

LESSON SEVEN

PERSISTENT PRAYER

“So I say to 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, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

LUKE 11:9-10 NKJV



REFLECTION

Think of a time when you felt like giving up on a certain prayer request. What made it difficult to pray? What helped you keep on praying? What do you think would have happened if you stopped praying?

SITUATION

The disciples had numerous opportunities to observe Jesus as he prayed. Eventually, they got around to saying, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Jesus’ response shows that he heard two requests in one: the disciples needed some idea of *how* to pray and they also needed some idea of *why* they should pray. He gave them a model for how to approach God, and he also gave reasons why they should pray.

OBSERVATION

Read Luke 11:1–13 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

¹ 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.”

² He said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father,
hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ Forgive us our sins,

for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

⁵ Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ ⁷ And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.

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

¹¹ “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ 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!”

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

¹ Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”

² So He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.

Your will be done
 On earth as it is in heaven.
³ Give us day by day our daily bread.
⁴ And forgive us our sins,
 For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
 And do not lead us into temptation,
 But deliver us from the evil one.”

⁵ And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶ for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; ⁷ and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’? ⁸ I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.

⁹ “So I say to 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 he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ¹¹ If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

EXPLORATION

1. Why do you think Jesus’ habit of prayer sparked the disciples’ interest in prayer?

2. What do you notice about the model prayer Jesus gave to his disciples? In what ways is the similar or different from the way you typically pray?

3. In Jesus’ story of the friend in need of bread, whom do the two friends represent?

4. What was Jesus saying about the need to be persistent in prayer? Why do you think God asks this of us?

5. What spiritual principles did Jesus convey to his disciples through his daily example and teaching?

6. What did Jesus say about the power his followers are given in prayer?

INSPIRATION

The neighborhood is quiet. The streets are still. The sky is dark, and so is your friend's two-story house. But still you ring his doorbell, not once or twice but three times. Ding-dong. Ding-dong. Ding-dong. It's a big house, so it has a big chime. His Chihuahua wakes up. He has this snappy, who-do-you-think-you-are bark: "Ruff, ruff, ruff."

You envision what is happening upstairs. Your friend's wife is giving him a kick beneath the blankets. "Hank, get up! Someone is at the door." Poor guy. One minute sound asleep. The next, kicked out of bed. Doorbell ringing, dog barking. He's not going to like this.

The porch light comes on. The door opens. Boy, does he look like a mess. Boxer shorts. T-shirt. Bed hair. Face lined with pillow creases and covered in whiskers.

"What in the world are you doing here?" he asks.

"A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat," you answer.

The home owner grumbles and complains, but you insist. "Come on, Hank, please." Finally Hank acquiesces, invites you in, and takes you to his pantry. You fill a basket with food and take it home. And your surprise guest doesn't have to go to bed hungry. All because you spoke up on behalf of someone else.

This is intercessory prayer at its purest, a confluence of paucity and audacity. Father, you are good. They need help. I can't, but you can.

"I can't heal them, but, God, you can."

"I can't forgive them, but, God, you can."

"I can't help them, but, God, you can."

This prayer gets God's attention. After all, if Hank, a cranky, disgruntled friend, will help out, how much more will God do? He never sleeps. He's never irritated. When you knock on his door, he responds quickly and fairly. (From *Before Amen* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. What does Jesus' story reveal about God's character?

8. What does Jesus' story reveal about the way God responds to our prayers for others?

9. What are some steps you can take to keep your prayers honest and meaningful?

10. In what circumstances do you find it tempting to give up on praying for others?

11. What can be accomplished for God's kingdom through persistent prayer?

12. In what way does this passage change your attitude toward a long-term prayer request or need in your life?

LIFE LESSONS

Jesus practiced a habit of prayer. Like any good habit, it must be deliberately maintained or it will fade away. God's faithfulness is often demonstrated in the Holy Spirit's gentle nudging and reminders to pray. Satan's craftiness is often demonstrated in mocking us when we fail to pray. We are always better off dwelling on God's reminders to pray than listening to our enemy's attempts to humiliate and discourage us. Persistence in prayer means going on despite any barriers or excuses not to do so.

DEVOTION

Father, forgive us for giving up on prayer so easily. Forgive us for our insincerity and lack of interest. We thank you for remaining faithful to us, even when we are unfaithful. Teach us how to pray honestly, persistently, and faithfully. Most importantly, Father, help us to follow in the footsteps of your perfect Son, Jesus Christ.

JOURNALING

What is one principle you can apply from this passage to strengthen your prayer life?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Luke during this twelve-part study, read Luke 11:1-54. For more Bible passages on prayer, read 1 Chronicles 5:20; Matthew 17:20; 21:21-22; Luke 17:6; 18:40-42; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; James 5:15-16; and Jude 1:20.