**Persistence in Prayer (Part one)**

**See Childlike Faith**

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray without ceasing

Children are an awesome blessing from God but if you have ever noticed they can have a few very annoying traits. One of those annoying traits is their ability to ask a question over and over until they get the answer they want. You yourself may have tried this before. Some of you might still do it.

It usually goes something like this: A small child sees something they want, let’s say it is a cookie. The child will then ask their mom if they can have it. If the Mom does not respond in a way that is acceptable to the child, the child will ask again: “Mom may I have a cookie.” If the answer is still no – “MOM can I have a Cookie.” And then again (even louder this time): MOM MAY I PLEASE HAVE A COOKIE. The child will continue to do this till they wear down the parent and they finally get what they want, the Cookie. You would never think that this strategy would work but it does and you might be surprised to hear that God calls us to pray this way (well sort of)

Let’s turn in our bibles to Luke where Jesus was teaching his disciples how to pray.

 Luke 11:5-11: Then, teaching them more about prayer, he (Jesus) used this illustration: “Suppose you went to a friend’s house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You would shout up to him, ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit and I’ve nothing to give him to eat.’ He would call down from his bedroom, ‘Please don’t ask me to get up. The door is locked for the night and we are all in bed. I just can’t help you this time.’ “But I’ll tell you this—though he won’t do it as a friend, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you everything you want—just because of your persistence. And so it is with prayer—keep on asking and you will keep on getting; keep on looking and you will keep on finding; knock and the door will be opened. Everyone who asks, receives; all who seek, find; and the door is opened to everyone who knocks.

Jesus told a second parable, later in Luke, about a women and a Judge

 Luke 18 1-7 Jesus was telling them a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged.He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him, asking, ‘Give me justice in this case against my adversary.’ For a while he refused but finally said to himself, I don’t fear God or respect people, but I will give this widow justice because she keeps bothering me. Otherwise, there will be no end to her coming here and embarrassing me.” The Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. Won’t God provide justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he be slow to help them?

Supporting verses:

* James 5:16 - The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man achieves much.
* Elijah prayed for rain 7 times in a row before God sent the rain (1 Kings 18:42)
* In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus went back and prayed the same words three times (Matthew 26:44).

**🡪 Why would God accept and even encourage this child-like act?**

**First Point:** Persistent prayer show we have faith.

The bible says, when it comes to faith, we should be as children

* Luke 18: 15-17 - Then they also brought children to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”
* Matthew 18:1-4 - At this time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And Jesus called a little child to him, and placed the child among them, and He said, “Truly I tell you, unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is saying: if you are not like a child you cannot have any part in his kingdom. Many people believe this to mean you have to have faith like a child, but it is much more than that. It is unconditional love, humbleness, acceptance, trust, Quickness to forgive, slow to judge, always hopeful for the future and the willingness to learn and believe (Think fat man in a sleigh behind flying reindeer delivering present or large egg delivering bunny). Kids just believe – no questions asked – Then we grow up into cynical adults.

As we grow older our lives become busy, complicated, and filled with selfish ambition. Our trinity becomes me, myself, and I. We question everyone’s motives. We build walls to keep out pain and rejection and lose things like love, compassion and trust in the process.

Jesus calls us to return to those childlike qualities: To be teachable, loving, humble, and innocent. To forget about who is the greatest among us, and to lay aside our selfish pride. To look to our Father for our needs and obey His voice. The greatest in the kingdom of God will be the simple man, or woman, that manages to shake off the worldly standards that we are so accustomed to, and to become something that looks more like Christ

* **As the Spirit of the Lord works in us we become more like Christ and reflect hi Glory (2 Corinthians 3:18)**

Now, lets compare what Jesus is saying in these versus about children with this verse

Matthew 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

To the Jews of this time the Pharisees were considered the most righteous people on earth so we can conclude that little Children are an example of righteousness and therefore should be an example to us. (And Parents thought they were setting a good example for their children)

So, if we go back to the child asking for the cookie, the child must first believe that the Mom can give them a cookie. **We call this faith**. The Child has absolute faith that the mother can provide the cookie. So, if we put this in the context of “praying persistently”, we must have faith that God can actually provide what we are asking for. The bible tells us that Faith is one of the prerequisites for God to answer our prayers.

* Matthew21:22: And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.
* James 1:5-7: But if any of you lack wisdom, asks God, who gives to all liberally; and it shall be given. But let him ask in Faith.
* Hebrews 11:6: And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe in him and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

**🡪 Persistent prayer is an act of faith.**

**Second point:** Persistent prayer builds a relationship.

God desires our prayers, and will answer our prayers, because he wants to build a relationship with us

* John 15:7 If you abide in me and my word abides in you ask whatever you wish and it will be given
* John 15:15-16 "No longer do I call you servants, because the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you **friends** because I have made known to you all the things that I have heard from My Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.
* Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

We also need to understand that God is not saying that he is like a corrupt judge or and cranky neighbor in the parables we read. What we see is the contrast: if a corrupt judge or a cranky neighbor will give good things how much more would a loving father give to his Children.

Matthew 7:11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

How many close friends do you have that you never talk to? Probably not many. How would your family feel if you never talk to them? Like any good father, God desires to hear from his children. He wants use to spend time with him. When we are praying persistently we are spending time with God telling him the things that are important to us. Which takes us to our third point

**🡪Persistent prayer builds a relationship.**

**Third point:** Persistent prayer shows you really careabout the things you are praying for.

It is not easy to pray persistently for something. You really need to care about what you are praying for. The devil will try to do everything he can to keep you from praying and you will be faced with all kinds of distractions. When this happens, you will know that you are getting closer to God’s blessing, so do not give up. Keep praying!

Many times, when people are praying they throw out a bunch of things that come to mind but don’t really believe or care if they are answered. (God bless John & God bless Mary and God Bless…). When you pray persistently it shows God you really care about what you are praying for and willing to invest the time and effort it takes to ask for it.

So to sum it up persistent prayer shows you have faith, Shows that you desire a relationship and shows you really care for what you are praying for

**Putting it to the test:** George Muller, the great Victorian Christian and social reformer, tells a story of persistent prayer in his diary he writes

In November 1844, I began to pray for the conversion of five individuals. I prayed every day without a single intermission, whether sick or in health, on the land, on the sea, and whatever the pressure of my engagements might be. Eighteen months elapsed before the first of the five was converted. I thanked God and prayed on for the others. Five years elapsed, and then the second was converted. I thanked God for the second, and prayed on for the other three. Day by day, I continued to pray for them, and six years passed before the third was converted. I thanked God for the three, and went on praying for the other two.

Thirty-six years later he wrote that the other two were still not converted. He wrote, “But I hope in God, I pray on, and look for the answer. They are not converted yet, but they will be.”

In 1897, fifty-two years after he began to pray daily, without interruption, for these two men, they were finally converted.

Now that is commitment to prayer

**Example from my life**

A while back there were several things in my life that were really bothering me. I was desperate for answers and I came across the Parables. I decided to try praying persistently. These weren’t small things so I knew if God answered it would not be coincident but just to be sure I picked three specific items to pray for. In order to remember to pray I decided to pray every time I stood up and I would say a quick prayer for these 3 items.

After about a week of doing this, and I will say this was no easy task, 2 of my requests were suddenly answered in the same day (My youngest son had been sick for over a month and was healed, My oldest son couldn’t find a job and he found one). Just when I thought “two out of three isn’t bad”, I thanked God, and then the answer to my 3rd request happened. This was the big one. I knew if this one happened it was truly God at work. This was the one I never thought could happen: My oldest son, who did not believe in God nor did he ever want to talk about it” came to me and asked if I would sit down and explain why I believe in God. He had never shown any interest before and was a declared atheist. I knew at that moment God had answered all my prayers. Now if it was just one or maybe two of these prayers being answered in the same day you might say that it was just luck but all three on the same day? I think it required more than just Luck.

NOW - I will say when this happened, I thought I had struck Gold. I found the magic key to getting what I wanted. I set out to pray for all kinds of things but each time I started to pray I would soon forget or get distracted and then realize the things I was praying for just weren’t that important to me.

**What if God does not answer**

Sometimes God is silent but there are a few things we should consider when this happens

* Do You already have / Know the answer? (i.e. Should I love my - What does the bible say). Maybe God has given you an answer but you just don’t like it. Sometimes “No” can be an answer or maybe what he has given you is not what you expected.
* Have you been faithful with the blessing / callings God has already given you (i.e. Money, Time, friendships, ministry)? God needs to trust you with the small things before he gives you Bigger things. If God has called us to something or given us some blessing and we have neglected to do or use it wisely, then why should he bless us more. For instance, If you prayer and God gives you a good Job but you don’t work at it “as if working for the Lord” then will he bless you with bigger things?

Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

* Maybe you need to start doing things God has already called you to do or stop doing things, that are outside His will, before he will bless you with new things? Sometimes God will call us to patiently wait for Him to move (Joseph in prison) and other times God will wait for us to step out in Faith (David and Goliath). We have to listen for God’s direction.
* God will never give you anything that would go against his good and perfect will. (Like giving you something just to boost your own ego or that would result in you falling away from Him) Remember Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane “not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). We should include this is our prayer when we pray.
* Are you ready to receive what he wants to give you? (What will you do with it, will you acknowledge to your friends that God gave it to you)

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

* We also need to remember that God knows all things so be sure you really want what you are praying for. For example, praying God for a specific Job when God knows you will not be happy in that position. You might choose instead to pray for God to show you the right Job.
* Finally, we need to realize “No” is an answer (Like Jesus praying in the Garden).
* Sometimes the answer is wait. I am not good at waiting but I know God’s timing is perfect and mine not so much.

So, set your life right with God and keep praying without ceasing. Know that God loves you and wants you to have all good things especially those things he can use to move you and others towards his Kingdom and not away.