

## Persistent Prayer

Turn with me again to the scriptures given to us in Luke chapter 11 and we'll continue with our study of this precious relationship of prayer that our Lord wants us to have with Him. And as we begin, I'd like to remind us of a special truth that is ever-present within these words, and that is that everything that we encounter and everything that we pray about each day is "Spiritual", "Spiritual". Whether a matter be of a temporal nature, food, clothing, where we will live, a crisis within our family life, and on and on, or it be our honoring and worshipping of our Lord, our God is always intimately involved within each of those matters, making it all very "Spiritual".

And that is especially so for all those unexpected encounters that we experience as we live and move and have our being within this daily life. And God wants you and me to treat all those matters as being "Spiritual". And I would like to do that with you today, as I share some of the personal matters that are taking place within my own private family life.

But first, read along with me as I read these word given in Luke chapter 11, beginning with verse 9.

<sup>9</sup>"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. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. <sup>11</sup>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? <sup>12</sup>Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>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!" (Luke 11:9-13)

These words are so very appropriate for my wife and me on this day, October 8<sup>th</sup>, because it marks the anniversary of one of the most difficult events within our lives. It was two years ago today that my precious wife was struck by a car and severely injured when she was visiting a friend in Collierville, Tennessee.

But while that was a very painful chapter in our life, especially for my precious wife, with all of her suffering and the many months of her rehabilitation, it was not all bad. There were many blessings that took place within it all.

For my dear wife, she could have been hurt much worse, and permanently so, and she could have even died. And for those mercies from God, we are so very grateful.

For my part in all that has taken place, I've been greatly blessed, in that from the very first moments of my wife's suffering, I have been required to go beyond my own "self-centered needs" and to instead focus my daily efforts on tending to the care and needs of my beloved wife. And I've experienced great joy in all that I have done.

And while now, physically, my dear wife is getting back to some measure of normality, some of the effects of the trauma still do remain, and will most likely continue. And beyond the trauma, we are also still within the throes of the battle with the insurance company to pay all the bills that were accumulated to pay for the "fixing" of all that was broken within my sweet wife's body.

Which brings us back to the reality and to the truth of these words that we are studying about here in our scripture text for today. That truth is that we ought always to pray. And not just to pray, but to be ever-so persistent with our prayers. To persistently ask and to seek and to knock, knowing and believing that as we are faithful in our persistent prayer, God will also be faithful to work out the answers and the solutions to our needs.

For us, in this difficult circumstance, our fervent daily prayers are first for the continued recovery of my dear wife, both from the physical injuries and from the trauma that still continues to reach in and give her problems and grief.

And then also, fervent daily prayer for ourselves, that our hearts would be gracious towards the woman who was driving the car that struck my precious wife. We could easily develop an anger and a bitterness towards this woman, especially because she doesn't seem to have much remorse about her role in the injuries.

From the very little knowledge that we have about this woman, there's some evidence that she is in need of fervent prayer concerning her soul. And because of that, and considering the promise concerning the Holy Spirit that is spoken about here in this passage, my wife and I have chosen to pray for this woman daily, that God would intervene within her soul.

And then also, we are fervently praying that the medical bills will be paid, hopefully by the insurance of the woman whose car struck my precious wife.

With all of these things to fill our thoughts each day, we are thankful for the sweet truths that are given to us in these scriptures. And remembering that while yes, some of these matters are of a very practical nature, they are also very, very "Spiritual". And these words of truth, exhort us and encourage us to be faithful in our persistence in prayer, never faltering in our perseverance, and never giving up for a moment as we pray, fervently asking, and seeking, and knocking, trusting that God truly will do as He has promised. And at the very best time possible, and in the very best way possible, He will bring an answer to our persistent prayers.

As I have considered these special words of scripture, especially in light of this incident of the injury of my wife, I've thought how God so wisely uses the occurrences of daily life to give us a deeper and more intimate understanding of Himself, of His ways and of His Will. And also, to instruct us about the responses that He wants you and me to have to these truths that He gives to us.

As with these truths in our passage for today, we need to take note that when God uses the opportunity to repeat a matter over and over again in several different ways, He really wants us to sit up and take notice and to follow the instructions He's giving, to ask, to seek and to knock.

Here in our passage, God is repeating over and over again the absolute necessity for us, you and me, to be persistent, diligent and patient when we come to Him with our prayers and our petitions, and not just persistent, but aggressively so.

As we studied last week in the parable about a man who came to his friend at midnight to ask for bread to feed another of his friends who had stopped by unexpectedly on a journey, Jesus said, in verse 8,

<sup>8</sup>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. (Luke 11:8)

It is so very, very important that we not lose heart when answers to our prayers don't come quickly. Within each circumstance, God's Holy Spirit has many,

many things to accomplish, many people and their circumstances to consider as He attends to our prayers and our petitions.

Some of those people will be directly involved in the matter that we are praying about, but there can also be many more that we don't know about that are also a part of the circumstance. And most often, at least some of those people will not cooperate with God's efforts.

Again, as I said in the message last week, God has given each person a "free will", and that "free will" is a necessary part of most every equation of life. As much as we might want God to simply force our loved ones to turn to Him, or as with us in this circumstance of my wife's injury, we might want God to force people to do the right thing. But forcing their obedience is not something that God will often do.

Yes, God is sovereign and He is all powerful and He can, and sometimes does, impose His providence upon a person or circumstance. But God also has some self-imposed rules that He Himself must follow.

And the evidence from these scriptures and the evidence from the ordinary events of our daily lives show us that when it comes to the exercising of our "free will", and especially in those times when we choose to make some wrong choices, God will not usually intervene and stop us. Yes, He will warn us, but He usually will not force us to stop. He instead will allow our "free will behaviors" to take their course.

And as strange as it might seem to us, in those times, our Almighty and All-powerful God will actually allow His divine purposes to be stymied by us. God tells us that we're able to "grieve" His Holy Spirit and to "quench" the Spirit's fire within us. What an awful thought, that we would actually stand in the way of and prevent the righteous work of the Almighty God.

Folks, that is a fearful position to be in! But many people do stand in His way. And sometimes it is us, you and me. And because that can take place, we need to continually examine ourselves to see if we are grieving or quenching the work of the Holy Spirit. And we need to quickly get out of God's way.

And God is gracious to those of us who know Him and have His Spirit abiding within us. If we'll be careful to listen, He will bring conviction to our minds and

will urge us to move aside. But again, we must always be listening, else we will miss the whisper of His Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, for those who do not have Christ as their Savior and do not have His Spirit dwelling within them, they cannot hear and perceive His urging, at least not like we can. And so, they continue in their ways on and on, and thus the need for our persistence as we pray for God to help them.

And now here in today's passage, we find that Jesus is not only calling us to persistence and patience in our prayers and petitions, but He is also urging us to be very aggressive as we approach His throne of grace, to ask, to seek and to knock.

And again, as we said in last week's message, God not only desires to help the ones we are praying for, He sends His grace and blessings right back to us, the ones who are praying, to bless us beyond any measure that we could hope or imagine.

A question . . . What is actually taking place here in this insistence by Jesus that we be aggressive in our pursuit of Him? I'm convinced that it is in this kind of aggressive pursuit of God that we discover that greater measure of "faith" that God desires for us to have.

Oswald Chambers, in speaking about persistence in our pursuit of God's favor, suggests that when a person is still young in their faith, God will very often quickly provide answers to their prayers and petitions. But as time goes by and that person's faith begins to grow, God's answers will begin to come more slowly.

But the delay should never be a discouragement to us. Oswald Chambers insists that it is simply God's way of letting us know that He is now trusting us with bigger, more meaningful matters to pray about, matters that require more time and more effort in prayer.

Here in today's passage, God is encouraging us to literally "storm" His gates with our persistence, to ask, to seek and to knock, and to never stop asking, seeking and knocking. But rooted within and permeating every fiber of our aggressive persistence must be a pervasive humility, desiring and seeking and asking only for the perfect will of God to be accomplished.

And therein can lay a very difficult problem with our prayers and petitions. We need to be cautious, because too often, we allow our sympathies and our affinities to get intermixed with our desires for God's will, and our prayers and our petitions can then go astray, an aggressively so.

I think about the many times that prayer requests are offered up for the physical healing of a loved one who might be close to death. There are many, well-meaning believers who adamantly hold to a belief that illness is from the devil and that with enough fervent prayer, God will heal that suffering one.

And much of what those folks believe is very true. God can, and He does, sometimes heal a desperately ill person, but not always, not always. And as to the devil's involvement, I also believe that many illnesses have the hand of the evil one controlling it. That is what satan and his demonic minions do. They bring misery and havoc to our lives and to our physical bodies.

We have only to look carefully at God's beloved servant Job to see all of the many ways that satan can work misery into a person's life. But we mustn't forget that satan can only do the things that God permits him to do. Satan had to ask permission from God to do the things he did to Job.

And that will also always be true when it comes to the suffering that you and I and our loved ones will encounter. So then, to pray that God would drive satan away from his mistreatment of ourselves or a loved one is a good thing to do. But folks God may have some other plans that we don't know about. And we need always to be careful to first seek to know and to do His will in a matter.

And I don't mean to just quickly add the words, "if it be your will". That is not God's intent for us. He wants you and me to first desire His will to be done, even over and above the health and well-being of ourselves or of our loved ones.

If it would bless God that I would have some terrible disease, would suffer and eventually die from it, then that should be alright with me. And it does not make God to be unkind or unrighteous or unholy to reach His hand into our lives and to provide woe and to provide suffering rather than to provide healing.

God is truly good all of the time, and everything that He does is always good, even our suffering and our death.

We must not always measure good and evil, right and wrong, righteousness and unrighteousness based on human sympathies. I know that that is a hard truth to accept, but God's ways are not our ways. He knows more and His wisdom is far better than our own.

So then, as God begins to trust us with the bigger matters of life, and as we begin to storm His gates asking, seeking and knocking at His door in pursuit of Him and His blessings, we need always to remember to be very careful with our prayers and petitions. Our sympathies are not always a good measuring tool. They can very often be confusing to us.

We must first, aggressively seek to know God's will in any matter that we pray about. And sometimes that is our hardest obstacle to overcome. And to some extent, it will probably remain that way, but God also has a way of easing our difficulty.

There is a promise that is implicit in God's word that as we draw nearer to Him, and as we come to know His heart and His mind, then we will begin to more and more know those things that He really wants to take place, and we can know the things and matters that we should pray for.

That is the ultimate goal, to know the heart and mind of God on each and every matter that we encounter. But how do we ever hope to do that? He answers that question right within these words, where He tells us,

<sup>13</sup>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!"(Luke 11:13)

The answer is, "God's Holy Spirit". God gives us His Holy Spirit the first moment that we receive Jesus as our Savior, and that is when the wisdom and knowledge of God begins to flow through our heart and mind.

But that is only the beginning. As we yield our hearts and minds to Him more and more, then He more and more begins to "fill" us with more and more of His wisdom and knowledge.

That is the thing that you and I must seek after, not just answers to our questions about whether something is within His will, but rather to have His Spirit full within us. And as His Spirit begins to abide more fully within us, we will begin to know

things that we never knew before. We will begin to see matters and needs and hopes from a whole different perspective, God's perspective.

Isn't that a marvelous thought, that we would know the heart and mind of God and that we would actually begin to do things in the way He intends. That we could, with great confidence, storm the gates of heaven, asking and seeking and knocking at the door of God on behalf of our friends and loved ones, and receive the answers that we need! Wouldn't that be wonderful!

And it can be! And I invite you and me to the task. Each one in this room has professed a saving faith in Christ, so why not get on about the things God intends for us.

We each need to beseech God to reveal to us the things that we should pray fervently for, and then we need to get about it, with great confidence, but with patience. We need to ask, to seek and to knock and then we need to expect to literally feel the presence of God's Holy Spirit as He goes about fulfilling His will in those matters that we are praying for. Listen again, and we'll close.

<sup>13</sup>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!" (Luke 11:13)

Let's pray.