

Praying with Persistence?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 March 2011

Preacher: Andrew Reid

[0 : 00] Our Father and Lord, open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things from your word. Soften our hearts that we might receive that word.

Transform our wills that we might be doers of it. Loose our tongues that we might proclaim it. And we ask this for the glory of your Son in whose name we pray. Amen.

Now I want to begin tonight's Bible talk with a story. I want you to imagine a little old lady. She boards this crowded bus and she looks down the aisle of the bus and she notices that there are no empty seats.

And so she stops beside a seated girl and then she holds her hand to her chest and she says imploringly, If you knew what I have, you would give me your seat.

And the girl immediately gets up and gives her seat to this old lady. Now this day is a summer's day and the bus is not air conditioned. And so the girl takes out a fan and she begins just fanning herself.

[1 : 09] And the little old woman, she sees the fan and so she says to the girl, If you knew what I have, you would give me that fan. And so the girl obligingly gives her the fan.

And finally the little old lady, well she gets up and she works her way down to the front of the bus and she says to the bus driver, Stop! I want to get off here. And the bus driver patiently tries to explain that he just can't drop her off anywhere.

You know, there's regulated stops that she has to stop at. And the old woman puts her hand to her chest and she says, If only you knew what I had, you would let me off right here.

And the driver pulls over. She exits the bus. And the bus driver says to her, Madam, what exactly is it that you have?

And the woman turns and smiles and says, Kutzpah. Now, most of you don't know what Kutzpah is. But Kutzpah is a Jewish word.

[2 : 13] It is a Yiddish word that has come, well it's a Yiddish word that has come into modern Hebrew and subsequently into modern English, particularly North American English. Kutzpah is a quality of audacity or insolence or impertinence.

It is used to describe someone who has overstepped the boundaries of accepted behaviour. It has all the connotations of gall, brass and nerve, effrontery, incredible guts and perhaps even some coarser ways of putting it.

But the classic example is, of Kutzpah is this. A boy has been convicted in a court of murdering his parents. You can look up this example on the internet.

It's a classic example of Kutzpah. Just before sentencing. So here he has. Everyone recognises he is guilty of murdering his parents. And just before sentencing, he turns to the judge and he begs for leniency.

On what grounds? That he's an orphan. Here are some other examples. Kutzpah is when someone gives a bald man a comb.

[3 : 23] Kutzpah is a chef arguing that the best vegetarian meal has meat in it and then serving it. Or Kutzpah is going into an opera house just wearing a bathing suit and then depositing it, the wardrobe on the way in.

In my view, the closest English word for Kutzpah is gumption, which most of you probably don't know and have never come across. Or if you have, you don't know what it means.

Gumption is bold, aggressive, shameless initiative or aggressiveness in pursuing a purpose. It is gutsy behaviour where you just think, I want to accomplish this and I'm going to accomplish it no matter what.

And it often cuts across all accepted norms. Now friends, as we look at the parable tonight, I want you to keep those images of Kutzpah in your mind.

And those definitions in mind. I want you to remember Kutzpah. I want you to remember gumption. Those words will help us later on as we try and grapple with what is going on in this parable about prayer that Jesus teaches.

[4 : 28] So turn with me in your Bibles, if they're not still open, to chapter 11 of Luke's Gospel, verses 5 to 8. You'll need to have it open in front of you. Now the first thing I want you to, I want to say, is that to understand this parable, you need to notice a couple of things about its context.

You see, first, look at the content in terms of what has gone before and what comes after. So have a look at the parable, see what goes before and what comes after. In verse 1a, a disciple comes to Jesus and asks, Will you give us some teaching on prayer?

And in the following verses, Jesus teaches them what it is that they should pray for. And the prayers are to be focused on their community. They should have the same sort of content as the Lord's Prayer has.

So our parable is clearly not about content. You see, he's already given that. People said, What should I pray for? He says, All right, here are the sorts of things you should pray for. And he goes through the Lord's Prayer.

Jesus is telling a parable rather about attitude. That is how they should approach God. So if the Lord's Prayer is about content, this is about attitude in approaching God.

[5 : 39] And then in verses 9 to 13, that's the following section, Jesus tells them about the God that they're praying to. He's a God who is generous and kind. Can you see it there? So I say, Ask and it will be given to you.

Search and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. Everyone who searches find. For everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Is there any one of you, if your child asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if a child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? Can you see what those verses are saying? They're saying, Here is the God that you're praying to. This God is generous and kind. He is a God who is like a father, who loves to give good things to his children.

Particularly, he longs to give them the good and great gift of the Holy Spirit. So there's the context of the parable. And this parable is set right in the middle of those two things. Now we'll need to remember this as we look at the parable itself.

[6 : 45] But there's one more bit of context that we need to understand. The other bit of context is cultural. There are two notes about culture you need to understand to understand this parable.

The first has to do with hospitality. You see, those of you who have read your Old Testaments know something about the importance and necessity of hospitality in the ancient world.

You see, if you were visited and you were in the ancient world, you can get an example of this if you want to read it later in Genesis 18. If you were invited, it was very important that you did the right thing.

Sorry, if you were invited to someone's house, the host had to do the right thing by you. If someone came into your household, you had to be a good host. You needed to care for your visitor.

Your community needed to care for the visitor that you had. To allow a visitor to be uncared for in your village or your tent or your house was a huge shame and disgrace.

[7 : 49] And in the ancient world, to be shamed, to suffer disgrace, was a terrible thing. Now, the second bit of culture has to do with village life in the first century.

You see, most villages consisted of houses, not like, you know, over there at the vicarage or not like most of the houses that you live in. They were not huge mansions.

They were one-room places. One-room houses. Everything happened in that one room. You ate there. You cooked there.

You entertained there. You slept there. And the whole family slept there, all largely in one room. And your one-room house was cheap by jail with every other house in the village.

So, you know, here was your house, one room. Right next door was another one-room house. And you just kept on going, not down neat little streets, but all over the place. And in villages, there was no evening shopping.

[8 : 49] Bread was baked every day to meet the needs of a household. So there's the context of this parable. So let's look at what happened. Have a look at it. Verse 6. Jesus paints the picture of a problem.

He imagines the scene. There you are in your little packed village. And it's late at night. And a friend arrives. And you're meant to do the right thing. And you're meant to exercise hospitality. And if you don't, it'll be great shame.

But you find you've got no bread. Now, the problem presents you with a choice. What can you do? You've got no bread. Late at night, you can do one of two things.

The first is you can think to yourself, well, I just have to be inhospitable. I can send my friend off to bed without any food. If he can find a bed somewhere.

Or even if you bring him into your house, but offer him no food. Your second option is to put caution to the wind and to be bold. That is, you could go next door and wake up your neighbor and see if he can help.

[9 : 49] Perhaps he could lend you some bread. Now, neither of these options is without problems. You see, if you chose to be inhospitable, then what are you going to do? You're going to paint yourself as being a failure, as a host.

First, and you would be one who's known from this moment on, who mistreats his friends. You would be one who brings shame on you, your family, and even on your whole little village.

They would be known as those who have let down visitors. The second option is not without problems either. You see, after all, rousing your neighbor has some costs involved in it.

First, you've got to get his attention. Now, that may mean rousing a reasonable section of the whole village population. You see, you're not going next door to 38 Queen Street.

You're going into the next door bedroom. And everyone's around, you know, because they've all got their own little houses. And it means waking up everyone. And second, he has undoubtedly locked his door.

[10 : 51] And usually in that first century situation, there's an iron bar placed through the rings on the door panels inside. And so what he's going to have to do is he's going to have to get up.

And in doing so, he's got to disturb his whole family. They are probably sleeping with him on the one usual shared mat in the house. And even if he can manage to get up without waking his family, removing the iron bar is undoubtedly going to create noise.

Now, any of us, especially those of us who have children, can identify with the friend. We don't want to disturb our family late at night.

You wake up little Johnny or whatever, you know, and he's going to be awake the rest of the night. And you've got to settle the whole family. And they're right next door, next to you. Any of them creates a disturbance. Everyone's going to be awake. Anyway, the parable is clear as to which option this man chooses.

Verse 7 indicates that he goes. And there's a touch of humor in the whole thing. You see, listen to the neighbor in verse 7. The neighbor says, And so he answers from within.

[12 : 01] Do not bother me. The door has already been locked. My children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything. Then look at what Jesus says. Jesus makes clear that the issue here is not one of friendship.

The friend does not get up and give this man anything because he's his friend. No, he gets up and gives him stuff for another reason.

And that's where the trouble comes. You see, I want you to read the second half of verse 8. Can you see it there? Second half of verse 8, he says this. Now friends, I think there is a problem here with our translation.

The first problem is, have you had any hint in this little parable that there has been any insistence on the part of the friend? Do you think he's been persistent? That he's insisted on something? There's no hint of that here in the text, is there? The second problem is that the Greek word here only occurs here in the New Testament. And it has probably been mistranslated.

[13 : 12] It can have the sense of persistence when it's used elsewhere. But it probably more commonly means shameless, reckless, audacious, insolent behavior.

In other words, it's the word you'd use of someone who is willing to do something or say something that might even risk social ostracism. It's the word that you'd use for someone who is willing to boldly, shamelessly not conform to rules in order to accomplish something.

Here's this man, he wants to be hospitable, so he knocks boldly on the door, gets up his neighbor, asks for bread in the middle of the night, is unashamed that he's got to wake up his whole household to do it.

Can you see what Jesus is saying? He's saying that the friend doesn't respond because of friendship. He responds because his friend has nerve. That guy inside that house, he thinks, you have got kutzpah.

You are bold. You're shameless. You have gall. You have gumption. You are willing to go to any lengths for it to be a good host.

[14:20] In other words, I think the NRSV, our translation, has got it wrong. And many other translations have got the right idea. But I want to offer you an alternative translation. This, our friends, is an Andrew Reid special.

You heard it here first. And it goes like this. Jesus says in verse 8, I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you anything because he is his friend, at least because of his gumption he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

Or if you prefer the version I prefer, it is this one. Jesus says, I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his kutzpah, he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

Friends, I wonder if you can hear what Jesus is saying. Can you hear what he is telling us? Jesus is telling us about the sort of attitude we should have when we go to God in prayer.

He is saying, you need to have guts when you approach God. God, you should be bold, full of gumption. Have some kutzpah when you approach God.

[15:27] Now, I wonder what that would look like. Well, remember what I said at the beginning? I said that the prayers that Jesus prayed in verses 1 to 4 were prayers about the community. I think, well, let's think about how our prayer life would change if we prayed as Jesus has suggested.

For a start. I don't think we'd pray the rather emasculated prayers that we often pray in church. I think we would enter boldly into God's presence and we would ask specifically and boldly for God to be at work.

We would come believing that he's a good God who loves to give good gifts. And we would name the things that we wanted him to do. We wouldn't sort of pussyfoot around and, you know, sort of sidle up to him and say, you know, please, you know, maybe in broad terms, could you give us these sorts of things?

No. We would say to him, please give us the good things that we know you want to give. Please turn people to Christ. Please, my neighbour, George, turn him or him to Christ.

Please, this suburb, turn it to Christ. Please give us revival here. Please be at work through your spirit. Now, friends, I want to tell you and I want to admit before you that my prayer life is often rather pathetic in its boldness.

[16:51] I am really often not willing to take risks in my prayer life. I'm not willing to believe that God hears and is keen to answer. There have been times when I have. And you know what? Typically, he has.

I have been rebuked by this parable time and time again. Every time I preach from it, I'm rebuked by it. And I don't think I'm alone. You see, I think that our prayer life as individuals and congregations is often pathetic in its boldness.

It is so wimpish. You know, it is really weak. We are largely not willing to take risks in prayer. We are not willing to believe that God is a God who hears and who is absolutely keen to answer our prayers.

We just think about some of the great people of prayer in the Bible and the things that they pray. Think about Moses. God said to him, I'm going to leave these people, leave them alone.

We'll go off and, you know, I'll create something with just you and me again. And Moses says, God, you can't do that. If you do that, this is what the nations will think. You cannot do that.

[18:01] Please do not do it. Change your mind about this. Now, most of us would think, oh, no, we can't get God to change. No, no, that's a bit. No, no, that would that would cause a front to God.

No, no, not Moses. He's quite happy to do it. Think about Hannah. She's barren and persecuted, but she refuses to dwell on it. One Samuel one tells us that she stands up.

She goes into the presence of God represented by the temple and God's priest, and she boldly puts it on the table before him and he hears her. Well, think of Daniel. He and his friends are threatened

with extermination in Daniel chapter 2.

They're faced with a king who's angry because he can't understand his dreams. And Daniel and his friends, they boldly plead for mercy from the God of heaven that they will not be executed along with all the other wise men.

And during the night, the mystery is revealed to Daniel in a dream. Or think of the early Christians in Acts chapter 4. They know that God has given them the task of gospel proclamation, but they are being harshly persecuted.

[19 : 04] And so they recall Psalm 2. And they acknowledge that God is sovereign. And they beseech him. Look, look at the threats that we are receiving here.

They say, please enable us to speak your word with great boldness. And God, who's ready to give his Holy Spirit, does exactly that. You see, he's waiting. Well, I was giving good things to his children.

So he gives them the Holy Spirit that they might speak boldly. And as they pray, the place where they are meeting is shaken. They're filled with the Holy Spirit.

And they speak the word of God boldly. Not only that, but as the succeeding verses tell us in Acts, they respond with godly living. Friends, I hope that this parable tonight has rebuked you as it rebukes me every time I think about it.

Let's together decide. We're going to change. If you're a person that has gumption in prayer, and there will be some in a congregation because God will raise them up, if you have gumption in prayer, then please help us.

[20 : 12] Let's be more forthright. Let's be bolder. Let's take God and Jesus at his word. You see, Jesus is not saying that God will always answer in the way that he wants.

Please, in the way that we want. Please don't read me as saying that. He will not always answer in the way that we want. But what he is saying is, don't be afraid to ask and come boldly to me because I am a father who gives good gifts to his children.

And I want to do it. I'm not a father who's stingy and holds back or gives evil things. No, I love and want to give good things.

So come and ask me for them. And let's determine to do as Jesus suggests. Let's remember that he's a God who loves to be generous. He loves giving good gifts to his children.

Friends, get away from this image that, you know, I've got to go and I'll knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. And finally I'll badger God into listening. No, no, no.

[21 : 19] He doesn't sit on the other side of the door saying another 20 times, 30 times, 40 times, 50 times. No, he's not like that. He is a good God who loves to give good things to his children.

So get the stingy God out of your brains. Our God is generous and kind. A loving Father who gives good gifts to his children. Approach it.

Have some guts in your prayer life. Have some kutzpah. Be bold. Come to him bold and ask him boldly.

Stretch yourself in your prayer life. God loves it. He wants us to be bold. He wants us to have kutzpah in prayer. So let's pray.

Father God, please forgive us for our tentative approach to you as we pray. Thank you that you are the God who loves to be generous.

[22 : 22] Thank you that you are the God who loves to give good gifts to his children. Please help us to be bold in prayer. To even, as it were, be shameless in prayer.

And Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.