

## The Battle We're In

1. Warm-up question: What's something good or bad (large or small) that's happened in your life over the past week?
2. Before tackling this week's parable, it's important to remind ourselves of the nature of the reality in which we find ourselves during our sojourn on earth. There are two primary aspects to our present reality. First, the physical reality that surrounds us is dominated by "entropy." Entropy means gradual decline into disorder. The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that, "The state of entropy of the entire universe, as an isolated system, will always increase over time." That's just a fancy scientific way of saying, absent intentional intervention, everything in our natural world has a tendency to come apart, to disintegrate, to move from order to disorder.
  - a. We see this principle powerfully at work in our houses, gardens, relationships, finances, physical health, mental health, spiritual health, etc., etc. What's an area of your life that is currently suffering from the effects of entropy? Describe how that makes you feel?
  - b. Entropy is so powerful and omnipresent, it can be overwhelming. Every time we turn around, there's another problem, another challenge, something else going wrong. Former POW Floyd Thompson, reflecting on his experience in prison camps, said, "Dying is easy. Living is the difficult thing." When in your life have you felt most overwhelmed? Describe how you felt? Did you give up?
3. But entropy isn't the only daunting aspect of our present reality. We're not just up against natural forces of disintegration; we also face supernatural forces of evil. At least that's what the Bible teaches. Read Daniel 10:1-6, 9-14, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Verses 13-15 tell us that God dispatched an angel to answer Daniel's prayer on the first day he prayed, but that angel was intercepted and resisted by a demonic angel referred to as "the prince of Persia." Then the archangel Michael intervened, freeing the original angel to complete the mission and deliver the answer to Daniel on the 21<sup>st</sup> day. This story raises fascinating questions about whether there is a metaphysical spiritual reality that overlays, surrounds, and impacts our natural reality, and if so, what that reality looks like. The Bible indicates that there is a higher level of beings (*i.e.*, angels) that exist in a realm of reality beyond our natural senses. As with human beings, some of these higher beings are positive and some are negative. How does that idea sit with you? Do you buy it? Why or why not?
  - b. Jeff said he embraces the idea that our natural reality is surrounded and impacted by the greater level of spiritual reality described in the Bible. He shared a story about a boy who awakened in the middle of the night with an urgent sense he needed to pray for his father who was on a business trip on the other side of the globe and at that very moment almost died in an automobile accident. Stories like

provide objective evidence that our natural reality is impacted by spiritual metaphysical realities we cannot explain. Have you ever experienced – or heard from a credible source who has experienced – something that feels clearly supernatural? Tell us about it.

- c. Philippians 6:12 says, “Our struggle is not [just] against enemies of flesh and blood, but against . . . the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the high places.” What do you think that means?
4. When we put all this together, it means we are up against both the natural power of entropy and the supernatural power of evil. No wonder life is so hard! How can we ever succeed when such powerful forces are arrayed against us? Jesus gives us the formula for success in this week’s parable. Read Luke 11:5-13, as printed on p. 3.
    - a. In verse 8, Jesus says “persistence” – sometimes also referred to in the Bible as “perseverance” – is the key to triumphing over stubborn challenges in our life. In verse 9, Jesus goes on to give us a three-part formula for living with perseverance. First, Jesus says, “**Ask and you will receive.**” To conquer our stubborn challenges, we have to ask God and others for the help we need. What’s something you’re asking God to help you with right now?
    - b. Asking other people for help is not always easy. Tell us about a time you asked someone for help. Suppose you hadn’t asked. What might have happened?
    - c. Why is it so hard to ask others for help?
  5. The second step in Jesus’ formula is, “**Seek and you will find.**” Searching for something requires personal effort; it’s hard work. So “seeking” means doing everything you personally can to address a challenge. Tell us about a challenge you’re facing right now. What do you need to ask from God and others? And what do you personally need to do, relentlessly, to contribute to success?
  6. The third step is, “**Knock and the door will open.**” The person in Jesus’ parable refused to take no for an answer. He just kept knocking again and again and again and again until the door opened.
    - a. Tell us about a time in your life when, with the benefit of hindsight, you feel you gave up on something too easily?
    - b. Let’s close our conversation by sharing some inspiring stories about the power of perseverance. It can be a personal story or a story about someone you know or have read about. When have you witnessed the amazing power of perseverance in action?

*Remember: “Everyone who asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” Luke 11:10.*

## **Daniel 10:1-6 and 9-14**

In the third year of King Cyrus of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. The word was true, and it concerned a great conflict. He understood the word, having received understanding in the vision.

2 At that time I, Daniel, had been mourning for three weeks. <sup>3</sup>I had eaten no rich food, no meat or wine had entered my mouth, and I had not anointed myself at all, for the full three weeks. <sup>4</sup>On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris), <sup>5</sup>I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. <sup>6</sup>His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude. <sup>9</sup>Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a trance, face to the ground.

10 But then a hand touched me and roused me to my hands and knees. <sup>11</sup>He said to me, ‘Daniel, greatly beloved, pay attention to the words that I am going to speak to you. Stand on your feet, for I have now been sent to you.’ So while he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling. <sup>12</sup>He said to me, ‘Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. <sup>13</sup>But the prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed me for twenty-one days. So Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia, <sup>14</sup>and have come to help you understand what is to happen to your people at the end of days. For there is a further vision for those days.’

## **Luke 11:5-13**

5 Jesus 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; <sup>6</sup>for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.” <sup>7</sup>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.” <sup>8</sup>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 to you; Seek, and you will find; Knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who seeks finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>11</sup>Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup>Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>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!’