, love to give gifts to your children..."** Luke 11:13)

- **EVIL** is a big ol' word, isn't it? *Why is Jesus using THAT WORD in this context?* Just a gratuitous reminder of their depravity?

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<sup>4</sup> Craig Groeschel, "Getting to Know God Through Prayer," series on Prayer.

- Well, because most of us are at our most loving when we are dealing with our kids. Even if we're not good people, we usually try to be good to our kids.
- **Yet compared to God's love for his children**, even the best parent, on the best day, would be classified as "evil."
  - **Think of how tenderly you love your kids.** Yet compared to God's love for his children, even that love for your kids is "evil" compared to his love for you.

**What would** your prayers for others look like if you really believed God had that kind of love for you and for the world?

**You'd pray boldly.** You'd also pray...

### 3. Persistently

**If anything**, my kids know how to wear me out asking for something repeatedly. For them, "No" isn't an answer. It's an invitation to an extended negotiation in which they know I eventually crumble. It's the start of a siege.

**And, as we saw**, Jesus makes clear in these parables that the reason God answers these request is because of the persistence of the one asking

(all of Jesus's parables about prayer are where adults act like children)<sup>5</sup>

- 11:8: "Because of his impudence;"
- 18:5, because of her "continual coming," the answer was given."<sup>6</sup>

**The rest of the Scripture demonstrates this, too:**

<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Paul Miller for this insight from *A Praying Life*.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Synoptics*. We do not gain victory over God through prayer; rather, "the actual facts do not all at once make it evident that he

- **Acts 11** tells us that the church prayed all night for the **release of Peter**—
  - They **didn't just mention it once** and then pick up a John Piper book and meditate on the sovereignty of God... they prayed until he got out.
- **Paul got this**; in at least one place he literally had to be told to stop asking for something **2 Cor 12:9**: a message came down from heaven... "Paul, let this one go. God has a greater plan."
- Or, one of my favorite scenes in the OT. **Exodus 17:12–13**...
  - **Moses' hands... UP, they win.** Down, they lose. I wonder if when he figured that out he started to do jumping jacks just to mess with everybody. Very graphic picture.

The point is clear: If he's not answering, **keep praying**.

**Now, I know: Some of you want to point to all the exceptions.** You say, "*One time I prayed and prayed for this and I never got it.*" **I get that. Jesus gets that.**

- **John 11**: Mary and Martha prayed for their brother Lazarus not to die and Jesus told them God let him die because he had a greater plan. So, **Jesus was aware of the exceptions.**
- But **here, in Luke 11, he is like (to them)**: "*Look, you asked me how to pray; so, I'm telling you how to pray. Don't let go until you absolutely have to.*"

**You say**, "Why does God work that way? Why not give it the 1<sup>st</sup> time we ask?" I don't know but that's clearly what he's teaching.

AND I have a guess: God is glorified **through our persistent boldness.**

graciously listens to our prayers." Further, Calvin claims that God chooses to be wearied by our prayers, as the parable of the widow illustrates. This is consistent with the idea of the judge as a contrast. "If they do not desist from the uninterrupted exercise of prayer, he will at length regard them and relieve their necessities."

- **These people in Jesus's parable have 1 absolute conviction:** You have the power to help me and you are the only one who can help me and so I have nowhere else to go.
- Remember that story of **Alexander the Great I've told you...?** He wants ice sculptures, Justin Bieber to play, Nic Cage will make an appearance...

When you pray and refuse to give up, that declaration of confidence in his goodness glorifies him, and many times he gives the answer because of your persistence.

If you hear 1 thing this weekend, hear this. If you're praying and praying don't have an answer yet: **Don't give up!**

- **How many times have I seen this** as a pastor? **I've seen faithful men and women of faith hang on** and pray about things that seemed impossible, and at the last minute, or at the end, or years later, something happens. It's just amazing.<sup>7</sup>
- **Every once in a while**, maybe more than every once in a while, God responds to those *"I'm just not going to give up; I'm going to ask and seek and knock and ask and seek and knock and ask and seek and knock"* until you listen... And he says yes. There are so many stories.
- **Here's an old one: George Mueller**, who wrote one of the most influential books on prayer in Christian history, tells a story about committing to pray for the salvation of 5 young men, every single day. He prayed for 18 months before the 1<sup>st</sup> one was converted. **He says, "I thanked God, and pressed on."** He prayed every day for 5 more years before the 2<sup>nd</sup> one was converted, and another 6 years before the 3<sup>rd</sup>. 36 years later, he wrote that the last 2 were still not converted, *"but I hope in God, I pray on, and look for the*

<sup>7</sup> Batterson calls this the JEJIT principle: God gives "just enough, just in time." He's got it jotted all over his Bible where he sees God do this in answer to prayers. It happens with Israel at the Red Sea, with Daniel in the lion's den, with the widow on her last jar of oil, with the disciples just before their boat was going to capsize. God wants to see if we will chicken out or pray through. If we pray **through**, we will

*answer. They are not converted yet, but they will be."* Then, in 1897, 52 years after he started praying, the final two were brought to faith. A few years **after** Mueller died.

- **Luke 18:1** And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart...
- **You have a brother, or father, or daughter, or roommate, that hasn't become a believer. Don't give up!**

Well, finally, Jesus teaches us that we should pray...

#### 4. Trustingly

**After the parable in Luke 11, Jesus acknowledges** that there are indeed sometimes that we don't receive the answers we think we should have.

That's not because God doesn't love us or because he's not listening, but because he has a greater plan.

Here's how Jesus explains that: **Luke 11:11** What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; **12** or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

- **You parents: If your kid asks** for chicken nugget, you're not going to say, "OK, hold out your hand." No, you only give good gifts. **Same with God.**
- So, **let's reverse that:** If your child asks you for a scorpion, will you give them a scorpion? No.
- You see, sometimes what looks to us like bread is actually a scorpion; and what looks like a scorpion is actually bread.

always get an answer. "Sometimes what we perceive as a divine period is actually just a comma. We think God's silence is the end of the sentence, but it's really just a providential pause. Never put a period where God has only put a comma."

- **Think of the cross.** If there were ever anything that looked like a scorpion it was the cross.
- But that was the moment of our salvation!
- Here's **something I've held onto** in times of unanswered prayer: **Sometimes God answers our prayers by giving us what we would have asked for if we knew what he knew.**
- **I know that doesn't answer** all your questions. "My dad died; I got abused... I know." We'll come back to that in a couple of weeks.
- **What I do know is that you have a Heavenly Father** you can always trust.
- **No good thing, Psalm 84:11 declares does he withhold,** from those who walk uprightly. NO GOOD THING!
- **And he proved that by how he died** for you on the cross. That shows you that whatever is happening in your life, it's not because he has lost love for you or forgotten you. The cross is his eternal pledge that he's always working for your good.

**Sometimes God delays because it is something in us** God wants to change.

- **How many stories do we know, for example,** of parents who prayed for wayward children, and after months/years they come and say, "We realize we're the ones whose hearts needed to be changed. No wonder he left. No wonder she left." And it was in praying and grappling with God, saying, "*God, why won't you hear us? Why won't you change his heart?*" that God revealed to us how we needed to change.<sup>8</sup>

**That may be what God is doing. I don't know. But see, at the end of the day, the key word we say in our prayer,** the word Jesus taught us to open every prayer with, a word we'll delve into next week: **Father...**

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<sup>8</sup> Andy Stanley, "Speed Dial," from *Permission to Speak Freely* series, preached at North Point Community Church.

**My kids ask me lots of things:** some things I give, some things I don't. **But** I am always working for their good. Even more so with God.

**How much more our Heavenly Father.**

So, as we enter this YOP, I want you to commit to pray: *desperately, boldly, persistently, and trustingly.*

**Summit, my conviction is this:** God wants to do great things through this church. **We've seen great things.** 11K in attendance. 100's of people saved at DPAC. Planted 43 churches. Sent out 1000 on church planting teams. But I think we're leaving a lot on the table...

- **We** live in one of the fastest growing areas of the United States. Lots of people and internationals to impact.
- **You have friends and family:**
- **God did not call us simply to manage** a respectable church; he commanded us to charge the gates of hell.
- To cast our nets wide so that they'd take in so many fish the nets would break.

**So, let me close this by asking: What about you? What are your prayers about?** Do you pray those trite, housekeeping prayers? "God, help with *the job and the quiz and give us traveling mercies and just be with us and I pray that in Jesus' name, Amen.*"

- **Or are you praying big things for God's kingdom,** things in line with Jesus's obvious love for the world?
  - **What are you so passionate about for God's kingdom** that you refuse to quit praying about it and you keep going until heaven listens?
- **If you're not praying this way—if all you are doing is praying trite prayers out of discipline rather than bold prayers from desperation, I can tell you that you're missing out** on an opportunity to see God do something great in this world, and

you're missing out on an opportunity to see God do something great in you!<sup>9</sup>

## Bow your heads (MUSIC)

### Which of these do you struggle most with?

- Have you forgotten how desperate you are?
- Are you not bold or confident in God's love toward you? Embrace it in the cross.
- Have you given up and stopped praying—and you need to persist?
- Are you just not trusting your Heavenly Father?
- *Confess that to God and ask for his help.*

How about this... **What do you have that you need to take now—** boldly and persistently—before God's throne? Let's stand at all of our campuses and declare our trust in our Father, and I'll give you a chance to do that.

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<sup>9</sup> Andy Stanley, "Speed Dial," from *Permission to Speak Freely* series, preached at North Point Community Church.

