

**PERSIST-  
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IN  
PRAYER**

## PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

ONE DAY JESUS WAS PRAYING IN A CERTAIN PLACE. WHEN HE FINISHED, ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES SAID TO HIM, "LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY, JUST AS JOHN TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES." HE SAID TO THEM, "WHEN YOU PRAY, SAY: 'FATHER, HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME, YOUR KINGDOM COME. GIVE US EACH DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. FORGIVE US OUR SINS, FOR WE ALSO FORGIVE EVERYONE WHO SINS AGAINST US. AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION.'" THEN HE SAID TO THEM, "SUPPOSE ONE OF YOU HAS A FRIEND, AND HE GOES TO HIM AT MIDNIGHT AND SAYS, 'FRIEND, LEND ME THREE LOAVES OF BREAD, BECAUSE A FRIEND OF MINE ON A JOURNEY HAS COME TO ME, AND I HAVE NOTHING TO SET BEFORE HIM.' THEN THE ONE INSIDE ANSWERS, 'DON'T BOTHER ME. THE DOOR IS ALREADY LOCKED, AND MY CHILDREN ARE WITH ME IN BED. I CAN'T GET UP AND GIVE YOU ANYTHING.' I TELL YOU, THOUGH HE WILL NOT GET UP AND GIVE HIM THE BREAD BECAUSE HE IS HIS FRIEND, YET BECAUSE OF THE MAN'S BOLDNESS HE WILL GET UP AND GIVE HIM AS MUCH AS HE NEEDS. 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. WHICH OF YOU FATHERS, IF YOUR SON ASKS FOR A FISH, WILL GIVE HIM A SNAKE INSTEAD? OR IF HE ASKS FOR AN EGG, WILL GIVE

HIM A SCORPION? IF YOU THEN, THOUGH YOU ARE EVIL, KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS TO YOUR CHILDREN, HOW MUCH MORE WILL YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN GIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THOSE WHO ASK HIM." *\_LUKE 11:1-15 (NIV)*

Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray IN Supplication

Today, we will examine the story that Jesus told his disciples in response to their question about how to pray. When they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, they were probably not expecting to be told a story. The story Jesus tells, however, clearly emphasizes the need for persistence in prayer. It is through persistence that God can begin to purify our desires. He wants the type of prayer that is drained of self and is in complete agreement with his will. There are five distinct stages to this type of prayer that we will want to examine and understand more clearly.

### STAGE 1: MAKING THE DECISION TO ASK ON A CONSISTENT BASIS

When we first begin to learn about the Lord, we make most of our decisions on our own. It may be helpful to ask yourself this question: "How many decisions do I make during the course of my day that I don't run by anyone?" Most of us do what we want, go where we want, and buy what we want, without ever asking anyone. Prayer happens only as a last resort—after our own decisions have put us into a crisis.

The first stage is to \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>1</sup>

As simple as it sounds, the first step is to make the consistent decision to ask the Lord what he wants you to do. Most people make plans first and then ask God to bless their plans. This type of prayer pattern is counterproductive, however.

## LEADER NOTE:

Have the class get into their small groups and answer the following questions:

**Question #1:** What decisions did you make this week that you did not ask the Lord about?

**Question #2:** Name some areas in your life where you would like to seek the Lord's will.

## STAGE 2: WANTING TO HEAR THE ANSWER ONCE YOU ASK

It takes a wholehearted ear and a determined heart to hear the whisper of God's voice.

"BE STILL," HE SAYS, "AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD." [\\_PSALM 46:10 \(NIV\)](#)

The Lord does not require us to do anything or go anywhere in order to meet with him. Rather, his simple command to us is to be still in his presence—cease our own efforts and all that distracts us so he can reveal himself more fully. There is a sense of hearing beyond the natural capacity. When Jesus said to his disciples, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears," he was referring to the ear of the spirit, which is the inner man (Luke 9:44, NIV).

The second stage is to \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>2</sup>

We learn to discern the voice of God by actively listening to him. The more time we spend in his presence, with a desire to hear from him, the more we are able to recognize his voice. Hebrews 5:14 says that our spiritual senses are sharpened "by constant use" (that is, with learned experience).

BUT SOLID FOOD IS FOR THE MATURE, WHO BY CONSTANT USE HAVE TRAINED THEMSELVES TO DISTINGUISH GOOD FROM EVIL. [\\_HEBREWS 5:14 \(NIV\)](#)

In the same way, repeatedly refusing to respond to the call of the Spirit results in a spiritual condition that leaves our hearts hardened before him—calloused, so to speak—and insensitive to his voice. This condition grieves the heart of God.

SO, AS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYS: "TODAY, IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS YOU DID IN THE REBELLION, DURING THE TIME OF TESTING IN THE DESERT, WHERE YOUR FATHERS TESTED AND TRIED ME AND FOR FORTY YEARS SAW WHAT I DID. THAT IS WHY I WAS ANGRY WITH THAT GENERATION, AND I SAID, 'THEIR HEARTS ARE ALWAYS GOING ASTRAY, AND THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN MY WAYS.'" [\\_HEBREW 3:7-10 \(NIV\)](#)

To maintain an adequate level of spiritual sensitivity, we must learn to respond without delay to the voice of the Spirit of God. God requires an immediate response within the hearts of his people. This is why it says, "Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..." (Hebrews 3:15).

SEEK THE LORD WHILE HE MAY BE FOUND; CALL ON HIM WHILE HE IS NEAR. [\\_ISAIAH 55:6 \(NIV\)](#)

WE MUST PAY MORE CAREFUL ATTENTION, THEREFORE, TO WHAT WE HAVE HEARD, SO THAT WE DO NOT DRIFT AWAY... [\\_HEBREWS 2:1 \(NIV\)](#)

Jesus continually repeated himself because his words often fell on deaf ears. At least eight times in the Gospels we read of him exhorting the people, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear." This same verse is also quoted eight times in the book of Revelation. Even though each of the seven churches of Revelation was at a different stage in the development of their spiritual experience, Jesus' invitation to them was the same: "He that has an ear, let him hear..." (Revelation 2:7).

To each of the seven churches Jesus was, in effect, saying, "There is more to hear." All but one had either settled for less than the Lord had for them, or had fallen away, and he wanted them to move forward. Many in our own day have become satisfied with the knowledge that they will someday inherit the promise of eternal life. However, this knowledge is barely enough to get them through the here and now. In contrast, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24, NIV). His promises are not for someday in the future; they are for now.

If this present life is to have any meaning or purpose at all, we must learn to come to know him with whom we will spend eternity. Unless we learn to know his voice and to have fellowship with him now, we will never experience the abundant life of which Jesus spoke (John 10:10).

God's greatest complaint in this matter is not with the unregenerate world, for he does not expect nonbelievers to have respect for his word—they are “uncircumcised in heart and ears” (Acts 7:51); rather, the Lord's deepest concern is for his own people—those who have the ability to hear but refuse to listen. They “have ears to hear and hear not.” Many have “stopped their ears” and have, by choice, turned “away their ears” from hearing the word of the Lord, while others have simply become “dull of hearing.”

WE HAVE MUCH TO SAY ABOUT THIS, BUT IT IS HARD TO EXPLAIN BECAUSE YOU ARE SLOW TO LEARN. [\\_HEBREWS 5:11 \(NIV\)](#)

“THE DAYS ARE COMING,” DECLARES THE SOVEREIGN LORD, “WHEN I WILL SEND A FAMINE THROUGH THE LAND—NOT A FAMINE OF FOOD OR A THIRST FOR WATER, BUT A FAMINE OF HEARING THE WORDS OF THE LORD.” [\\_AMOS 8:11 \(NIV\)](#)

Churches are plentiful; the Word of God has gone forth—but there is a famine of hearing his voice. We see that the famine mentioned in Amos 8:11 is “not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.”

God has not stopped speaking to his people; the problem is that his people have failed to listen to his voice. When the message becomes too demanding, many try to avoid the issue by seeking an escape, which is any excuse that will allow them to continue in their own ways. However, the claim upon our lives remains the same, and we cannot find true and lasting peace apart from obedience to God's plan.

We must beware lest our hearts be overcome by an attitude of complacency and spiritual laziness. The Lord does not usually call at a “convenient” time. Unless we keep watch and are ready, ever listening for his voice, we will miss out. Moreover, as long as we consider his calling an inconvenience, we will only be met by disappointment.

I ROSE UP TO OPEN TO MY BELOVED...BUT MY BELOVED HAD WITHDRAWN HIMSELF, AND WAS GONE: MY SOUL FAILED WHEN HE SPOKE; I SOUGHT HIM, BUT I COULD NOT FIND HIM; I CALLED HIM, BUT HE GAVE NO ANSWER.

[\\_SONG OF SONGS 5:5-6 \(NIV\)](#)

How can we better hear God's voice? As it is in the natural, Paul says, so it is in the spiritual. When we have trouble hearing the voice of God, we can (1) get closer to the speaker; or (2) we can close out the distracting sounds or voices that interfere or compete for our attention. In other words, often the problem is not in the hearing, or even in the listening, but in discerning God's voice.

## LEADER NOTE:

Have small groups confess not listening to God's voice. Confess any passivity, apathy, or independence that keeps them from being still and knowing him.

**Question #1:** Do you really want to hear what God would say about any subject in your life? Is there a specific subject you know you are withholding from God?

**Question #2:** Have you ever been asked a question by a person who really did not want to know the answer? Describe this situation with your small group.

**Question #3:** Do you have a difficult time hearing the Lord's voice? What stands in the way of hearing from the Lord in a clearer way?

(Small group leader note: If someone has trouble hearing God's voice, you may want to spend some time with them outside of class. Begin with the spiritual blockers, which is any known sin that still needs to be confessed; then move into practical problem solving.)

## STAGE 3: FERVENCY— THE FIRST SIGNS OF DESPERATION IN THE PLACE OF PRAYER

As we move further into the heart of Christ through prayer, there are several things that begin to happen. First, Christ will purify our desires. Our spiritual muscle builds as we discipline ourselves and press into prayer, regardless of what our eyes see.

Imagine, for just a moment, a person going to the gym three times a week versus someone who goes only once a month. There is really no change in a person's body by lifting weights one time a month. However, the one who disciplines himself to continually work out each and every week will find significant changes as he increasingly gets in shape. Likewise, we change when we pray consistently and with passion. Our faith and perseverance begin to birth God's character within us; we find ourselves being transformed through prayer.

The third stage is \_\_\_\_\_<sup>3</sup>  
marked with \_\_\_\_\_<sup>4</sup> and \_\_\_\_\_<sup>5</sup>.

Fervent prayer comes from those who are filled with passion and zeal. There is a consistency and sincerity that marks their prayer life. They really want everything the Lord wants, no matter the cost. They are desperate to please the Lord and desperate to see change in and around them. This kind of prayer does not come out of the flesh because it requires the Holy Spirit to assist and motivate the believer in prayer.

### LEADER NOTE:

Break into small groups again and ask the questions below. Each group will need strong leadership in order to facilitate discussion.

**Question #1:** What promises has the Lord given that you pray for fervently?

**Question #2:** Seek the Lord as a group for the following:

1. Pray for each person in your group to determine what biblical promises the Lord wants the individual to pray into consistently.
2. Decide as a group when you can get together to pray about the promises over each person's life.

## STAGE 4: DETERMINATION AND POUNDING— UNRELENTING PERSISTENCE

I TELL YOU, THOUGH HE WILL NOT GET UP AND GIVE HIM THE BREAD BECAUSE HE IS HIS FRIEND, YET BECAUSE OF THE MAN'S BOLDNESS HE WILL GET UP AND GIVE HIM AS MUCH AS HE NEEDS. 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 11:8-15 \(NIV\)](#)

Jesus taught the disciples that boldness and perseverance are required if prayer is to be effective. There are many prayers that begin with impure motives and selfish agendas. However, as we move into a greater determination to carry out God's will, our prayers change from, "This is what I want and I need it now," to "Jesus, what is it that you want? Show me how to pray in accordance with your will." Once his will is known, we do not quit pounding on the door.

The fourth stage is relentless \_\_\_\_\_<sup>6</sup>,  
which \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup> our motives.

Remember, through prayer God transforms our hearts to beat like his. We are changed. Without engaging in prayer, we remain fundamentally self-absorbed in our Christian walk. Our only prayers revolve around our lives and they rarely include the needs of others. For example, if we are praying to have God's heart for others, it will take more than a two-minute prayer time every thirty days. If we are praying for the lost to be saved, the Lord will ensure that we become broken over the condition of the lost before he answers that prayer. If we are praying to be filled with God's authority and power to do Jesus-ministry, the Lord will ensure that our will is broken and submitted fully to his. If we are praying for the sick to be healed, the Lord will guarantee that we understand suffering and develop mercy in the process.

It is important to understand that we have to make a willful decision to pray in a determined and bold manner. There will be many times when we will not want to pray, but we will need to pray. Self-doubt will come against our determination, and it will require a firm stance against the enemy to refuse the temptation to quit. The enemy will say, "What is this for anyway? Why are you praying for something God will never answer?" However, as we press through the enemy's strongholds of doubt and unbelief, our character is strengthened.

NOT ONLY SO, BUT WE ALSO REJOICE IN OUR SUFFERINGS, BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT SUFFERING PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE; PERSEVERANCE, CHARACTER; AND CHARACTER, HOPE. AND HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT US, BECAUSE GOD HAS Poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. [\\_ROMANS 5:3-4 \(NIV\)](#)

CONSIDER IT ALL JOY, MY BRETHREN, WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER VARIOUS TRIALS, KNOWING THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES ENDURANCE. AND LET ENDURANCE HAVE ITS PERFECT RESULT, SO THAT YOU MAY BE PERFECT AND COMPLETE, LACKING IN NOTHING. [\\_JAMES 1:2-4 \(NASB\)](#)

You will be challenged; you need to know that going in. The world and its priorities will attempt to choke your passion to see God move. Like weights, God allows challenges to gradually be added to the bar each day in weight lifting. The Lord builds the ones he has called—making us much stronger. Then our hearts will be ready to receive the marvellous answers to the prayers that we believed in faith would happen.

Our persistent knocking can become frustrating when our timing does not line up with the Lord's. He knows that there is buried anger and he allows the process of prayer to unearth what is deep in our hearts. Peace will take the place of exasperation if we allow the Lord to purify our desires with his refiner's fire. Once the door is opened, we will not be heard saying, "It's about time, God." Instead, we will be filled with praise and thanksgiving over the faithfulness and perfect timing of our God.

## LEADER NOTE:

Break into small groups to answer the following questions.

**Question #1:** What practical steps will you take to make intercession a weekly discipline?

**Question #2:** How would eliminating television and movies from your life allow prayer to blossom?

**Question #3:** What are some worship CDs you currently own? Have you ever listened to worship music while you were praying?

**Question #4:** Have you ever gone on a prayer walk in your city, asking for God's heart as your eyes are opened to the many needs of the people?

## HOMework

1. Make time in your schedule for daily intercession.
2. Spend some time every day this week praying for the things the Lord has promised you individually.
3. Meet as a small group to pray over one another's promises from God.
4. Using Isaiah 58:6–12 as your guide, pray every day for your city. If you do not feel a passion for the things listed there, ask the Lord to birth that passion in your heart.

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### KEY

1. ask for God's input
2. listen for his answer
3. fervency
4. consistency
5. passion
6. persistence
7. purifies