

Lessons for Life

1. **Prevailing prayer is persistent.** Spurgeon argues, if we would prevail, we must persist; we must continue incessantly and constantly, and know no pause to our prayer till we win the mercy to the fullest possible extent. (Metropolitan Tabernacle Newington: Sermon 856 “The Importunate Widow”).
2. **To be persistent in prayer, pray when your mind is fully present, when you are at your best.** For some it is in the morning, when there are fewer distractions. Mark 1:35 seems to indicate Jesus followed this pattern. Others prefer the evening when everyone else is asleep. In either case, make sure that you find a place and time to be consistent, so that you can avoid what some would call the “feast and famine” prayer life. Cultivate a relationship with the Father through prayer. Make it a sacred event in your daily routine.
3. **If you find that prayer is difficult for you, do not be ashamed.** The disciples had to ask Jesus. He gave them a simple model prayer and basic principles. Start with simple prayer. Do not attempt to pray for long periods of time if you know you cannot maintain focus. Grow by learning to intercede for others.

“The Lord’s Prayer”

After this manner pray ye: Our father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Matthew: Chapter 6; verses 9-13

Explore Jesus’ teachings on being persistent in taking our needs to God.

Seventh Day Baptist Church - Sydney
cnr Sorrell & Fennell Sts Parramatta 2150
www.asdba.org

Inspired to Pray



Seventh Day Baptist Church - Sydney

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The Most Challenging Spiritual Discipline

Desperation prayers have been the beginning of spiritual life for many people. But by themselves such prayers are not sufficient to sustain spiritual life. Many of us fall into a pattern where the only times we pray are the times we are prompted by crisis or pain; the rest of the time we rely on our own strength and cleverness (p. 92). Taken from *The Life You've Always Wanted* by John Ortberg. Copyright © 1997, 2002 by John Ortberg. Used by permission of <http://www.zondervan.com/cultures/en-US/product/productDetail.htm?ProdID=com.zondervan.9780310246954&QueryStringSite=Zondervan>

Most Christians probably expect or desire prayer to be easy, when in reality it takes discipline and effort. Other disciplines can have challenges, as well. You find reasons to miss fellowshiping with believers in church; your daily Bible reading time is lost occasionally because of fatigue or a conflict in your schedule; introverts often feel witnessing is not for them. With these we can find ways to survive the challenges. Most of us have plenty of opportunities to spend time with Christians during the week; we can find all sorts of Bible study helps through various media; and our lives act as a witness even if we do not use words. **If you do not pray, you have no “substitute” way to fill the void.** In Luke 11:1, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray. So the discipline to pray, must have been a challenge for them as well.

The Scripture Account

Luke 11 records Jesus providing two means of answering their inquiry. Verses 2-4 are a condensed version of the so-called “Model Prayer” seen in Matthew 6:9-13. Then he uses a parable and its interpretation to provide instruction that is similar to Matthew 7:7-12. A man needs three loaves from a friend. He goes to him at midnight, so the man does

not want to help because his children are in bed and he does not want to be bothered. Jesus, states, “yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs” (Luke 11:8).

Luke also records another parable in 18:1-8, which refers to the widow who keeps coming to a judge who does not fear God or respect man. Just like the friend in chapter 11, the judge relents at the end and says, “yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out” (Luke 18:5). In both cases Jesus uses the idea of contrast instead of comparison to illustrate his point. Most parables take an example from everyday life and compare it to a spiritual principle. These two instances teach persistence in prayer by showing that if people who are unlike God eventually relent, how much more a loving heavenly Father answers the requests of his children.

While the New Testament does not offer a tremendous amount of detail concerning Jesus’ personal persistence in prayer, there are some examples. Both Matthew 4 and Luke 4 record him spending 40 days and nights in prayer and fasting in the wilderness. In Luke 6:12 we are told, “He went off to the mountain to pray and he spent the whole night in prayer to God.” Hebrews 5:7 summarises the anguish of the Garden of Gethsemane by stating, “He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save him from death and he was heard because of his piety. Moreover, Paul tells Christians to “pray without ceasing” in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and to “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” in Philippians 4:6. He prayed “night and day” for Timothy (2 Timothy 1:3).

Luke connects persistence with action verbs in verse

9. You have to ask to receive, seek to find and knock to have the door opened. This runs counter to the modern philosophy of “name it and claim it,” which can create the expectation of a quick, easy answer. John MacArthur asserts:

*We are not heard for our many words, but for the cry of our hearts. The man who came to his friend to ask for bread did not recite some formula request, he pleaded for what he needed. The same is true for the widow – she cried out for protection from the one who had the power to answer her request. **Persistent, continual prayer that comes from the innermost part of your being is what moves the heart of our compassionate, loving God.*** (Chapter one – A heart Set on God: Fervency in Prayer”). ©1995, 2006 Cook Communications Ministries. *Alone With God* by John MacArthur. Used with permission. May not be further reproduced. All rights reserved

Also, this persistence runs parallel to the parental instinct of providing for the needs of children, as Jesus relates in the next three verses. God gives us the Holy spirit; in Matthew 7:11 he says the Father will give us “what is good.” Therefore Jesus is not offering us automatic material prosperity. Sometimes the things our world believes are significant, such as money, possessions, power, talent and the like, are not the things we need to be in closer relationship with Christ, so the Father may not grant them.

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