

Persistent Prayer

There is much to be said about prayer in and of itself. It is our direct line of communication with our Heavenly Father and it is how we can approach Him without pretense and in the most intimate of ways. There is not a need we have that He does not know about already but when we voice our concerns, requests, shortcomings, and heartaches, etc., He is there waiting and intently listening. However, there is something touchingly beautiful about what the Word of God reveals to us regarding persistent prayers and that there is power in them.

Jesus had been asked by His disciples to teach them to pray. It is very interesting to me that they asked this and not to teach us to preach. Could it be that it was because they had observed their Master often in prayer with His Father? The "The Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9-13) teaches us to pray for our daily needs. To come daily before the throne of God making our request known to Him. Just like the children of Israel gathering their 'daily bread', we as well are told to do the same in prayer.

Waiting on God to Come Through

Although the Father is always attentive and cares for our every need, there are times when we can get impatient while waiting for specific prayers to be answered.

Sometimes there is inactivity when we long for action.

Sometimes there is silence when we desire a word.

It is in those moments that we are to trust that God truly is Who He says He is and that He ultimately knows what is best for us. He is sovereign, and His timing is perfect. His answer will not come a moment too soon, and it is never late. It is always right on time, His time!

Because God does not seem to always answer our prayers right away (in our time), we must learn to be persistent. We must learn to endure. We must learn what it means to hang on to impossible hope even when we do not see God doing anything.

Praying persistently stretches our faith muscle in a way few other things can.

We see multiple examples of this in the Word of God. In 1 Kings 18 we see the story of Elijah, the prophet of God who had commanded it not to rain in Israel for 3 1/2 year because of the great sins of King Ahab and Queen

Jezebel, which turned the people of Israel away from Jehovah, to the false god, Baal. God came to Elijah at the end of the 3 1/2 years and told him to gather the people, the prophets of Baal and the king, to Mt. Carmel for a showdown.

Bulls were to be offer to Baal and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with the prophets of Baal going first. We see Elijah challenge the 450 prophets of Baal to call down fire from their god to burn up their sacrifice.

The prophets of Baal cried from morning until noon, and no one answered. Their sacrifice remained on the altar, embarrassingly untouched.

Then these prophets of a nonexistent god cut and slashed themselves until they bled, begging for their unhearing god to take notice. Still no answer.

Then when the time for the evening sacrifice was come Elijah rebuilt the alter of the Lord and prepared his bull. To prove that God was the only true God, Elijah dug a trench around his alter and had them pour four barrels of water over the sacrifice three times. This was a precious commodity, since it had not rained for 3 years. Now the sacrifice was drenched, and the trench filled with water. With one simple prayer from Elijah, God answered, *"Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench."* Elijah prayed one time and God answered in a mighty way.

God doesn't always answer right away

However, we see only a few verses later that Elijah had to send his servant 7 times to look for the answer to his prayer for rain. God moves in His time - not ours. We must have faith and pray according to His will, not ours.

Another example would be found in Dan 10:12-13 (ESV)

12) *"Then he said to me, Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words."*

13) *The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia."*

Here we see Daniel's request was heard the very first day, but the answer was hindered in the second heaven. However, Daniel did not stop praying, he set his heart to understanding and humbled himself before God and the

answer finally came. Why, because he was faithful and did not give up until, he received what he had asked for.

What Do We Do in the Meantime?

Surely God has heard our prayers that were spoken once, but what does God say we should do when He has not answered yet?

Keep Praying. Have Faith.

We are told many times to keep on praying. In 1Th 5:17 (ESV) Paul tells us to *"pray without ceasing."*

In Luke 11:5-13 (ESV) we see a parable concerning persistence in prayer. Jesus' disciples had asked Him to teach them to pray as John taught his disciples to pray. Jesus follows this request up with this parable.

v. 5 And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves,

6 for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him';

7 and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'?

8 I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

9 And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

11 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent;

12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him 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 to those who ask him!"

It is common in Luke for good lessons to be taught from bad examples. In contrast with the man who did not want to be bothered, God wants His people to pray to Him as seen in 11:9-10. So, Jesus encouraged people to

be persistent in prayer – not to change God’s mind but to be steadfast in praying and to receive their needs.

In Luke 18:1-8 (ESV), Jesus’ gives us another parable about persistent prayer. This one was addressed to the disciples again.

1) *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*

2) He said, *"In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.*

3) *And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'*

4) *For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man,*

5) *yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'"*

6) *And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says.*

7) *And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?*

8) *I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"*

Jesus told the parable of the unjust judge to teach persistence in prayer - that they, His disciples, should always pray and not give up. We see in vs. 2-5, the widow continued to go before an unjust judge to plead for justice in her case. The judge continually refused to “hear” her case, but finally he decided to give her justice so that she would not wear him out with her complaining.

Jesus gives us the interpretation in vs. 6-8, pointing out that if the unjust judge would give justice, then imagine how God, the Just Judge, will see that they get justice, and quickly. Jesus’ question, “*when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth*”, was not spoken out of ignorance. Nor was He questioning whether all believers would be gone when He returns. He asked the question to spur the disciple on to faithfulness in prayer, to encourage them to keep on in their praying.

Remember Those Who Prayed Persistently

As we read through the Word of God, we see many examples of those who were persistent in prayer. Moses prayed 40 days for the children of Israel that God would not leave them alone in the wilderness after they had sinned at Mt. Sinai, but to go before them leading the way to the promise land. Look at King David, who consistently prayed to be rescued from those who sought to destroy him, from King Saul, to the Philistines, and even his own son, Absalom. We see Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth who prayed that their wombs would be opened, and God heard and answered their prayers.

It is said of D.L. Moody that he had a list of 100 people he believed to come to faith. At the time of his death 96 people had given their lives to Christ. One might think that when we die, our prayers die with us. But this is not the case, our prayers outlive us. At Moody's funeral the last 4 people came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Today there are many prayers of fathers, mothers, grandmothers, and grandfathers that live on, even though they have gone to heaven.

However, we must pray in Accordance to God Will.

1 John 5:14-15 (ESV) reminds us that God does indeed hear each prayer. 14 *"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him."* Note that asking "in line with His will" is required. We often pray for things that we want instead of what God desires for us. Our all-knowing, loving God wants only the best for us.

Although we are told to be persistent in our prayers, it does not mean we are to treat God as if He is a genie in a bottle. That all we must do is rub Him the right way and we will get our three wishes answered. There will be times when our answer is no because what we ask for is not in accordance with His will. We might be asking for something that can hurt us down the road, trip up our faith, destroy our family, or interrupt God's ultimate plan.

We see two examples of this in the New Testament with Jesus and Paul. First, Jesus had finished His last Passover with His disciples, and they had departed for their usual place of gathering when they were in Jerusalem, the Mt. of Olives. Upon entering the grove, He instructed them to stay at the entrance and watch. He proceeded further into the grove to the place called Gethsemane with Peter, James and John. Asking them to watch and pray, He went a little further and prayed to His Father that if possible that this cup of God's judgement be removed. We find that Jesus prayed three separate

times for the cup to be removed however He told the Father, not my will but Thine.

Paul also had asked the Father to remove a thorn in his flesh, three times. A *"messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure". And He (God) said unto me (Paul), My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."*

So, we see here 3 times that the message was no, this was not according to the Father's will. And both accepted the answer. Jesus message to the Father was, *"Yet not what I will but what You will"* Mark 14:36 and Paul stated, *"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."* 2 Cor. 12:7-10 (ESV)

It is in those hard moments when we hear no that we must believe that it is for a good reason. That is when we stand on His Word, *"and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."* Romans 8:28 (KJV)

How Can We Stay Persistent?

Persistency in prayer is an approach of our prayer lives that goes a long way in strengthening our faith. But praying the same thing for a long period of time can get discouraging. Here are five pieces of encouragement for you to cling to:

1. Give thanks for the answers God has given. Maybe that illness is not completely gone, but the vitals are better today. Maybe you are still unemployed, but God provided enough for another week of groceries. Praise Him for the small answers you have seen and trust that He will come through on the rest.
2. Remember God's faithfulness in your life so far. In the OT God continued to remind the children of Israel to remember what He had done for them in the past. How He brought them out of Egypt, gave them manna, water and meat in the desert and gave them victory over their enemies. God's previous faithfulness can restore our hope that He will be faithful again.
3. Be honest and stay hopeful. Do not be afraid to pray honestly. God can handle it, and He will respond. Let your prayers mean something. Then ask again for that thing you still have not seen God answer yet. Allow God to fill you with hope even as you pour out your heart to Him.

4. Ask someone to pray with you. Prayer can be burdensome. Depending on what you are praying for and how long you have been praying, the waiting can feel like a heavy weight to carry all by yourself. That is why it is good to find a prayer partner or two. Find a couple of trusted friends who can walk this journey with you, lifting you up in prayer as well as that thing you have been praying for. You do not have to walk this journey alone. There is power in numbers and I have seen many prayers answered when I have joined with others.
5. Keep a Prayer Journal. I have found that writing down my persistent prayers and keeping them where I meet with the Lord each day is helpful. You will find that during your times of prayer that the Holy Spirit will often reveal things to you about those prayers and ways to further pray into them. Beside this, a journal is a great place to record all the prayers that the Lord has answered for you. As it were, a Book of Remembrance (Malachi 3:16).

Pray and Then Pray Again

John Knox, one of the great preachers of Scotland, prayed: "God, give me Scotland, or I'll die." And in his persistence, God answered his prayer. He gave John Knox Scotland. Knox's sermons turned that country upside down.

We see in Ps. 88:13 (ESV) David saying, 13 *"But I, O LORD, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you."* Bringing our request to the Lord first thing before our day begins allows Him to work on our behalf. If we wait till later in our day we will be going in our own power and not His.

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus"

Paul tell us in Phl. 4:6-7 (ESV) 6 *"do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand.

By following these simple steps, we place everything in His hands.

As believers, we have an awesome privilege to be able to bring our request to our Heavenly Father. I still stand in awe that the God of the universe wants to hear from me. That He is never too busy to hear my heart's cry. That He is not away in some far distant land but is concerned with my every

need. That He loves me so much that He tells me to come to Him with my every request, in the name that is above every name-Jesus Christ of Nazareth. That I am told that I can ask in faith believing, knowing that He hears my prayers and petition 19) *"And my God will supply every need . . . according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* Phl 4:19 (ESV)

May we never tire of bringing our needs to our Father's feet. May we continue to lift up our prayers again and again, knowing that one day our Heavenly Father will send the answer.