

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **the parable of the interceding friend** in Luke 11:5-13. Remember that this parable was told in the context of parables about God's kingdom. This is a parable concerning PERSISTENT PRAYER IN GOD'S KINGDOM. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Please read Luke 11:5-8.

(S) Luke 11:5-8 says, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs."

(T) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story. Let us take turns to explain the true-to-life elements of the story of this parable.

Jesus told the story in the form of a question. The question Jesus asked and the situation he pictured is included in verse 5 to 7, with the emphasis on verse 7. The answer to this question in parable form is given by Jesus in verse 8.

(S) First. The story is about three friends. In order to distinguish between them, we will call them *the needy friend*, *the interceding friend* who is the host and *the very able friend*.

(T) Second. The request of the host or interceding friend. It is late in the evening. Unexpectedly, a needy friend appears at his door. This needy guest is tired from a journey he has been making and he is hungry. He expects hospitality, food and a place to sleep. But the host did not expect guests and he has no food in the house. In his great predicament, the host goes to the house of his very able friend. The host becomes an interceding friend and asks his very able friend to lend him three loaves of bread. He promises to return the three loaves to him the next day.

(S) Third. The possible answer of his very able friend. Would the host's very able friend give him a negative answer? His very able friend had already locked the door of his one-room home and he and his family were already lying on their sleeping-mats. If he would get up, walk across the floor and remove the huge bolting bar from the door, the noise would scare his family out of their sleep. Would his very able friend say, "I am sorry, but I can't get up and give you anything"? It is possible to regard the host's very able friend as a person who is reluctant or even unwilling to give.

(T) Fourth. The three loaves of bread. What is meant are three *bread-cakes*, which were flat and round pancakes, just enough to feed one person in one meal.

(S) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

The context of the parable may consist of *the setting* and *the explanation or application* of the parable. The setting of the parable may state *the occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the parable.

What is the context of this parable?

(T) The setting of the parable is contained in Luke 11:1-4. One of Jesus' disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus then taught them the Lord's prayer. Compared to the Lord's prayer in Matthew chapter 6, the prayer in Luke chapter 11 is shorter. The third and sixth petitions in Matthew's Gospel are included in the second and fifth petitions in Luke's Gospel. Jesus probably taught the Lord's prayer several times to people. His intention was not to demand that Christians use the exact same words every time they pray the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's prayer serves as a model or pattern for Christians to pray.

At this point, Jesus told the parable of the interceding friend.

The story of the parable is contained in Luke 11:5-7.

The explanation and application of the parable is contained in Luke 11:8-13. The implied answer of Jesus in verse 7 is, "None of you will receive such a refusal from a very able friend to whom you go for help." And the actual answer of Jesus in verse 8 is even better. The very able friend will certainly get up and give him whatever he needs! His motive may be that he is a true and sympathetic friend. If not, the very able friend will still get up and he will certainly give the interceding friend whatever he needs because the interceding friend keeps on asking! In verse 9-10, Jesus says, "Keep on asking!" "Keep on seeking!" "Keep on knocking!" All three verbs are imperatives and in the present tense. Hence they express *persistence or perseverance*. Thus, Jesus continues to emphasise *the effectiveness of prayer*. In verse 11-13, in the parable of the asking son, the main message is that God the Father will not disappoint any of his children, when they pray. He will answer the kind of prayer that is accompanied by seeking and knocking, that is, by *faith that acts and that perseveres*.

(S) **POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.**

Jesus Christ did not intend every detail in the parable to have some spiritual significance. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the message of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the parable.

Let us take turns to explain which of the details in this parable are really essential or relevant:

(T) **First. The three friends.** They are the needy friend, the host or interceding friend and the very able friend. These three friends illustrate the situation of prayer. *The needy friend* represents any specific need a Christian may have, especially unexpected needs, which may include needy people whom God places on their way! *The interceding friend* represents the Christian, you or me. He is the one who is willing to be a friend at midnight to his needy friend. He is the one who cares for others when everybody else is sleeping. And *the very able friend* represents God the Father, but with this difference, that the motive of the very able friend in the story of the parable was that of an ordinary human person on earth, while the motive of God is never questionable!

(S) **Second. The boldness of the interceding friend.** This is the only detail that Jesus explains. It is not only implied in the story, but is especially a part of the application of the parable. *Boldness* means *fearless boldness* or *shameless persistence*. Once more it is clear that a parable has but one central point, one main message, and that is that God the Father will answer bold and persistent prayers! All the details of the story reinforce this main message.

(T) **POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.**

The main message of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. A parable normally has only one main lesson or message, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the main message of the story.

The parable of the interceding friend in Luke 11:5-8 teaches about *persistent prayer in God's kingdom*.

The main message of the parable is the following. "Whatever his motive may be, an earthly friend will help. About God's motivation there can be no question. He will certainly and generously answer the Christian's bold and persistent prayers!" Verse 8 says, "Because of his boldness, he will give him as much as he needs." The word *boldness* can best be translated with *fearless boldness* or *shameless persistence*. It means to boldly ask for something specific and to keep on asking without feeling ashamed or afraid to ask.

When we intercede we may find that there is difficulty and delay with the answer. It may be as if God is saying, "I cannot give you anything", or "I cannot give it to you at this moment!" When that happens, it is not easy to hold fast to our confidence that God hears our prayers. Then our faith is tested and we have to learn perseverance.

Like Abraham in Romans 4:20-21, we must not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God. With full persuasion that God is able to do what he had promised, we must ask and ask and ask. This is what God is looking for from us. God so highly prizes our confidence in him, that he will do anything to train us in the exercise of this trust in him. Blessed is the Christian who does not give up when God delays to answer or when God is silent or when God apparently refuses to give. Blessed is the Christian who believes that God can do what he has promised. Such faith perseveres, even persists shamelessly if there is a need, and cannot fail to receive as much as he needs!

(S) POINT 5. COMPARE THE PARABLE WITH PARALLEL AND CONTRASTING PASSAGES.

The truth in all the parables also has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct and clear teaching of the Bible.

I want to compare the parable with two Bible passages: Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." All Christians may approach God with freedom and confidence. They are exhorted to approach God's throne of grace with confidence. There they will receive mercy and forgiveness for their sins. There they will find grace to help them in their time of need! However, in Matthew 6:7, Jesus Christ warns that "keeping on babbling like pagans" is not the same as persistent prayer. It is not "the many words", but the faith expressed in bold and persistent asking (prayer) that is important.

(T) POINT 6. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLE.

Let us take turns to summarise the main teachings or messages of the parable.

The main message of the parable is that the God of the Bible will certainly and generously answer the Christian's bold and persistent prayers! The parable also teaches praying Christians the following truths:

(S) The first truth. The interceding friend must see the urgent need. Intercession has its origin in seeing the urgent need of people. The needy friend was hungry and had nothing to eat. He also could not buy bread at that time of the night. If we want to learn how to pray for others, then we must open our eyes and hearts to the needs around us. As a *possible application* of seeing the needs of people around us, Christians should know that spiritually, there are thousand millions of non-Christians who live in midnight darkness of sin, ignorance and indifference. They are perishing for lack of knowledge of salvation in Jesus Christ. Moreover, physically, there are millions of Christians who are underfed, neglected and persecuted, or who are living sickly and fruitless lives, just like sheep without a shepherd. Many of these needy people live all around us in our towns. Nothing, nothing but prayer to God for help, will avail!

(T) The second truth. The interceding friend must love the needy friend unselfishly. The host or interceding friend was a real friend at midnight. He took his weary and hungry friend into his house, but also into his heart. He did not make excuses, saying "I have nothing to give to you." No, at midnight, when all shops were closed and everybody was sleeping, he went out to look for a way to help his needy friend. He sacrificed his own sleep and the comfort of his warm house. The Bible says, "Love is not self-seeking". Christian love forgets itself for the sake of others. Love takes the needs of other people and make them his own. Love finds real joy in living and dying for others just as Christ did. It is the lack of love that causes so many shortcomings in our prayers. True love must pray.

(S) The third truth. The interceding friend must sense his own inability to help. The interceding friend was very willing to give his needy friend what he needed, but he simply had *nothing* to give! He had no means or power to give. He himself had arrived in a situation of poverty and impotence! It was this sense of not being able to help that caused him to go out and beg. He acknowledged his own poverty and powerlessness to his very able friend. He said, "I have a hungry friend, but I have nothing to set before him". It is this sense of inability that caused him to intercede. This awareness of "I have nothing!" makes intercession strong. As application, only the conviction, that the super-natural power of God is needed to save people from sin and judgement, will urge us to intercede. The feeling, that everything we can do to save people is utterly insufficient, will stimulate us to intercede. The knowledge, that only God can give life and growth to people, will send us begging. Intercession seemed to the interceding friend as his only hope to find help, the only way to express his love for his friend in need. This is a warning to workers who think they can work in their own strength and wisdom. This is at the same time an encouragement to workers who feel weak. The simplest and weakest Christians can pray down blessings from the Almighty God.

(T) The fourth truth. The interceding friend must believe that his very able friend will help. What the interceding friend did not have, another friend could supply! The interceding friend had another friend living nearby. He knew that this friend was both able and willing to give what he needed. He was sure that if he only asked, he would receive. Therefore he went out at midnight to his very able friend's house to ask for the bread that he needed. Our very able friend is nobody else than the God of the Bible and he is the Almighty God. He is very near to every Christian. The Bible is full of promises that God hears our prayers, and that God is both able and willing to give what we need. The testimonies of many Christians urge us to believe that what we cannot possibly do for the needy people ourselves, God can and will do in answer to our intercession.

(S) The fifth truth. The interceding friend must pray with boldness and persistence. The interceding friend asked his very able friend for help, "Friend, please lend me three loaves of bread!" However, the faith of the interceding friend encountered a sudden and unexpected check: his very able friend refused to give help. His very able friend said, "I can't get up and give you anything." How little did the loving heart of the interceding friend count on this disappointment! But the interceding friend decided not to give up at this setback. So he kept on pressing his plea, "I have a friend in

need. You have abundance. I am your friend. Please help me!” The interceding friend refused to accept a denial. Instead, he asked with *boldness* or *persistence*. He kept on knocking on his very able friend’s door and he refused to stop asking for help. His love for his needy friend must win!

(T) The sixth truth. The interceding friend must be certain that his very able friend will help. Jesus says, “I tell you, because of the man’s boldness or persistence he will give him as much as he needs.” If we will only believe in God’s faithfulness, then intercession will be the first thing we do when we seek help for other people! Then intercession will be the last thing for which we cannot find time! Intercession will be hard work, but a hopeful work as well as a joyful work, because all the time we intercede, we know that God will answer in his own time. Disappointment is impossible, because Jesus says, “He will give him as much as he needs.” Time spent in prayer will yield more than time given to work only. Prayer makes your work worthwhile as well as fruitful. Prayer opens the way for God to do his work *in us* as well as *through us* at the same time. Through prayer we secure the presence and the power of God to go with us. The secret of fruitful work is *first to receive* from God and *then to give* to people. Between our powerlessness and God’s almighty power, intercession is the blessed link.

(S) The characteristics of the true intercessor are therefore: a *knowledge* of the needs of people; a Christ-like *love* to meet such needs; a *consciousness* of personal inability to meet those needs; *faith* in the power of prayer; *courage* to persevere asking in spite of difficulties; and the *assurance* that God will answer in his own time.

(T) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Next week we will study the parables of the doctor and the sick and the salt and the light. As preparation, please read Matthew 9:9-13 and Matthew 5:13-16.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom and www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.