

From Our Lips to God's Ears: The Persistence of Prayer

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[0 : 00] Well, welcome here for this Sunday, February 11th, 2024. Gentlemen, Wednesday is Valentine's Day. There's your free advice. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here.

So speaking of love and that this is the season of love, take note of the decorations in the gym because God's love is represented in the message there, and so I encourage you to reflect on that. So next week, Michelle and I will be away. We are going to surprise Connor. We already blew this surprise by accident. He is involved in a show down in Rosebud that he has helped put together and he is super proud of and he was super bummed that we couldn't make it, but I have a friend named Paul Hay who said, oh, you should be there, so we will be there, so we will not be here. But as we start the season of Lent this coming week, Paul will be bringing a sermon focusing on Lent next Sunday. So, yes, so we will be away and Paul will bring a sermon focusing on Lent. So because Paul is preaching and not me, it's more of a borrowed sermon than a Lent sermon. Anyway, we're continuing in our sermon series this morning, From Our Lips to God's Ears, Living a Life of Prayer.

[1 : 22] And over the coming weeks, we're going to continue to explore many of the aspects of prayer and be reminded of why it's so critical for us to seek to be people of prayer.

And if you were here last week or listened to that sermon, you'll know that we considered the principles of prayer last week, right? We looked at some of the important things that we need to remember, both as we approach God in prayer, and also things we need to keep in mind as we pray.

And we explored several essential principles last week. So we must pray in faith. We must pray with humility. We must pray seeking to be in harmony with the will of God.

We must pray with thanksgiving. And above all, we must pray in the name of Jesus. So there's another principle of prayer that's worthy of careful consideration, so much so that I wanted to focus on it specifically.

And that's why our sermon this morning is titled, The Persistence of Prayer. Because we must pray with persistence. And this was actually, is actually a principle of prayer that was important to Jesus.

[2 : 38] And we can see in his ministry. We can recognize a focus on the importance of the persistence of prayer throughout Scripture. Because we see both teaching and instruction on it.

As well as examples of persistent prayer in action. So we're going to look at some examples of how we're taught to be persistent in prayer.

Jesus tells a parable in Luke 11 that's often known as the parable of the persistent friend. So if you have your Bible with you, turn with me to Luke 11.

You can grab a Bible from the pew in front of you. You can turn on your iPhone now. And listen to it. Or you can listen to it as I read. And I'll be reading from the ESV. Luke 11, beginning at verse 10.

Verse 1, going to verse 10. Now Jesus was praying in a certain place. And when he finished, one of the disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples.

[3 : 41] And he said to them, when you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins.

For we ourselves forgive everyone who is indeed indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation. 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.

For a friend of mine has arrived on a journey and I have nothing to set before him. And he will answer from within. Do not bother me. The door is now shut and my children are in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though, he will not get up and give him anything because he is a friend. Yet because of his impudence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs. 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. For everyone who asks receives.

[4 : 49] The one who seeks finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. So it's important to note that we see in Luke 11 verse 1 that Jesus tells this parable specifically in response to his disciples' request for him to teach them how to pray.

So prayer is the specific focus of this parable that Jesus gives. In verses 2 to 4, Jesus takes it a step further then. And rather than just making a general statement on prayer or saying, yeah, it's probably a good idea that you fellows do this.

He gives them a blueprint. He gives them an actual model for them to follow in the way that they pray, how they pray. And that's still a model for us today.

And the parable itself seems pretty easy to understand, doesn't it? It reflects the importance of not giving up. Being persistent in asking for something.

But it also indicates, though, that persistence will be rewarded. That's an important part of this message, too. So then Jesus, now I debated when I thought about this.

[6 : 00] I was going to err on the side of the greatest teacher humanity has ever known. People could argue that with me. But he is likely the greatest.

I would lean towards the greatest teacher humanity has ever known. He bridges seamlessly from this parable to the importance of us asking, seeking, knocking persistently to him in prayer.

So Jesus is making an important connection here in the parable, then to the model, then to the directive, of being persistent, persistence and prayer.

These two things being linked together. So let's turn to Luke 18. Let's flip over a little bit. So we find another of Jesus' parables here.

It is known as the parable of the persistent widow. So we're beginning at Luke 18, verse 1. And we'll be reading to verse 8. And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

[7 : 05] He said, In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, Give me justice against my adversary.

For a while he refused. But after he said to himself, Though I neither fear God nor respect man, Yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice.

So she will not beat me down by her continual coming. And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, Will he find faith on earth?

So in verse 1, it's made pretty clear that Jesus wanted his disciples to remember two things again. To remember to always pray. And to not lose heart.

[8 : 13] Not be discouraged as we wait in prayer. As we ask. As we seek. As we knock. Then we come to that parable itself, Which emphasizes what? Again. Persistence.

It's interesting that despite how things may seem, It's being suggested to us that we should be persistent, And not be discouraged in our persistence.

While we wait. In our instant gratification world, Human beings have become, I believe, Far too accustomed to Me first, And right now thinking.

I believe our patience reservoirs can tend to reflect that. Can't they? We want what we want. We want it exactly how we want it.

And we want it right now. Does that sound familiar? And I believe persistence of prayer, Can also require patience in prayer.

[9 : 16] A healthy orientation to life through prayer, I believe, Can help us to have a better perspective on what's truly important in life.

Help us to align our desires and timing, More closely with God's. Jesus makes it clear that those who are persistent in their prayers, Who cry to him day and night, Will be heard.

It's clear. But Jesus is also honest with his disciples. He was honest with them then and now. Because he expresses, At the end of that passage, You probably noticed, He expresses concern over whether the faith And persistence of prayer that he was teaching In his early ministry Will be found when he returns to earth.

Have we learned these lessons? Do we have this kind of faith? Persistence of prayer. Because persistence of prayer is directly connected to our faith in God.

And his promises on what he said he will do, He will do. We're called to have faith that God is a being, Is a God of his word.

[10:41] So as he did with many other areas of faith, Teaching and practice. Patience of prayer requires patience in prayer. Because we're seeking to gain the right perspective.

I see people writing this down, So I'll leave that for a minute. So this is a summary of that little section. Is that we need to be aware, Be persistent, And be patient as we pray.

Because it helps us To learn to align with God. So as he did, In many other areas of faith, Teaching and practice, Paul continued to echo and emphasize The teachings of Jesus in his own ministry.

If you turn to Romans 12, verse 12, And you know this verse, So it's short. Paul reminds us to rejoice in hope, Be patient in tribulation, And be constant, Steadfast, Unwavering, In prayer.

Paul shares this teaching as a model for all followers of Jesus. So this goal for how we should seek to be focused, That's what this is.

[11:51] Remember, Ask for God's help in this. We're not meant to feel guilty If it's not our default perspective. Give yourselves grace.

We're not meant to do this on our own strength, To be persistent in prayer. So after Paul teaches about the armor of God, In the life of a follower of Jesus, In Ephesians 6, verse 18, Paul encourages us that we should be Praying at all times in the Spirit, With all prayer and supplication. To that end, Keep alert with all perseverance, Making supplication for all the saints, Paul says. In Colossians 4, verse 2, Paul says that we should, We read there, That we should continue steadfastly, There's that word again, So being constant and unwavering, Be steadfast in prayer, And being watchful in prayer, With thanksgiving.

And as we've heard in this series already, We are to, As 1 Thessalonians 5, 16 to 18 says, Rejoice always, Pray without ceasing, Give thanks in all circumstances, For this is the will of God In Christ Jesus for you.

So in all of Paul's teaching, That message of, And reminders to pray, Come through over and over, Consistently and powerfully. And this is not something He's just suggesting, But he's identifying it As a critical part Of the Christian life.

[13:42] So as you've heard from me In sermons over the years, And I'm sure, Hopefully, From other preachers you've heard, Or theologians that you may have read, Repetition is significant In scripture.

So whether it's numbers, Or concepts, Or phrases, Repetition is important. And so it's no less important In messages or other things That are clearly being emphasized.

So this idea that we see Recurring through scripture Of the persistence of prayer Must be important. Fair? For it to be emphasized And stressed so often, It must be important.

But it's also important To recognize that there's More than just teaching On persistence of prayer In the Bible. We also find examples of it. So let's look at some examples.

And I believe one of the greatest examples Of persistence of prayer And the challenges that accompany that Come from Jesus himself. Now, fitting that we're approaching Lent, We're approaching Easter, Let's look at Matthew 26, Verses 36 to 46.

[14:52] Then Jesus went with them To a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, Sit here while I go over there And pray.

And taking with him Peter And the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful And troubled. And then he said to them, My soul is very sorrowful, Even to death.

Remain here and watch with me. And going a little farther, He fell on his face And prayed, saying, My father, If it be possible, Let this cup pass From me.

Nevertheless, Not as I will, But as you will. And he came to the disciples And found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, So, Could you not watch with me One hour?

Watch and pray That you may not enter Into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, But the flesh is weak. Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed, My father, If this cannot pass Unless I

drink it, Your will be done.

[16:08] And again he came And found them sleeping, For their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, He went away and prayed For the third time, Saying the same words again.

Then he came to the disciples And said to them, Sleep and take your rest Later on. See, The hour is at hand, And the Son of Man Is betrayed Into the hands of sinners.

Rise, Let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand. So in the middle Of his own deep Personal distress Over what he knew Lay ahead of him, Jesus turned to prayer.

While his closest friends And disciples slept, Jesus turned to prayer And prayed three times. As Luke relates, Jesus' experience At Gethsemane In Luke 22, Verse 43, There's a slightly Different view.

We read, And there appeared to him An angel from heaven, Strengthening him. So Luke is making it clear here That it was just as Jesus prayed persistently That he was strengthened.

[17:24] Remember I said We're not called to do this On our own, Not without God's help. Hebrews 5, Verses 7 and 8. In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up Prayers and supplications.

With loud cries and tears To whom, Or sorry, To him who was able To save him from death. And he was heard Because of his reverence.

Do you hear that? Although he was a son, He learned obedience Through what he suffered. Well, Jesus prayed For what he knew Lay ahead for him.

He begged for it To be changed. To be different. He also submitted To the Father's will. And as we know, Jesus' prayer To be spared Was not answered.

But thanks be to God For his persistence In prayer. Jesus' persistence And his willingness To submit to the Father's will. Ultimately, For your sake And for mine.

[18:27] So if Jesus, The Son of God In the flesh Needed to be persistent In prayer And we see that In his life Should we not also Be people Of persistence?

Another lived example Of persistence In prayer Comes from Paul And what he referred to In 2 Corinthians 12 verse 7 As a thorn Given to him In the flesh.

So we recognize That Paul Never exactly Spelled out What he meant By this statement. Some scholars And have said this Before in the past Some scholars Have suggested It may have referred To his mental health Or anxiety That he was experiencing.

Perhaps an actual Opponent In his ministry. That's another perspective. Or even a physical Malady Or health issue Of some kind. And a lot of scholars See it as being that.

But whatever It actually was Whatever was the root Of Paul's thorn In the flesh As he called it He recognized It is something He had to endure. Something he had To persevere through.

[19:37] But that does not mean He enjoyed it. Right? In 2 Corinthians 12 Verse 8 We'll look at 2 Corinthians 12 A little bit here. In verse 8 Paul says Three times I pleaded With the Lord About this That it should Leave me.

So whatever the issue was We don't get the sense That it was ever removed. But 2 Corinthians 12 Verse 9 Tells us God's response To Paul's prayers.

Paul says He said to me You know this My grace Is sufficient For you For my power Is made perfect In He can insert Your Weakness Therefore I will boast All the more gladly Of my weaknesses So that the power Of Christ May rest Upon me And even more Than that strength To endure We read in 2 Corinthians 12 Verse 10 That Paul came To recognize That For the sake Of Christ Then He said I am content With weaknesses Insults Hardships Persecutions And calamities For Say it with me When I am weak Then I am strong So if the apostle Paul Needed to be persistent In prayer Shouldn't we?

So what about the examples Of the early church? Turn to Acts 2 Verse 42 Acts 2 Verse 42 Tells us They devoted Themselves To the apostles Teaching And the fellowship To the breaking Of bread And the prayers Devotion To prayer Acts 12 Verses 5 And verse 12 In those two verses We learn that When Paul was arrested And thrown into prison Earnest prayer For him Was made to God By the church His brothers And sisters In the church Community Interceded On his behalf In prayer And when Peter Escaped And came Sorry Did I say Paul?

I meant Peter So when Peter Escaped And came to Mary's house He found That Many were gathered And were praying For him Colossians 4 Verse 12 Tells us Epaphras Who is one of you A servant of Christ Jesus Greets you Always struggling Always struggling On your behalf In his prayers That you may stand Mature And fully assured In all the will Of God Do you struggle For

other people in prayer?

[22 : 24] That's powerful language Isn't it? Paul was encouraging The Christians At Colossae That Epaphras Was praying For them Was as we said They're struggling On their behalf Interceding with And for them With God Prayer was a deeply Ingrained feature Of the early church We can see it In the book of Acts And if they The early church The beginning When the battle Was fierce If they Persisted In prayer When their faith Was literally A matter of life And death Shouldn't we Be persistent In prayer So with the Examples in teaching On the persistence Of prayer That we've been Reminded of This morning Here's a bit Of a summary We generally Can't overemphasize The persistence The importance Of persistence Of prayer In general So keep praying

And in particular Don't ask Just once Be persistent It's important To remember That persistence Doesn't just Ensure God Will answer Our prayers In the specific Ways And with the Specific details We may want Most We saw those Examples this Morning Jesus still Had to suffer At the cross Paul still Had to bear The thorn In his flesh By enduring Persecution For Christ Yet persistence In prayer Prayer is Absolutely The key To receiving The answers We need Most Because through Prayer we can Receive God's Grace and mercy To help us And through Prayer we can Receive strength To endure Whatever it is We are facing In our lives So through the Persistence of Prayer My brothers and Sisters Let's ask Let's seek Let's knock Let's trust That God will Answer our Prayers Giving whatever He graciously Determines That we truly Need Amen