

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

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No: 53

LORD TEACH US TO PRAY IV

Perseverance in Prayer

Reading: Luke 18:1-14

The Oxford dictionary's definition of the word 'perseverance' is "to continue steadfastly especially in something that is difficult or tedious." Coupled with the right understanding, perseverance can be an extremely valuable thing.

So often, as Christians, we pray these half-hearted prayers and we don't really lay hold of God. As a result, we are frustrated in our prayer life because we are not seeing the answers we so desperately want. But Jesus gave us a tremendous clue as to how to obtain answers to prayer. You find it in Luke 11, in the parable of the man who came to his friend at midnight, and he asked him for three loaves [of bread]. The good thing about this parable is that the petitioner is not asking for himself; he is asking for his friend. Jesus is telling us it is because of his persistence in asking. He knows that his friend has bread; he knows that his other friend has a need, and he knows that if he can connect the two together, the need will be filled. Because of his persistence in prayer, the friend answers. The other example we shall consider is someone who prayed that God should change events, but this time for his immediate benefit. His name is Hezekiah. However, we must pause to refresh our memory of what we had learnt in the past studies about the importance of our concept of God in prayer.

Before any meaningful progress can be made - in any enterprise - knowledge is required. Here is what you must know about God to be successful in prayer. Identify them in Job 19:25; 23:10 and 42:2. There were many things Job did not know (Chapters 38-40) but he knew that his redeemer lived and that he is almighty.

Read Luke 11:5-11

- What message is Jesus trying to convey in this passage?
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- Which verse will you consider the most critical and why?
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- How could verses 9-10 be misunderstood or misapplied?
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Tick and explain your answer(s)

- The point of the parable about the neighbour is that
 - (a) We give up too soon when we pray to God,
 - (b) We should refuse to take no for answer,
 - (c) God is as responsive as our reluctant neighbour,
 - (d) God gives us what we want, not in exasperation but in joy,
 - (e) The answer is always yes from God,
 - (f) We should keep praying on the same point no matter what the answer is.

The word translated friend is a strong one and indicates more than a casual or ordinary acquaintance. It is a term of endearment, 'to love as a brother'. This is an impossible thing – turning away a man you loved like a brother. No one would do that, no matter the hour. Yet this man does. What we have here are two very stubborn men: one man determined to get bread, the other just as determined not to give. If friendship can't make this man open his door what can? Perseverance and persistence from his friend. Evidently, Jesus considered this shameless stubbornness an advantage in praying because He emphasized it again in the parable of the widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). We can conclude that Intercession is stubborn praying, but with knowledge. It is not vain repetition which is the countless mouthings of the same phrase or sentence over and over again. Pagans go in for vain repetition. They say the exact same words over and over again. This is not the kind of perseverance that Jesus calls for. Perseverance is spiritual endurance governed by reason. Vain repetition is a mindless reiteration of the same words - without reason and without respect to the intelligence of the hearer. Beware of people who use vain repetition!

Patience : It is a characteristic of valuables that the more worthwhile they are the longer they take to produce. In other words, time is involved in the making of everything of worth. And this is where patience links hands with perseverance.

What do the following verses: Proverbs 20:22, Psalm 40:1, Daniel 12:12, Habakkuk 2:3 have in common?

To hold on when all around are letting go is most essential for final victory. Perseverance in prayer usually pays off; but even when it doesn't, we must never give up our faith in God. Hold fast!

- What do we learn from the story of the Hebrew youths in Daniel 3, especially verse 17?
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Here is evidence of faith without presumption. In other words: 'Our God can save us. But even if He decides not to, we will not break His law and worship your golden image.' My prayer is that we will all be as steadfast as those three Hebrew worthies were.

Read Isaiah 38: 1-22

Hezekiah became ill and was not surprisingly alarmed when Isaiah prophesied that he would not recover. But despite the prophet's pronouncement, Hezekiah cries out to God and perseveres in prayer. His prayer is recorded in verses 10ff. In response, God sent Isaiah back with the message that God would heal Hezekiah and give him another 15 years of life.

- What can we learn about prayer from the example of Hezekiah?
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- Would you like to know the exact date when you will die? What difference would it make in how you live now?
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The Prayer Jigsaw (continued)

Praying with the Spirit

Any of the spiritual gifts can be used in prayer. We have already seen that the prophetic gifts are useful. In particular, the gift of speaking in tongues is very helpful in intercessory prayer.

The Holy Spirit has a vital part to play in intercession and he is able to pray in and through us when we don't know what precisely to pray for. Praying in tongues is an excellent form of intercession because we become a very ready vehicle for the spirit's prayers in which we are not encumbered by the need to find the right words, grammar etc, neither are we limited by our own minds. In the context of the intercessory group, tongues is best used by all who speak in tongues, praying together. If only one person speaks in tongues then we are required to pray for an interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:13).

Posture

Sitting comfortably on a chair is not the ideal posture for intercession! Clearly people will have their own preferences, but the following points should be noted. The most comfortable position will probably be the least effective for intercession! Intercession is work, not relaxation. Sitting in an attentive way is well suited to listening to God. Standing is an excellent posture for intercession. It keeps you awake and alert, and is particularly helpful for authoritative prayer in spiritual warfare. Kneeling is appropriate for prayers of repentance and prayers of beseeching. Prostration is one stage on from kneeling. It is an act of humbling and is particularly appropriate when there is a strong awareness of the holiness of God. Walking in prayer has been found to be very helpful, though it's not that easy for groups meeting in living rooms! Eyes—most find it easiest to intercede with their eyes closed, unless there is something helpful to focus on. However, please note that for someone new to group prayer there is something very strange about people meeting together, shutting their eyes and talking to an unseen God! You may need to explain a bit.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, forgive my faintheartedness and the times I have given up too easily. Forgive me for the times when, like the disciples in Gethsemane, I slept when I should have been praying. Send your Spirit upon me today to make me a worthy warrior in prayer, only ceasing when you give the word. This I ask in the name of Jesus who persevered for me. Amen.