

# THREE WORLDS OF THE TEXT

## THE IMPORTUNATE FRIEND

**Luke 11:5-13** New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE) *Perseverance in Prayer*  
5 And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; 6 for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' 7 And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.'  
8 I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

9 "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given

## THREE WORLDS OF THIS TEXT

### WORLD BEHIND THE TEXT.

Luke's Gospel was written around the middle of the eighth decade of the first century about the same time as Matthew's. Luke had access to the same sources as Matthew namely the Gospel of Mark and the sayings source known as Q. Luke was a Gentile writing for Gentile Christians.

Jesus was raised in a culture where hospitality was a high value. The Jewish people from Abraham on down honored their guests: Abraham prepared a meal for his three (angel) visitors (Genesis 18:3-8). Lot perceived his obligation towards his (angel) guests was even greater than his responsibility for the welfare of his own daughters (Genesis 19:2-8).

Laban, Jethro, Manoah, Samuel, David, the Shunammite woman, and others offered hospitality.

With such a high value -- and no corner convenience stores -- you can imagine the acute sense of anxiety of the man whose friend arrives for a visit about midnight. He **MUST** feed his visitor. That he has no bread in his house is no excuse.

Luke writes of a Jesus who paints the picture in a few strokes and his listeners can place themselves in the same situation.

So the man goes to his neighbor's house and calls to his neighbor inside, probably waking him, and appeals to him as a friend. The Greek word used is *philos*, an adjective that means, "loved, dear, loving, kindly disposed, devoted" as well as a noun, as found in our verse, "friend." It is the way a person addresses one with whom he is on good terms. Friendship is one of the important elements of this parable. Jesus' point is this: As strong as the bond of friendship is, it isn't strong enough to get the man out of his bed in the middle of the night.



you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 11 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for[a] a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? 12 Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? 13 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[b] to those who ask him!"

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The typical poor Israelite family lived in a one-room house. And in many poorer homes, the house also served as a part-time stable for the family's few sheep, goats, and chickens. All family members would sleep in the same room, sometimes on a raised platform, perhaps 18 inches higher than the floor of the rest of the house, so the family could eat and sleep without constant intrusions by their animals. Family members usually slept with their clothes on, covering themselves with the cloaks they had worn during the day. They would bed down side-by-side on straw mats rolled out at night.

Getting a whole family to bed was a considerable undertaking, as parents know. Once children are asleep, parents want to keep them that way. Once the chickens were asleep, parents would want to keep them that way, too.

The door was locked, too. The Greek word is *kleio*, "shut, lock, bar" ... of structures, "close, lock." "[3] The poorest homes would have had a bar across the door would have prevented the leather-hinged wood door from opening. Some homes may have been equipped with a primitive wooden lock using two- or three-pegged keys that would allow a bar to be lifted from its socket from the outside.

Since the door was locked, the friend couldn't just let himself in and get the bread he needed. The father would have to get up quietly from the sleeping area, find the bread in the food storage area, and cross the area where the animals were near the door, unlock the door, and give the bread to his neighbor. There would be no way to keep the household from waking up.

The point of the parable, of course, is the importance of persistence, of never giving up. But Jesus' expression, "because of the man's shamelessness" is remarkable. The friend has no sense of decency of waiting until morning, of not disturbing his sleeping neighbor. He goes at midnight and knocks -- for some bread! And he shamelessly keeps on knocking until his neighbor gets up and shoves bread at him just to shut him up. Shamelessness! Brashness! Boldness! Chutzpah! That's what the parable illustrates.

By these time Jesus' hearers are chuckling. The picture Jesus has painted has them imagining the man out the outside pounding, and the neighbor inside stumbling over children and chickens in order to get bread to the door as fast as he can. It is a humorous story. <sup>i</sup>



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## WORLD OF THE TEXT

In a certain sense, this scripture passage gospel can be subdivided into two parts:

- (1) the request of Jesus' disciples to be taught how to pray, and the teaching of the Lord's prayer (Our Father/pater noster) as a model (Luke 11:1-4), and
- (2) a more general teaching on the importance of persistence in prayer, and on God's goodness towards God's beloved children who come to God in need (Luke 11:5-13)

This particular parable, focusses on the need to be persevering in prayer and is found only in Luke. The expression "which one of you..." is used to introduce a rhetorical question, and will be used in other Lucan parables as well; often, the expected answer is an emphatic "no one!"

The scene is a Palestinian one-room house, with the family all in bed; the conflict is between the rules of hospitality and mutual aid which would be normal in village life in the east, and the trouble caused to a whole family by such an appeal at midnight. The moral seems to be: a pressing request from a friend, however importunate, will obtain whatever he needs. How much greater the efficacy of even an apparently importunate prayer, given the unconditional 'friendship' of God!"

In verse 8, Jesus says that, for no other reason, the homeowner will get up and offer something to his friend because of his ἀναίδεια, *anaideia*, which the NRSV renders as "persistence". Many Greek dictionaries suggest as much

Stronger meaning, however: "impudence, shamelessness, effrontery, insolence, gall". David H. Stern (Jewish new testament commentary, p. 123) suggests translating it with the Yiddish term *chutzpah*, which is probably as close to the real meaning as any other expression.

An addition, probably originating in the region of Antioch in the third century." 9-11: "does this justify the apparently unconditional promise, 'ask, and it will be given you'? As in Matthew, the answer is found in the analogy of a human father, who will hardly refuse food to his children, let alone give them a snake or a scorpion (a startling addition by Luke) instead of bread and eggs: if God is your father—and that he is so is a premise of the lord's prayer and of all Christian praying that begins Abba, 'father'—how much more will he grant the prayers of his children! But what prayers?



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Luke may have been conscious of the obvious connection: surely God does not answer all prayers? In Matthew's version, the promise seems quite general: God will give 'good things' to those who ask him.

According to Luke, there is only one prayer which will certainly be answered, that for the Holy Spirit."

Verses 11-12 are meant to be interpreted symbolically: just as scorpions or snakes conjure up the idea of death, so eggs and fish are sources of life.

#### THE WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT

##### REFLECTION BY:

*The Venerable Bede (ca. 672-735):*

Our Lord and Savior wishes us to attain the joy of the heavenly kingdom, and so he taught us to pray for it, promising to give it to us if we did so.

Ask, he said, and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.

We should consider most seriously and attentively what these words of the Lord may mean for us, for they warn that not the idle and feckless but those who ask, seek, and knock will receive, find, and have the door opened to them. We must therefore ask for entry into the kingdom by prayer, seek it by upright living, and knock at its door by perseverance.

*From the Center for Excellence in Preaching*

Maybe the answer is that whether we know it or not, in all our praying, in all our asking and begging and pleading with god, what we are finally asking for--and what we for sure will in the end receive--is nothing less than the indwelling spirit of the living God. We pray in the power of this Spirit, who is our sacred companion that brings to us the fullness of Christ Jesus in our hearts. And when we pray in the power of the Spirit, we find that same Spirit living in us and assuring us that no matter what happens, we serve a loving God who holds us tenderly every moment of our lives.

We aren't to pray with a whimper or a whine or a whisper. No. We are to come with a confident asking, seeking, knocking. God our father desires to hear our petitions and we are entirely open with him. Prayer is not a time to hide what is going on inside us, but to share it openly -- warts and all -- with our father whom we know loves us and understands us and seeks good for us. We can trust him, even though we might misunderstand an issue, or ask for the wrong thing.<sup>ii</sup>



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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/11\\_5-13.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/11_5-13.htm)

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/11\\_5-13.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/11_5-13.htm)



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