

Life: God's promise of answered prayer

September 11, 2015

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Sept. 27 focuses on Luke 11:5-13.*

Scott Joplin wrote several popular jazz songs, most notably "The Entertainer." Another piece he wrote was "Maple Leaf Rag," which I heard a child play beautifully at a piano concert. Everyone in the audience bounced along with the snappy tune. The next year, another child selected the same piece and played the same notes, only this time, the audience didn't get into the tune. The child mechanically played the notes with no feeling or heart.

In Luke 11:1-4, Jesus taught the disciples what to pray. In verses 5-13, he taught them how to pray. Using the musical illustration, he gave them the notes of prayer in verses 1-4, and in verses 5-13, he taught them how the notes can make an impact.

Keep asking because God will answer (Luke 11:5-10)

Jesus told the disciples a parable illustrating how to pray. A certain man had unexpected late-night guests, and they caught him without any food he could serve. This would have been a huge embarrassment in Jesus' social world.

So, the man went at midnight to his friend to get enough food to supply a quick meal for his unexpected company. Since the hour was so late, the friend did not want to get up and get the bread. Such late-night commotion in the home would have awakened everyone, especially the children who can be so difficult to get back to sleep.

The first man persisted, and the friend finally relented, not because of friendship but shame. It would have brought shame upon him and his family to refuse giving the food and commit an act lacking in hospitality.

What's the point? Children learn at an early age who will give them what they want if they just ask with persistence. Is Jesus saying God can be badgered into giving us what we want if we ask enough? Of course not.

The man's friend gave the bread, even though it resulted in waking up his children. The friend did not give the bread because of the first man's persistence. Rather, he gave the bread to avoid shame. So, Jesus taught if a man will act to avoid shame to do the right thing, then how much more will God do for those who ask him in prayer?

Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray. Basically, he said don't be shy about talking to God. Talk to him frequently. It's never midnight with God. He's always ready to hear those who pray in humility and dependence on him.

Jesus stressed his teaching by giving three simple commands. Ask, seek, knock. "ASK" makes a good acronym to remember these three words. Each imperative shows an increasing amount of urgency in prayer.

"Ask" is a simple request, and Jesus stressed the importance of constant asking. This may be pictured by someone sitting and asking aloud several times, "Where are my keys?"

Next comes the effort to "seek." This word shows more urgency in the search. This point may be illustrated with the man missing his keys actually getting up from his seated position and begin searching for his keys.

Finally, the word "knock" involves a higher level of urgency in the hunt. It's more than making a simple request by asking. It's more than putting forth an effort to seek and search. It's a persistent knock on a door in an effort to get at what is desired.

Using the illustration of the man who lost his keys, we note how he recognizes a need for help in his search. So, he goes next door and knocks on his neighbor's door in order to enlist his help to find the lost keys. ASK. Ask, seek, knock.

One who prays with such fervor will be heard by God who will answer the prayer. Of course, no one should believe continually asking God for something will result in getting what is requested. God is not obligated to answer prayers based on the terms set by the petitioner. Rather, God will give what is needed in accordance with the request.

Trust God to answer out of his goodness (Luke 11:11-13)

Children love getting gifts from their parents. In turn, parents receive a rich blessing by giving to their kids. Now, if a child wants to order fish at a local restaurant, the parent isn't going to order a snake instead. Or if the child wants eggs for breakfast, a scorpion won't be served. Of course not. Parents know how to give good gifts. They don't give harmful or cruel gifts.

If parents know how to give good gifts, then God definitely knows how to give them. In employing this lesser-to-greater argument, Jesus stressed God gives good gifts, and the best gift is the Holy Spirit. Count on it.

Prayer results in relationship. Asking, seeking and knocking assumes a relationship exists. In any relationship, communication is needed. If only one party seems to speak, then a further pursuit of two-way communication is necessary. If it seems God is not answering prayer, then keep praying. God wants a relationship with his followers, and he will speak. He will answer prayer. He gives good gifts. What could be a more wonderful gift than being in an intimate and loving relationship with God?