

Parable of the Grumpy Neighbor

BY HANK HANEGRAAFF



Give us today our daily bread.
—Matthew 6:11

Recall with me the scene from Luke 11. Jesus has just returned from one of his private prayer sessions, his face awash with the glory of his Father's presence. The disciples immediately encircle him. One of them, perhaps Peter, verbalizes the words, but they were all thinking the same thing. "Lord," he says in a voice mixed with urgency and anticipation, "whatever it is you experience when you disappear for those long stretches and pray, we really want to know about it."

Jesus smiles. The time has come for him to unveil the principles of prayer to his disciples. As usual, he begins with a story. Pointing to Peter, he says, "Imagine going to your neighbor's house at midnight and asking him if you can borrow three loaves of bread." A smile breaks out on Thomas's face. He can't help but chuckle at the irony of the Bread of Life telling a story about borrowing bread.

"Your neighbor is fast asleep,"

Jesus continues, "so you pound on the door frantically and shout, 'Wake up! I need your help! A friend of mine has just shown up on my doorstep, and my cupboard is bare!'"

Jesus cups his hands around his mouth for effect. "'Don't bother me!' the neighbor yells back. 'I've locked up the house and my kids are in bed. I just can't help you tonight.'"

Peter wasn't very good at keeping a poker face. His thoughts might as well have been three-inch neon letters flashing across his forehead. "Yeah, right," Peter murmurs to himself, "this guy can't help? Or won't!" James and John locked eyes knowingly. *If Peter knocked on my door in the middle of the night, they each were thinking, I wouldn't get up either!*

"I tell you the truth," Jesus explains, "if Peter had just kept banging on the door, his neighbor would have given him bread. Not

tence—if only to keep you from continuing to bother him—how much more will your heavenly Father, who is righteous and loving, come to your aid when you ask."

Some of the disciples were beginning to catch the meaning of the parable. Peter couldn't help himself. "I get it!" he shouted, his voice echoing through the canyon. "You're contrasting my grumpy neighbor with God." James, John, and the rest of the disciples now caught the full force of the meaning as well. Jesus was not *comparing* Peter's neighbor to God. He was *contrasting* the neighbor's grumpiness and resistance with God's goodness and readiness to help.

Jesus had just offered his disciples what is known as a lesser-to-greater argument for trusting God in prayer. If the lesser individual, the grumpy neighbor, was in the end willing to help a hungry man, *even for a less than noble reason*, how much more will our gracious heav-

If the lesser individual, the grumpy neighbor, was in the end willing to help a hungry man, even for a less than noble reason, how much more will our gracious heavenly Father respond...

so much because he was a good neighbor, but because of Peter's persistence."

The disciples had begun to fidget. They didn't quite understand what Jesus meant.

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Luke 11:9-10).

"If your grumpy neighbor offers you aid as a result of your persis-

only Father respond when we humbly come before him and ask for our daily bread—all those things that are required for the necessary, peaceable and honest ordering of this life? □

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