

TELL ME THE STORIES OF JESUS
“A Story About Friendship”
Luke 11:1, 5-13

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Sermon preached from the pulpit of First Baptist Church Merritt Island, Florida, on Sunday, June 28, 1998, by Dr. David H. McKinley, Pastor.

On an unusually busy Saturday, I had some personal projects that I needed to work on and some family responsibilities to tend to. In addition, I had ministry commitments and responsibilities. When I finally completed the activities of the day, I put on an oversized T-shirt and a very relaxed-fit pair of shorts. Then, I just plopped in a big chair in our living room! I love to sit in my living room because it is the coolest room in my house. On these hot days, there is nothing quite like coming in and just sitting in that cool room. I took my shoes off and started digging my feet down in the carpet. I was grateful to be sitting there cool and comfortable for a few minutes. After a few minutes of chilling out, I looked down at those two big footprints where I had dug my feet and thought, “Now, how am I going to explain this to my wife?” (She had just finished vacuuming this carpet.)

As I was sitting there looking at those footprints, I thought about an experience a number of years ago that Connie and I had. We were living in West Palm Beach, Florida. On a beautiful, sunny, South Florida morning we got up and went to breakfast together. We decided that, since it was a Saturday morning, we would go out and make some ministry contacts. The first house that we drove to we could see the sun shining through the trees, and the yard was freshly mowed. I walked up the pathway towards the house with Connie on my arm.

When we got there, I made a step just before she did and it seemed as though I slid just a little bit. I took the next step up to the porch and about that time she slid and I sort of bounced back. I wondered what was going on! We walked up on the porch and as I looked back, I suddenly noticed that the step we had stepped on had just been freshly painted with white paint. There were our footprints on that step! To make matters worse, we had just stepped onto the porch and they had fresh green AstroTurf carpet. There, all over that porch, were white spots where we had somehow walked and turned around, wondering what we had slipped on.

I had a very important judgment call to make. I could simply try to slip back off the porch, get back in the car, and leave. I could never even note that we were there. I was scared to death that if I did that, though, they would look out the window and recognize us. I did not know who we were going to visit. I just knew they had been to our church. I thought, “If I just leave and drive away that will be terrible!” So, I came up with a great plan. I knew that I had to do something so I rang the doorbell. The lady opened the door and I said, “Hello, I am from First Presbyterian Church.”

Actually, I decided there really was nothing I could do but just confess. I rang the doorbell and the lady opened the door. I said, “Ma’am, I am from First Baptist Church. I am so sorry that I have just messed up your whole porch. I was trying to come and tell you that we were so grateful

that you have come to be with us at our church. She said, “I have enjoyed coming to the church but my husband has never been.” (I am thinking that he is the guy that just did the painting. He was probably somewhere around the side of the house and was going to be wondering about this.) I will never forget how embarrassed I was that day as I stood on that porch and saw my footprints all over their carpet. There was nothing that I could do about it to make the situation right.

What I experienced there that day, looking at my footprints, reminds me a little bit of what I think a lot of us experience when it comes to prayer in our lives. In each one of our lives, there are moments when we attempt to pray because we know that we should pray. Yet, in reality, we feel that our prayers are nothing more than footprints that trample the doorway of heaven. We many times feel that our prayers get no further than the front door of heaven. We go away feeling that our petitions have fallen and we are embarrassed and defeated. Jesus does not want us to live with such an attitude about prayer. Prayer is one of the greatest privileges in all of the Christian life. It is one of the greatest opportunities that you can ever embrace.

In Luke 11 Jesus taught a parable about prayer. This parable will help us to know how we can stand confidently and pray in the moment of need. We will also see how God meets our needs when we pray. Luke 11:1,

“Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray,’...”

If you study the scripture, you will find that of all of the things that the disciples could have asked Jesus, this was the one thing they did ask Him. They never said, “Lord, teach us to preach.” They never said, “Lord, teach us how to perform miracles.” They said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” I believe there is such a yearning in the hearts and the lives of people that you would say with those disciples, “Lord, teach me to pray. I do not want to go on living my life feeling embarrassed on Your doorstep. I do not want to feel that my prayer is nothing more than trampling heaven with my footprints. I want to feel that I can stand before You.” If that is your yearning, I think the Master Teacher on prayer has some insight for you. Luke 11:1-4,

“... ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’ So He said to them, ‘When you pray, say:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us day by day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
For we also forgive everyone
who is indebted to us.
And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one’.”

Jesus gave them a model prayer. When they said, “Lord, teach us to pray”, He repeated what He had said on the Sermon on the Mount. He again gave them a digest of the simple elements of prayer. Then, He went on to picture it. Luke 11:5,

“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. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!’”

What an incredible portion of scripture this is on the subject of prayer! The central part of this is the parable of the friend at midnight. This was a friend who had a friend who traveled a long way and came to his home unannounced and unexpected.

In the opening of the story we have a friend in need, a late arrival. In that day and time, it was not possible, when you were riding on your camel, to simply reach back in your leather pouch, pull up your cellular phone and dial and say, “I am sorry. I am going to be a little bit late.” In fact, this friend did not even know that his friend was coming. When you traveled in that day, you simply embarked on a journey and you got there when you got there. It may have been that this man had been traveling late in the day because of the heat of the midday sun. It is also possible that he got delayed somewhere along the way and that delay pushed him later than he thought. Regardless of what the circumstances were, we just simply have this kind of frame. A late arrival shows up at his friend’s house after a long journey.

The next scene moves us from that frame to a knock on the door. The man who was there when his friend arrived immediately recognized that he had no provisions. It was common in that day to get up in the morning and bake the bread, to prepare the food that you would need for that day. Anything else would basically perish. As a result, he had no food in the house. Recognizing that the friend had come and had needs, he decided that he had to leave his house and go to his next door neighbor’s house. He wanted to see if his next door neighbor would provide something that he could give his friend. Obviously, he could not simply go out, stand on the Judean hillside, look out and see a bright red 7-11 sign and go buy some Wonder Bread. The only alternative that he had was to take this need to his next-door neighbor.

You will understand this even more when you understand that in those days and times, when a traveler came, the way that traveler was treated was a reflection of the whole village. For this neighbor to have failed to have met the need of this man would have been a shame to his entire

village. It was important to him to be willing to demonstrate hospitality. It was a great virtue in that day.

I remember that I experienced something like this a number of years ago when I went to Cuba. I was in little homes and villages on the outskirts of Havana. I have never been treated by people more graciously and with more hospitality than I was there. They had very little more than a lot of dried beans, some very hard rice, and some tomatoes that basically were green to eat. Yet, they were careful to be sure that everything they had or could have would be on the table. If they could get even a portion of meat, they would take it, even if it involved what would normally be something that they would eat within a month. They would put it all in front of us because they wanted to treat us with hospitality.

It was a critical cultural virtue in that day to meet the needs of travelers and strangers. So, this man, having a late arrival in his home, goes next door, knocks on the door, and says to his friend, “Hey, get up! I need three loaves of bread.”

That takes us to the next scene, the scene inside of the house. It might be easy to us to see ourselves getting up, stumbling to the door, opening it, and saying, “What do you want?” That was not the case at all! He could not flip on a light switch. He had to get up and light a torch of some kind from maybe a fire or an ember. He had to begin to arouse the entire house. The way that they slept in those days would be that every member of the family would be sleeping all in the same pattern on the floor. The reality was, he would probably wake up his children. I do not know if you have woken your children in the middle of the night, but it is not always enjoyable for some. Some will just sleep right through anything. Others, though, will keep you up for the rest of the night. So, there was a risk here.

The Bible says that the man called out initially and said, [paraphrased] “Hey, my kids are in bed, my family is down. Why don’t you go away?” However, the final scene in this frame is a beautiful scene because the man stood outside, knocked, and waited. Finally, his neighbor came to the door. The Bible says that when he asked for the bread, that he gave him as many as he needed. He did not simply leave with three loaves of bread, but he left with everything he needed. What a wonderful picture that is of the need being met by this neighbor, and the hospitality! It is an incredible story as we see it unfolding!

I think you have the picture of basically what happened that night between the friend, the traveler, and his neighbor. However, I want to take you from the obvious to some of the specific observations that we need to see from this story.

First, everything that is said and shared in this parable is based on the principle of *relationship*. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus, the Son of God, appealed to the Father in heaven, teaching us to pray. A friend went to a friend at midnight because there was a relationship there. Then, we see a son asking something of his father and the father meeting the need of his son. Four different levels of relationships are seen in this passage. A crucial principle of observation is that the critical foundational ground of all praying is a relationship.

One of the primary reasons that many of us fail at the point of prayer is because we do not understand that the basis of prayer is a relationship with God. If we were to take the picture of the stranger of the friend at midnight, we would see that prayer is an appeal to our friendship with God. You have the ability to come to God as a friend. Jesus said, [paraphrased] “I called you friends.” A friend in need is a friend indeed. Jesus is the friend that sticks closer than a brother. God is the One who is willing, on the basis of friendship, to help when you have a need in your life.

Yet, not only do we see that ideal friendship, we see the picture of sonship because it begins with us praying to the Father. Then, we see the son who comes with the need before his father. Prayer is an appeal based on a relationship. If you have ever felt that sometimes your prayers are not getting anywhere, maybe the first thing that you need to do is stop and ask yourself this question: “Do I have a relationship with God?” Many people fail in prayer because they assume that they can just ring the doorbell of heaven and run, and maybe they will get God’s attention.

It is like a little boy that I heard about. He was standing on a doorstep, on his tiptoes, stretching to ring the doorbell. He could not quite reach it. He was waiting and waiting and finally, a little lady came by and saw him. She thought she should help him so she walked up and said, “Son, here, let me help you.” She picked him up. He reached over and rang the doorbell. She put him down and said, “Now what?” He said, “Run like crazy!”

Sometimes I think that is what we do with God in prayer. We think we can ring the doorbell and maybe we will get His attention. Then, we will just run off and maybe God will show up and do something for us. However, it is not a hit or miss. It is not just punching the doorbell of heaven and leaving. Prayer is engaging yourself in a relationship with God. It is a friendship. It is a sonship. It is a relationship with God. When we have that relationship with Him, we can be confident that whatever we need we can find in Him.

I love what Hebrews says. Hebrews 4:13,

“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Secondly, not only do we make the observation in this parable about a relationship, I do think that it is important that I point out to you some things about the *request*. There was a consistent request made. Beginning in Luke 11:3,

“Give us day by day our daily bread.”

Look in Luke 11 as we go into the parable now. Luke 11:5 says that a man went to his friend, to his next door neighbor at midnight and he said to him, “Friend, lend me three loaves.” He was talking about bread. In Luke 11:11,

“If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone?...”

Each time we see a request for bread, each of those requests is specific because there is a specific need that bread represents. That is the substance and the sustenance of life. What we are learning here in observation is that we have the ability, based on relationship, to come to God with every request of need in our lives. There is a dependency that is expressed in prayer. There is the expression of that which I need to live and whatever I need I can and I must come to God to find.

In this parable we see a relationship. Next, we see a request. Thirdly, we see a response. The man who went to his friend at midnight and knocked on the door, walked away with all of the bread that he needed. The son who came to his father and asked that his father would provide his need, found that his father was more than willing to meet the needs of his life. What we have is a relationship which is the foundation of prayer. We have a request which is the essence of prayer. We have a response which is the promise of prayer that God will respond when we call upon Him.

Let me take a moment to clarify something that I think is very important about this parable. The most natural way in which we tend to view this parable is that we see ourselves as the person who goes to the door. We see God as the One who is behind that closed door. Then, we see ourselves knocking on that door to get what we need. When we leave, we leave with all that we need because we were willing to persist until we got it. That is the most common interpretation of this parable. I have so often seen it or heard it many times preached that way. However, I want to challenge that thinking for just a moment. I do not believe that what Jesus was giving us in this parable was a comparison between ourselves and that friend. I do not believe that this was simply an allegory, a picture of God and of you and of me. The reason that I do not believe that is this:

1. Does God ever sleep? Do you think that when you pray and start seeking God that the first thing that you have to do is say, “Wake up, God!” The Bible says, [paraphrased] “He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.” ***God is not asleep!*** I think you have a little bit of a problem with your theology when you make God the one sleeping in the house.

2. You will find that when this man went to his neighbor he had to deal with his neighbor’s reluctance and resistance. The neighbor initially said to the man, “Go away! My kids are down. I cannot meet your need or your request right now.” I want you to know that nowhere in the Bible is God ever seen as being resistant to our approach or to our appeal when we come to Him with a need. ***God is never resistant!*** God says, [paraphrased] “Come to me!” God is not resisting us so that we have to somehow try to figure out how to get around His resistance so we can approach Him the right way. That is not at all the picture of what prayer is about.

3. ***God is not forced by our persistence!*** People have the idea that what real heavy-duty praying entails is getting in the face of God and just staying there -- staying on God and staying after God until God just gets so exhausted and so exasperated with them that He just says, “O.K., have it your way!”

Is that what prayer really is? That is how we so often see it . Jesus was not giving us an allegory, a comparison of how we have to somehow force God to work on our behalf. Instead, Jesus began by addressing him as the Father. Jesus told the story about the friend, and then He came back to the essence of what it is to approach your Father with a need. What He was showing was not a comparison, but a *contrast*. A contrast, between a friend who, out of culture and out of responsibility, would ultimately do something because a friend came to him. Yet, how much more a father is responsible to care for and to meet the needs of his children!

When you pray, prayer is not some way that you come to God and through your persistence and your obnoxious importunity eventually make God do something for you. Prayer and persistence are not somehow manipulating God. It is, instead, coming to an understanding that God loves you, and God wants every need that you have to be brought to Him. He, like a loving father, who already knows what you need before you ask it, stands ready to meet that need.

That even gets clearer when you see how Jesus responded. He told a story about the man who had a friend come at midnight and how a man finally got up and met the need. Yet, this is how Jesus interpreted it: if a friend would do this for a friend at midnight, then here is what I say to you: Luke 11:9,

“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

Simple directives -- ask, seek, knock. Yet, not only do we have those simple directives, but we also have an emphatic activity. If you will ask, if you will seek, if you will knock, then there is the powerful promise that you will receive, you will find, it will be opened. God is not a reluctant neighbor. He is a responsible Father. God wants to meet the need of your life. God is willing to meet the need of your life if you will simply come to Him and ask and seek and knock.

Let us look at those words for a minute. The word “ask ” is the word “petition.” Specifically, it means an expression of dependency. When I ask God for something I am saying, “God, I need you! I am dependent upon you.” Jesus is teaching us that whenever we have a need, the right place to go and the right thing to do is to ask of the Father, because we are all dependent creatures.

The problem is that we tend to see ourselves as independent creatures. We tend to think that we can handle this without God. Yet, the Lord wants us to understand that the way in which we are to live in relationship with Him is to bring our request to Him. Every time we ask something of God we are expressing this fact that we are dependent upon God.

The greatest lesson that you can learn is how dependent you really are upon Him. The greatest need of our lives is to understand that dependency and how great our need is for God. When we come to Him, because of who He is, no matter what the need, no matter what the crisis or the circumstance, our God is able to meet that need. Someone has penned,

“Thou art coming to a King.
Great petitions with thee bring.
For His grace and power are such
that no one can ever ask too much.”

The word “ask” is an expression of dependency. Not only does he express dependency, he says when you pray, **seek**. The word “seek” expresses desire. When you seek after something, you desire something. A part of God’s plan in prayer is that, through the process of prayer, the desire of your heart would be for God. God wants us to hunger and to thirst after righteousness. A very real part of what happens in the experience of prayer is that you become a seeker after God. God desires sincere seekers! He wants us to desire Him! The Psalmist expressed this so well in Psalm 119:2,

“Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!”

God wants us to be whole-hearted seekers. Prayer causes us to seek out intimacy with God that we might know Him and understand the faithfulness of His character in our lives. The interesting thing is that when we seek Him, He fulfills all of our desires. Psalms 37:4,

“Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.”

I know the way we like to read that. I delight in God and then He gives me whatever I want. No! You delight in Him, you seek Him, you desire God more than anything else, and you will find that He takes clusters of desire from heaven. He puts them in your heart so that He purifies and gives you the right kind of desires for living.

Prayer involves asking, expressing dependency. Prayer involves seeking, expressing desire. Then, prayer involves **knocking**, expressing desperation. When I am knocking on heaven’s door, it is not that I am demanding of God. It is that I am desperate for God! I am not just saying, “God, look at me! Look at me! Look at me!” I am saying, “God, I am looking to you! I am looking to you! I need you, O God!” When I knock, I, through the persistence of knocking, am expressing the desperation of my heart for God and for God alone.

What we so often want is our goals and our desires and our dreams. However, what prayer is really all about is coming to the place where what we really want is God. We realize that He is the kind of God, the kind of Father who is willing to meet every need if only we will come to Him and let Him take charge, instead of us trying to take charge. I Peter 5:5,

“...God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

When I am knocking on heaven’s door, I am coming because I am knocking with the humility that says, “I am desperate for God to work in my life!” It is not that I am there and I am going to keep beating the door down until I get my way. It is not that I am there and I am simply going to seek until God gives me what I seek. It is that I am there because I know that is where God is,

and I am going to come face to face with God because I understand that all of the needs of my life are ultimately summarized in the need that I have for Him. When that need is met, then every other need will be supplied. What a faithful Father He is!

His disciples asked that He teach them to pray. He tells them a story contrasting prayer and how willing and eager the Father is to meet their need. Wrapping up this wonderful parable, I think there are at least three specific directives that we need to take to heart that are being taught in this passage on prayer.

First, ***Do not avoid prayer!*** I am amazed at how little time many of us spend praying because we have learned to be content with the avoidance of prayer. Somehow, we feel that if we do not feel just right, if our words are not eloquently shaped and patterned, if we do not get in just the right posture when we pray, that prayer is not going to be answered. We think that this is just too much trouble. We wonder about whether or not God really answers prayer anyway. We feel like God is so busy running the universe that He surely does not have time for what I have, so most of us go through life just avoiding prayer.

I want you to know that what Jesus is saying to you and me is do not avoid prayer! What that means is do not avoid it even if you do not feel like it. I keep thinking that I have to feel a certain way to pray, that I have to get worked up to pray, but the Bible is teaching me that no, you come as a child. You come in desperation and in need, in dependency and desire. You come to God when you feel like it and even when you do not. You lay out your heart before God!

I am convinced that one of the reasons that we avoid prayer is that we are unwilling to get honest with God. Let us just get honest with ourselves. Don't you think God really knows what is going on in your mind and in your heart anyway? Don't you know that even those thoughts that you are ashamed of that He knows them? He already knows and sees those feelings that you are down on. God knows how you feel. God knows how you think. There is no benefit in your life by trying to avoid God until sometime when you feel more spiritual, like praying. You need to come to God just as you are. You need to bring the dependency and the desire and the desperation of your life into the arena of your relationship with Him. You need to get honest with God about who you are and where you are and pour out your heart before God.

If there is anything that the Psalms teaches us, it is to pour out our hearts to God. Listen to the Psalmist in Psalms 31:7,

“I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, for You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities,...Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; my eye wastes away with grief, yes, my soul and my body! For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away. I am a reproach among all my enemies...”

This guy is spilling his guts before God. He is saying, “Lord, I am stained!” “Lord, I have been rejected!” “Lord, I am ashamed!” “Lord, I need help!”

If there is something that I think Jesus wants you and me to learn about prayer, it is that we not only pray when we feel like praying, we pray because we need to pray. Do not avoid prayer! The Father knows where you are! He just wants you to come to Him.

Not only does Jesus teach us not to avoid prayer because God is available, and through His availability it is in prayer that He dispenses His grace to our need, but I also think that He is telling us not to fear prayer. ***Do not fear what will happen when you pray.*** I am convinced that many of us are afraid to pray because we are afraid that God will not come through.

I appreciate so much what Warren Weirsbe said in his brief commentary on the parables. He said, “We must never be afraid of answered prayer in the will of God. A loving father will never give his son anything that will harm him. If a son asks for bread, he will not give him a stone. The Father knows what we need and He will give us what is right. Never be afraid to pray and never be afraid of the answer to prayer.”

So many times I am convinced we do not pray because we are afraid. We are afraid that it might not turn out the way that we wanted it to. We are afraid that we do not really know how to shape the words and we are afraid that what God does is not going to be what we want. You do not have to fear prayer. You do not have to fear the outcome of praying because God is a Father who loves you and who is going to see to it that He answers and gives you His best. He just wants you to be dependent upon Him.

It was Charles Spurgeon who said, “When you can’t trace God’s hand, trust His heart.” There are days when you pray and you fear in prayer that you are not praying rightly. You cannot see Him working and your prayer is just an expression of the anguish and the agitation of your soul. Yet, when you pray you do not have to fear because God is going to answer that prayer. He is going to do it based on what He knows is best for you. Not only is prayer the dispensary of God’s grace when I come and when I ask, but it is also the crucible of conformity. God takes the bitter and the sweet and He crushes it and blends it. He makes it so that we begin to take the shape of Christ. I do not need to fear prayer because the ultimate outcome of prayer is that when I pray, and if I will pray, my life will be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

There is one final thing that I think He wants us to see. Not only should we not avoid prayer and not fear prayer, but **do not doubt prayer**. Do not pray with unbelief. Pray believing! For the Bible says, [paraphrased] “Ask, and it will be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened.” If that were not enough, Jesus came back a second time and said, [paraphrased] “For everyone who asks receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. Everyone who knocks, it opens.” God answers prayer!

God always answers prayer. He does not always answer it the way I want him to. Because I have a relationship with Him and He loves me as a heavenly Father, He always wants what is best for me. He is always attentive to my cry, to my call, but He does not always do it the way I want him to. While there may be the tendency to avoid prayer and to fear prayer, there is also that great tendency to doubt prayer. I want you to learn today that God can answer prayer in different ways. If you have never really embraced that, I want you to embrace that this morning because possibly this could help to clarify some of your doubts.

I do not know who originated this but I know that I think it is valuable:

1. If the request is wrong when I pray, God will say “No”.
2. If the timing is wrong, God says “Slow”.
3. If I am wrong, if there is something that needs to be made right in me, then God says “Grow”.
4. If the request is right and the time is right and I am right, then God says “Go”.

I just want to give living testimony that I am thankful for some of the “No” answers that I have gotten from God in my life. If God had said “Yes” to everything that I prayed, I probably would have married the wrong person, gone to the wrong school and served the wrong churches. God has many times in my life said “No.” When the request is wrong, it does not mean that God will not answer it. It means that His answer may be different than what I expected. When my request is wrong God has to purify my request. God has to change my heart. He has to give me new desires. When the request is wrong, God says “No.”

When the timing is wrong, God says “Slow.” When I want things to happen right away, God says to wait a minute. Slow down! It is not going to happen like that. Many times God sees to it in prayer that He slows us down, that we become still to know that He is God and to learn that when the timing is wrong, God says “Slow.”

Then, when I am wrong, God says “Grow.” Many times there are things in me that are immature and are incomplete. God allows me to be purified in the crucible of prayer that I might grow.

When the request is right and the time is right and you are right, then God says “Go.” It is so amazing when He does that! How many of you have ever prayed for something and God answered it? You could not believe it! It is amazing how many times we do not believe that God really answers! Yet, God always looks at the relationship, at the request, and at the right response, rather than simply letting us set the agenda, make our demands, twist His arm, wrestle Him down, or pole-vault over His resistance to get our way.

God is not interested in your request. God is interested in you. God wants to work in you when you pray. He is your friend that sticks closer than a brother. He is your Father who will never let you have a need to which He is not willing to respond. With the heart of the disciples we say, “Lord, teach us to pray!” There is such power in prayer! I want to be a person of prayer. I want to know what it is to pray personally, and walk with God. I want to know what it is to pray for others, and to see God work in their lives.

I was reminded of this recently when I read the introduction to a new book written by Mark Bubeck. In the introduction he says,

“Lynn came quietly into the kitchen where her mother was busily preparing a meal. A vivacious junior in college, Lynn seemed somewhat pensive, as if she were moved spiritually and emotionally. Her bouncy zip was subdued, her mood was sober and somber, her emotions were really near the surface. In fact, as she spoke, her eyes were brimming with tears. She looked at her mother and she said, ‘Mom, is Dad still going into our rooms every night like he did before

we went to college and praying for me and for Peter?’ Her mom, not prepared for the question and knowing that her dad was dedicated to his long-standing intercessory prayer vigils for their children and respecting the privacy of this part of his life and the dedication of his heart, was cautious in her answer. She looked at her daughter and she said, ‘Yes, he is. But, how did you know?’ She said, ‘Mom, I was in my room and I could see his footprints in the carpet by my bed and I knew that so much of what is happening in my life is because Dad is praying for me.’”

I do not know about you, but I want to know what it is like to have footprints in the carpet of earth and footprints on the doorway of heaven that I might know the power of prayer in my life.