

## **Good Gifts**

Luke 11:5-13

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(Image of A Gift)

### **Wrapping Paper—the surface layer of this parable---untying the bow Control**

I am curious how many people here are familiar with the Myers-Briggs personality test. Raise your hand if you are. I am very interested and fascinated with personality types and how people's minds work. For those who are not familiar with Myers-Briggs I will quickly explain how the test categorizes people.

E-extrovert (gets energy from people, outward processor)

I-introvert (gets energy from alone time, internal processor)

N-intuitive (makes big picture connections, abstract thinking)

S-sensing (prefers detailed, linear thinking)

F-feeling (relies on emotional thought processes, prefers mercy over justice)

T-thinking (relies on logical thought processes, prefers justice over mercy)

P-perceiving (enjoys spontaneity, resists structure, likes different possibilities)

J-judging (likes structure and organization, enjoys settling on just one option)

I usually test as an ENFP

ENFP's are describes as bubbly, full of life, easily excited, and full of ideas. (Those are some of my good traits) :)

If you would mold this personality type into this parable, we would be the friend who ran out of bread and, when surprised by a guest in the middle of the night, ran over to our (probably INTJ friend) asking for bread.

We are the askers, the seekers, and the knockers

ENFP's are the most introverted of the (extroverted) group—they have a “rich interior life”---we have a lot going on inside of us!! Since we are a handful, we thrive best when we are surrounded by structure. We resist structure and routine, preferring to be free-spirited and wild—but structure helps us focus our enthusiasm and ideas, and actually get stuff done. Structure tames the beast—more or less.

This has become especially true for me in seminary. I need structure if I am going to do well in school. And having—and making plans has become increasingly important to me. When my plans go wrong I get very disappointed. Birthdays have always been hard for

me because I get so excited and make so many plans---and things never go the way you imagined it in your head.

I think this parable, surprisingly, isn't for the askers, the seekers, and the knockers. This parable is especially for all of the J's out there---all of you who love routine, order, predictability, and control.

We all have a bit of a control freak inside of us—if we are honest with ourselves. We want things to go our way. Some of us speak up more and make our way happen; some keep quiet and let things go. But we all have a piece of us scrambling for control.

**Clinging tightly to Control—this is the wrapping paper of the text. We have shed the surface layer of the text and now we are closer to opening up our gift.**

### **Losing Control**

Richard Rohr says that the very definition of suffering is losing control.

I think of suffering on a spectrum:

Inconvenience	Life-Threatening
First World Problems	-starving -illness -exposure to extreme elements -chronic loneliness

I think that Jesus, in this parable, is addressing this (life threatening) side when he is talking about what we are asking, seeking, and knocking for. In fact he says so in the Lord's prayer when he tells the disciples how to pray, in the passage right before this one.

We say, give us Lord our daily bread

Another translation could read: "Continue giving us each day our essential food"

That is why he makes the comparison between the heavenly Father and a good parent who provides for their children.

None of you, hopefully, would give your child dangerous (like a scorpion or a snake) if your child was asking for gold fish. And it would be a sick joke if they asked for food and you gave them a rock instead. And if we, in comparison to God, are considered evil and **we** wouldn't do these nasty tricks, how much better will God treat us and provide for us!

This is where I get frustrated with this passage. Jesus is assuring us that God will provide for our basic needs. He does this other times, telling us not to worry about where we will

eat and what we will wear. But will God only provide these things if we keep asking for them?

What about chronic illness?

What about the fact that there are people starving all over the world?

We pray, we beg, and we still don't get the healing we want.

And I know, I know that God is not a diving vending machine, where we put in x-amount of prayers and out pops our answered prayers. God is not a fancy Santa Claus. Although we do mix up the two: A white old man who is always watching us, knows what we want, and gives us what we want if we are good.

We know that it doesn't work this way, but then how does it work?

This passage also reminds us of the persistent widow, who finally persuades the unjust judge to act with justice.

### **Explanation of the Text**

So, if I understand the passage correctly, Jesus is comparing the disciples (and therefore us the readers) to the person asking for bread in the middle of the night—and God is the annoyed and grumpy person behind locked doors who doesn't want their kids to wake up with all of the commotion we are making. But because we are stubborn/persistent/cheeky God finally gives in and gives us what we are asking for.

In both of these passages—the unjust judge and the annoyed neighbor, God seem aloof, uncaring, and dismissive.

So do we annoy God with our prayers?

Does God have other things to attend to that are more important than our basic needs?

Is God a reluctant God?

### **Problems with the Text**

So here we have my two problems with this text:

1. People don't always have their basic needs met.
2. God does not seem good.

Yet Jesus reassures us that, like a good parent, God will give us what we need. That kind of God is more in line with the merciful, caring, and loving God that is revealed throughout the entire Bible. This God, like a good parent, is the kind of God that I can believe in. With this God, if we ask for bread, we will not break our teeth on a stone.

How do we reconcile these two different pictures that this text is displaying?

On one side we have a grumpy neighbor, on the other a generous and kind God? There are people suffering in the world and Jesus promises that God will give us good gifts?

(WRITE OUT THE TWO SIDES ON THE PIECES OF PAPER)

Jesus kind of skips over **why** we need to be cheeky and persistent with our prayers and why things that can harm us (like scorpions and snakes) exist in the first place.

I can't ignore the fact that this passage as well as many others are incredibly vague when it comes to answering the **why** questions about suffering.

I am not content with most of the answers to the “why do bad things happen to good people” question. But that's another sermon.

Here is what I believe to be true in the face of the confusing text like this one:

- God is good and works for good in our lives

- God is always present, God both mourns and celebrates with each of us

Keeping these things in mind allows us to sin in our discomfort and know that we will probably never get answers to our “why” questions in this life.

**Now we have unwrapped our Gift and we are met with a cardboard box taped shut. This is the shell the text—it keeps everything together—but it is not the gift.**

### **Letting Go of the Outcome**

When we stop trying to have all of the answers, when we loosen our grip, when we stop trying to control God, then we open doors that allow God to work in our lives.

Recently I heard someone say that her daughter is atheist because every time someone tries to name the greater Spirit that unties us, then that religion gets violent.

When we know someone or something's name, we claim power over that thing. That is why YHWH is I AM. YHWH refused to be named.

When we name God, we get violent.

When we try and control exactly how our prayers will get answered, we are trying to harness a force beyond all of our understanding.

Back in the days when I was crying because my birthday didn't turn out exactly the way I imagined it, my dad would offer these words of counsel:

“Don't get caught up in the outcome”

It is so simple but so true.

If we live from within our expectations then we aren't truly living are we? We are certainly not living within the here-and-now.

This is not counsel to stop—or micromanage—how we pray. In fact it is the opposite.

I believe that we need to pray, no matter how we do it, no matter what we say, no matter where we are we need to establish a connection with God like one we have with someone whom we would barge down their door in the middle of the night for a loaf of bread.

What would our lives look like if we were like Jacob wrestling with God, never giving up from within our tangled mess of our lives, until we are blessed? This messy work of asking, seeking, and knocking becomes a way of life, not a shortcut to happiness. It is transformative work. God will move, God will work in our lives, but we need to do our work as well.

We need to talk to God. But in our asking, in our seeking, in our knocking we need to remember that we do not control **how** God answers our prayers. I believe strongly that God is listening and near and that God answers every one of our prayers—but not necessarily how we expect God to.

I believe in something I call Holy Irony. Part of my intuitive side (the N in my ENFP) is seeing connections. These connections are like connecting the dots, tracing God's work in my life and in others. This work shows up in the Holy Irony in our lives. This text is a prime example of Holy Irony.

Did anyone notice something odd about his text? There is a twist, a Holy Irony, hidden in this text, kind of like a hidden treasure. Our box is open, and now we get to see what is inside. But I am going to require the help from our VBS kids in order to uncover this hidden treasure.

**Ok. Our box is open. Ask all the kids to come forward.**

All of you will get one of these gifts. Don't open your gift until everyone has one, ok?

Ok, you can open your presents now. Can anyone figure out what it is? What do you think it means? It is a little tricky.

This is a wind chime. By itself it is not particularly special, but when you hang it up, and the wind blows, it gives the wind a song.

**Ok you can go back to your seats now.**

When Jesus talks at the very end of this passage about good gifts that God gives us. He doesn't talk about receiving things, miraculous healings, reconciliation between fighting family members. He doesn't even talk about receiving the basic necessities of life. The gifts are not bread to curb our hunger, shelter to keep out the cold, or water to quench our thirst.

When we ask, when we seek, when we knock we receive the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit blows and gives music to the wind. Whenever the winds of the Holy Spirit blows on your wind chime, remember that the Holy Spirit has been breathed upon you.

We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is apparently as, if not more, important than our basic needs.

This is the gift, the center of our box, the depths of this parable.

So why is this Jesus's gift? Why the Holy Spirit?

If you look at the wind chimes you will notice that there are three charms on each one.

There is a dove, a heart, and a feather.

The dove represents Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

The heart represents our loving Creator God

The feather represents the wings of the Holy Spirit

This is the trinity, the three—in—one, love wrapped up in a triune package.

The Greeks used different words for love, I am sure that some of you are familiar with them. Agape, Philo, and Eros are three of them.

I think we can understand the depth of importance of the Holy Spirit when we compare each piece of the trinity with these three different types of love.

God is like the Greek word Agape.

Agape is a universal, unconditional, that transcends circumstance love. Agape love is God love.

Jesus embodies Philo love.

Philo love is affection between loved ones, like family or close friends. It's the kind of bond that you would lay your life down for the other.

And here is where I scandalize everyone, which is my duty as an intern :)

The Holy Spirit is like Eros

Eros is often considered erotic, or sexual love

Don't worry; Eros has gotten a reputation that is not true to the original meaning. Erotic love has been twisted into a sad version of its self. Eroticism isn't lust, it's desire. True erotic love is considered the life force that moves us forward. It is our will to live, to dream. It is creative energy that empowers and transforms. It brings new life. It is an inner strength of perseverance. What is food, water, and shelter if we have no will to live, no motivation?

**This** is the Holy Spirit. This, erotic love, the Holy Spirit is what Jesus gifted us with. It is what makes us persistent and cheeky, banging on doors in the middle of the night.

But we need to remember that the door is never really locked. The door isn't even closed. What we most desperately need, the Heavenly Father's good gift, is open and among us. Let's be like the open gift and the open door, and accept the good gift that it is the Holy Spirit, the erotic love that gives voice to the wind.