

## The Power of Persistent Prayer

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

A man's daughter had asked the local pastor to come and pray with her father. When the pastor arrived, he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows and an empty chair beside his bed. The pastor assumed that the old fellow had been informed of his visit. "I guess you were expecting me," he said. "No, who are you?" "I'm the new associate at your local church," the pastor replied. "When I saw the empty chair, I figured you knew I was going to show up." "Oh yeah, the chair," said the bedridden man. "Would you mind closing the door?" Puzzled, the pastor shut the door. "I've never told anyone this, not even my daughter," said the man. "But all of my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it always went right over my head."

"I abandoned any attempt at prayer," the old man continued, "until one day about four years ago my best friend said to me, 'Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here's what I suggest. Sit down on a chair, place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because he promised, 'I'll be with you always.' Then just speak to him and listen in the same way you're doing with me right now." "So, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful, though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm."

The pastor was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old guy to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with him, and returned to the church. Two nights later the daughter called to tell the pastor that her daddy had died that afternoon. "Did he seem to die in peace?" he asked. "Yes, when I left the house around two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his corny jokes, and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange. In fact, beyond strange-kind of weird. Apparently, just before Daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on a chair beside the bed."

Dear friend, we must get back to talking to God these days, knowing that He is near, knowing that He still answers prayer. God is still on the throne and prayer still does change things! If we will learn the secret of persistent or prevailing prayer we can unlock the blessing of Heaven and God will pour out a blessing upon our personal lives and church ministry where we serve that we cannot contain.

Someone wrote:

“Prayer moves the hand that moves the world.”

I believe this is true. This means that prayer moves God’s hand and His hand moves the world and the events associated with our lives. We can pray and know that God can answer our prayers.

#### I. The promise of persistent prayer

Jeremiah 33:3 says:

“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.”

If you do business with God, then God will do business with you! This verse teaches that God moves in response to our prayers. Let us never forget this.

- a. There is the prayer (“Call unto me”).
- b. There is the promise (“and I will answer thee”).
- c. There is the prize (“great and mighty things”).

We must learn the secret of being committed to prayer so we might receive answers to our prayers and experience the blessing of God upon our lives. This verse is given to encourage us to pray, so we might receive answers to our prayers, which are not selfish but spiritual prayers, and prayers which align with God’s purpose and plan for our lives. This verse reminds us that prevailing in prayer is the way we receive from God. Do we really believe that God will show us “great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” Are we willing to step out, wrestle with God in prayer, and find out what God can do?

Someone said:

“Don’t tell God what we cannot do; find out what God can do.”

A little girl came to her mother and said, "I suppose, up in heaven, they think I am dead." The mother replied, "Why Mary, why do you suppose they think you are dead?" "Well," said the little girl, "because, I have not said my prayers for a week." How about you? When was the last time you prayed? Furthermore, when was the last time you really prayed and meant business with God? If we don't pray we can't expect God's promise of answered prayer.

God is still on the throne! Psalm 103:19 says:

“The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.”

In today's culture, we have seen people mocking the Biblical family, the Biblical account of creation, traditional values, and moral living. But while others mock, we can be sure that Christ is still on the throne and is in control of everything.

“What though wars may come,  
With marching feet and beat of the drum.  
For I have Christ in my heart.  
What though nations rage,  
As we approach the end of the age,  
For I have Christ in my heart.  
God is still on the throne. Almighty God is He.  
And He cares for His own through all eternity.  
So let come what may, whatever it is,  
I only say that I have Christ in my heart.  
I have Christ in my heart.”

Since the Lord is still on the throne, and in charge, He can answer prayer and bring wonderful blessings into our lives. In this study we want to talk about persistent or prevailing prayer that touches the heart of God. Have we touched God's heart lately? Have our prayers reached inside the gates of Heaven?

## II. The problems of persistent prayer

There are some problems that can develop when God's people begin to pray with persistence. They are manmade problems. One must humble themselves when praying and beware of the old nature getting in the way of true persistent prayer, which is done out of humility, and reverence for God.

### a. Arrogance

Abraham's prayer was a humble prayer since he recognized that he was nothing but dust and ashes in God's sight (Gen. 18:25). There was no arrogance associated with his prevailing prayer. Persistent prayer is not arrogant prayer. It is not commanding God to do something. You can never command God to do anything! Do you know why? It's because He is God and you are not God! You don't have the authority to command God. God commands you and controls you (Job 36:10; Acts 9:6). You are not in charge. God is in charge (Ps. 115:3 – "he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased"). Isaiah said we are as grasshoppers in His sight.

Isaiah 40:22 says: "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in."

### b. Selfishness

Praying with persistence does not mean we can pray selfishly and bring our own personal will and wants to pass (James 4:3 – "ye ask amiss"). Prevailing prayer means we should always pray to bring God's plan and purpose to fruition in our lives and the lives of others. James 4:15 says:

"For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

Persistent prayer does not mean we can bypass God's will for our lives. Prayer is the way God's will is brought to fruition in our lives. It's not the way we override God's purpose for our lives. However, we can receive answers to our prayers and bring God's will to fruition in our lives, when we take prayer seriously, and pray spiritually, instead

of selfishly. Prayer is one way God accomplishes His perfect plan for our lives. God's plan works in connection with God's people praying. This keeps life exciting and prayer as a needed and important ministry. It gives prayer the nature of a fuse, which can light the firecracker and result in the explosion of God's blessing upon our lives!

Psalm 126:5

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

Let us not forget this. Our prayers should never be arrogant or selfish. We should humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, so He can bless our lives once again.

Psalm 51:17

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

### III. The providence of persistent prayer

God often works in accordance with the saint's prayers. The Biblical facts about prayer and God's providence can be summed up in this way. First, God does some other things without anyone praying (Matt. 5:45; Prov. 21:1). Second, God does some things contrary to the prayers made (2 Samuel 12:15-18; 2 Cor. 12:8-9). Third, God does many things only in answer to prayer (James 5:17-18; Jer. 33:3). You can be sure of one thing. God always does something! The point is this. The same God who ordained the end, also ordained the means to the end – prayer! God often allows human responsibility to enter into His eternal purpose, decision, and the bringing to pass of His decrees (Isa. 14:24). In other words, God allows prayer and answers to prayer, as a way to fulfill His sovereign purpose for our lives. Jesus said in John 16:24, "ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full."

The wonderful truth is this; if we want to experience the joy of answered prayer and greater blessing in our lives, we must keep praying. Prayer, persistent or prevailing prayer, can have a direct impact upon our lives, since through prayer God's purpose and plan is brought to fruition in our lives. Prayer is the way we get God's will done on earth.

I would like add something to this thought. There is a certain amount of flexibility within the decrees of God. God has determined that we can be blessed according to our giving, serving, or praying, and expect blessing from Him in proportion to the way we live out our lives on earth (2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-8). In short, God blesses us in relationship to our persistent prayers. If you want more answered prayer, and blessing, then start praying more! God's decrees do not override our prayers. In some cases, His decrees come to pass through our prayers. This is because God's purpose is interwoven together with our prayer lives. God's purpose for our lives comes to pass only as we pray and receive the blessing associated with answered prayer.

2 Corinthians 9:6 states this spiritual principle:

“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”

What is true in relationship to giving and eternal reward is also true in relationship to prayer and the blessing of getting answers from God. Paul sets forth the law of the harvest. It is a well-known fact in agriculture that a generous sowing of seed is necessary if there is to be a generous harvest. If you do not sprinkle enough seed on the ground, your harvest will be small. This agricultural law can be used to illustrate the spiritual law or principle connected with giving. The more you sow in relationship to money, as you give to God's work and cause, the more spiritual blessings of joy, fulfillment, and eternal rewards you will receive.

Think of it this way, God may want to give us more blessing than we have, if we would take Him more seriously and sacrificially give to His work and cause. God has decreed that we would be spiritually blessed today and through eternity in direct proportion to the way we give. However, this same spiritual law applies to prayer. God blesses us proportionately, or in a greater way, when we learn to pray to Him in faith and with persistence (2 Chron. 7:14). When we pray with persistence, we experience the joy associated with answered prayer and greater blessing from God. Let's not forget the harvest principle when we pray!

Jeremiah 33:3 once again says: “Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” The Bible teaches that God blesses our lives in direct proportion to our prayer life and His blessings are seen in many ways – health, strength, power, victory, satisfaction, having our needs met, and eternal reward. One thing is certain, greater blessing comes when we pray. So today, we must learn the importance of persistent prayer. We must take more time to pray!

“Ere you left your room this morning,  
Did you think to pray?  
In the name of Christ our Savior,  
Did you sue for loving favor,  
As a shield today?  
Oh, how praying rests the weary!  
Prayer will change the night to day;  
So when life seems dark and dreary,  
Don't forget to pray.”

#### IV. The pictures of persistent prayer

There are four pictures or examples in Scripture of the power of persistent prayer. We would call it prevailing prayer. These three examples demonstrate what prayer can do to the heart of God. Prayer, persistent prayer, prevailing prayer, and meaningful heart-wrenching prayer does change things.

##### A. Abraham's intercession for Sodom (Genesis 18:16-33)

Abraham's prayers for the safety of the righteous people in the city were made with genuine humility and reverence. He pleaded that God would deliver Sodom if there were as few as 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, or even 10 righteous people there (Gen. 18:24-32). The text reveals, “And he spake unto him yet again” (vs. 29), as he interceded and pleaded for these righteous people in the city. He was not trying to talk God into doing something against His will, as Lot did, when praying for Zoar (Gen. 19:18-23). Abraham's prayer was sincere and God knew it. God was willing to listen to Abraham! This is prevailing prayer.

Consider seven important types of prayer.

1. Courageous prayer (Gen. 18:22)

“And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord.”

As the narrative goes, the angelic visitors turned toward Sodom and began walking in the direction of the city. It's likely they were moving in this direction to judge the city. However, the Bible says that Abraham "stood yet before the Lord." This means that Abraham was courageous enough to stand up before the Lord, and intercede in prayer for those righteous people, who were still in Sodom. He was bold and courageous in his prayers. He was willing to take the initiative to wrestle with God in prayer, even though He knew that God was eventually going to judge the city. Abraham had the courage to pray and see if he could change God's decision to destroy Sodom. Abraham was willing to stand before God, in prayer, as the angelic visitors walked toward Sodom to destroy the city. Are we courageous enough to stand up and intercede in prayer? Are we willing to look toward Sodom, realize God's coming judgment upon the lost, and then stand before the Lord in prayer, asking for His mercy and blessing?

“Brethren, see poor sinners round you  
slumbering on the brink of woe;  
Death is coming, hell is moving,  
can you bear to let them go?  
See our fathers and our mothers,  
and our children sinking down;  
Brethren, pray and holy manna  
Will be showered all around.”

Abraham, like Jacob, was determined to get God's attention and blessing. So let's compare Abraham's courageous persistence in prayer with Jacob's wrestling with God.

Genesis 32:24-29

“And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until



the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there.”

Like Abraham, Jacob did not give up. Dear friend, it's always too soon to give up! Jacob was very courageous and bold and “wrestled a man” all night long “until the breaking of the day” (Gen. 18:24). Although Jacob was known for his scheming methods, his battle with this man proves he wanted God's blessing. This was no ordinary man. This was probably a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ in human form (Christophany – Hosea 12:4) or a theophany of God, since we read about the Lord appearing to Abraham earlier (Gen. 18:1, 13) and since Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face.” (Gen. 32:30).

By the way, have we seen the face of God lately? Have we experienced His power and presence operating in our lives? Have we come to grips with the fact that we need Him and His blessing, if we are ever going to amount to anything in life? Have we wrestled with God lately, as we prayed and expected His blessing and direction for our personal lives and church ministry? We must get back to being men and women of faith, believing that God can bless, and will bless, both our church and personal lives, as we seek His blessing.

The text says Jacob was “left alone” (Gen. 32:24) with God. This is the secret of finding out who we are and who God is. When we take time to be alone with God, we come to grips with ourselves, and God's power, which is needed to bless and change our lives. Alone with God! This is the secret to discovering who we really are and finding God's power for our lives.

C. H. Macintosh said:

“To be left alone with God is the only true way of arriving at a just knowledge of ourselves and our ways. We can never get a true estimate of nature and all its actings until we have weighed them in the balances of the sanctuary, and there we may ascertain their real worth. No matter what we may think about ourselves, nor yet what man may think about us, the great question is ‘What does God think about us?’ And the answer to this question can only be learned when we are ‘left alone.’ Away from the world, away from self, away from all the thoughts, reasonings, imaginings, and emotions of mere nature, and ‘alone with God,’— thus, and thus alone, can we get a correct judgment about ourselves.”

In this text, we see the prevailing attitude of Jacob. Notice Jacob’s persistence in wanting to receive God’s blessing when he says, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26). This man wanted God to bless and protect his life and family from Esau and his enemies. Jacob may have been trying to do it his own way, once again, but it does prove his desire to be blessed by God. Jacob fought with this mysterious Visitor, who was God, and wanted His blessing to come upon his life and family. However, during the battle Jacob’s thigh was taken out of place (Gen. 32:25 – “he touched the hollow of his thigh”) in order to teach Jacob that God’s blessing cannot be won by force and trickery. Jacob learned the lifelong secret, that he could not by his own conniving actions, and repeated attempts to wrestle with this strange visitor, make things right with Esau, and create God’s blessing for himself and family (Gen. 32:13-21). God had to cripple Jacob to prove that He alone could bless him without his deceit and trickery.

God must sometimes do this to us, in order to get us to see our own helplessness, in light of His greatness and power operating in our lives. God must sometime take us down to the ground and cripple our lives before we see ourselves as dirt, dust, and utterly dependent upon Him. God wants us to become nothing, so we can become something! Jacob had previously conned Esau out of the blessing and birthright, and now he was trying to con Esau into forgiving him, by sending him multiple gifts. This was bad enough, but Jacob was now trying to win the battle with God, and force God into doing something for him. His desire to wrestle with God and receive the

Lord's blessing upon his life was a noble act, since Jacob realized that true blessing can only come from God. However, Jacob needed to learn, while wrestling with God, that the Lord was in control of the situation – not him. Jacob needed to find out that he could not force God to bless his life and do something contrary to the Lord's purpose. He needed to learn the secret of depending upon the Lord and allowing God to work in the situation.

The point is this; let's learn the secret of wrestling with God in prayer and longing for His blessing. Jacob should be praised for this. However, let us not think that we can make something happen outside God's will and force God into doing something. Jacob was trying to do it his way, instead of God's way! Many times we are guilty of this. We want the blessing of the Lord but we try and create this blessing by our own scheming plans and pragmatic practices. Let God do it! Let God have His way! Let God work! Get out of the way!

We think we can sometime create the atmosphere of God's blessing by doing something, changing something, and creating something new. We don't receive God's true blessing by rearranging the furniture or bringing glass pulpits, new programs, and a party atmosphere into the church. God's true blessing never comes in this way. This is a terrible travesty of God and His power. You can't create the blessing of God! You cannot coerce God into blessing your life! You must simply do it God's way and cast yourself upon the Lord to receive His blessing.

It's interesting that Jacob wrestled with God and the Lord took and shrank the sinew in his joint ("touched the hallow of his thigh" – Gen. 32:25), so Jacob could learn an important lesson. Jacob discovered that there was nothing he could do, through His own power and strength, to gain God's favor and blessing. It was only through dependence upon the Lord that Jacob could truly be blessed. As a result of learning this lesson, God changed His name from Jacob (one who schemes or supplants) to Israel (God fights and rules), reminding Jacob that it is only through encountering God and depending upon the Lord to win the battle for him, that blessing came into his life (Gen. 32:28). Jacob lost the physical battle with God but he won a spiritual battle. The changed name, along with his limp, would remind Jacob and everyone of us today, that when we want

God's blessing, we must remember that it's God who fights for us, and brings the blessing into our lives.

This is why the closing of the verse says that Jacob had "power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. 32:28). In short, Jacob prevailed with God, not by his scheming plans, but because God chose to graciously bless his life. Jacob often sought to receive God's blessing by his own strength and through His own trickery. He previously prevailed by his own power and plans. But not this time! God won the fight or battle and taught Jacob an important lesson. He taught Jacob that he must trust in the Lord's power and provision, if he is ever going to receive the true blessing of God. It was not really Jacob who was the fighting or ruling prince, but God. Jacob's changed name and his shrunken sinew in his hip would be an eternal reminder that it's the Lord who fights for Israel and blesses them.

Genesis 32:32, "Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank." Pfeiffer says: "The sciatic nerve, or thigh vein, must be removed from the slaughtered animal before that portion of the animal may be prepared for consumption by orthodox Jews."

All of this teaches us an important lesson on prevailing with God, the power of God, and His true blessing. Like Abraham, Jacob is to be recognized for his desire to receive God's blessing, through wrestling with God. Let's not miss this in the narrative. Are we willing to wrestle with God for the true blessing? Have you ever wrestled with God through the night till the daybreak? Have you ever been awakened at night and started wrestling with God in prayer realizing that if anything is going to happen in this church, in the lives of people, and if Satan is going to be defeated, you need to pray? Have you ever really prevailed in prayer in order to receive God's blessing? Many of us need to light a match to our prayers, and when we stop praying through our old forms and rituals, God might just do something!

Please notice once again that even when "the hollow of his thigh was touched" (vs. 25) Jacob continued to wrestle with God. Jacob learned the lesson that he was dependent upon God but he did not give up for his heart was aflame with a passion for God's blessing. He hung

on to God even with his hip shrunken and out of place. God had humbled him, and yet Jacob hung on for his dear life, so his life would be blessed. Jacob was willing to walk with a limp the rest of his life in order to have God's blessing.

Genesis 18:22, "And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord." The same aggressive attitude, which Jacob possessed, was expressed in relationship to Abraham's prayer over the righteous in Sodom (Gen. 18:23-33). He wanted God to intercede on behalf of the righteous people in Sodom (Lot and his family). The lesson is this. Sometimes we must wrestle with God in the matter of prayer, if we are going to receive His true blessing. There are times when persistent, prevailing prayer moves God's heart and results in His blessing. Abraham discovered this to be true. Have we found this to be true? Have we been prevailing in prayer for the victory of the saints (Eph. 6:18) or do we have the attitude, "Oh they will never change." Do we prevail in prayer over lost souls, or do we say, "Oh they will never get saved."

In this Biblical narrative, we see how God can choose to answer our prayers, when we are willing to courageously and confidently approach Him, and petition Him to do something extraordinary. Our problem is this, we don't believe in God's power anymore! We don't believe what God can do when we step out and mean business with Him. We don't believe that God can answer our prayers and bring in the blessing and harvest. How can God work in our lives, and the lives of other people, if we really don't believe that He can change the hearts of people and the circumstances which surround us?

Mark 9:24

"And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

This should be our cry for such a time at this (Esther 4:14). We must believe! Christians are called believers, but they often act like unbelievers. Believing unbelievers! Let us persevere in prayer so God's greatest blessings can come upon our lives, children, and church ministries. This is what Abraham is going to do in this particular situation. He is going to bargain with God, intercede for others, and ask for God's blessing to come upon them. Dear friend,

don't expect a thousand-dollar answer to a ten-cent prayer! We must learn to wrestle with God in prayer.

Many years ago, the men, during one of our special prayer meetings, were praying together for some specific things. An old man who was a warrior for the Lord was visiting the church. When he stood up, the first words out of his mouth were, "O God!" Somehow I knew that this man was a Jacob or Abraham who knew how to wrestle with God in prayer. He addressed God in a certain agonizing manner, that proved he understood how the Lord could do great and mighty things in our lives, and the lives of other people.

Jeremiah 33:3

"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

Dear friend, we learn from Abraham's experience that there is a type of prevailing prayer, which touches the heart of God, and moves the hand of God. If you want to witness the mountains moving then prevail in prayer and faith.

Matthew 17:20

"And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

## 2. Compassionate prayer (Gen. 18:23)

"And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?"

Abraham realized that Lot was in this city, whose spirit was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" (2 Pet. 2:7). He knew about Lot's family and wanted God to spare them. We need to have this same kind of compassion for people today. Abraham was showing his compassion for those righteous people, who were in the line of God's fire, and who would experience friendly fire, if God judges Sodom. Abraham was concerned about people enough to intercede for them and see if God would spare His judgment for their sake.

Abraham believed that God would spare His judgment, if He found righteous people, who were still honoring God, within the city of Sodom. However, since God could not find ten righteous people in the city (vs. 32), He would have to eventually judge Sodom. Imagine this. God would end up judging the entire city for there were not even ten righteous people living in the city. The practical lesson is this. Do we have compassion for people when we pray? Are we really concerned about their lives and souls? Do we really have a concern to reach out to them and intercede for them? Let's stop being so selfish in our time of praying.

Luke 22:31-32

“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”

James Montgomery Boice once said:

“We are never more like the Lord Jesus Christ or more pleasing to God the Father than when we pray for others.”

If we want to be more like Jesus, we will find time to prevail in prayer for others.

### 3. Confident prayer (Gen. 18:24-26)

“Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.”

These verses teach the importance of confident persistence in prayer. Abraham prayed in confidence before the sovereign God, who could change everything, and make a difference! My friend, if anything true and lasting is going to happen, God must do it! Abraham knew this. Do we know it today? I like to think that Abraham was buttering up God. Abraham pleaded with boldness and

confidence before God. As He approached God in prayer, He reminds God about His own justice, and in one sense pleads for mercy in view of God's justice. Some suggest Abraham is questioning God's justice at this point, but I think He is simply expressing to God His own character, in order to touch His heart. Abraham was not testing God, but in his praying he pleaded with God, in order to make a difference. If God could justify saving the righteous in Sodom, if it was within the scope of His justice, then so be it.

Abraham's "bargaining" with God jars some readers of the Bible. But Abraham's repeated prayers, though confident and bold, were made with genuine humility. He prayed for 50 righteous people, but kept bargaining with God, all the way down to ten righteous people (Gen. 18:24-32). He did not give up! This narrative teaches us the importance of prevailing with God in prayer. What is the lesson? As we plead and prevail with God in confident prayer, it just might touch the heart of God, so that He answers our prayer.

When we address God, we must address Him with confidence, knowing that He can do anything, make a difference in the lives of people, and the circumstances that surround us. God is still the answer. It's not psychology, psychotherapy, Dr. Phil, Oprah Winfrey, or any other person. It's God! I think Abraham knew the secret and power of persistent prayer. If he did not have confidence, or truly believe what God could do, he would have never entered into this bargaining plea with the Lord.

If we want to see God bless our churches in a wonderful way, we need to bargain with God. We need to pray in confidence, believing what God can do and wants to do for our ministries. Are we ready to bargain with God? Confident, persistent prayer does touch the heart of God, and as we pray, we will always know that Judge of all the earth will always do right (Gen. 18:25). God is still on the throne and He is in charge. How God chooses to answer our prayers will always be right! Our part is to pray, and God's part is to answer, as He sees fit. Do we really believe that prevailing prayer works? Do we have as much faith and persistence before God as Abraham did?

#### 4. Contrite prayer (Gen. 18:27-28)



“And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And he said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it.”

Abraham was humble or contrite before God. He showed a sense of remorse and unworthiness in respect to his own life (“dust and ashes”). As mentioned before, prevailing and persistent prayer is not arrogant prayer. It is humble prayer. Dust and ashes! This sounds different than the self-esteem theology of Robert Schuler and all the rest of these positive, self-esteem proclaimers of today. Abraham realized that he was unworthy of God’s blessing and humbled himself before God. God’s heart is moved when a person possesses a contrite spirit before Him, a heart of humble unworthiness, when viewing his life before the greatness of God Almighty.

Psalm 51:17

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

It’s not how great I am but how puny, powerless, and penitent I am before God that counts. John Bunyan wrote:

“He that is down needs fear no fall,  
He that is low, no pride;  
He that is humble ever shall  
Have God to be his guide.”

A. W. Tozer said:

“Because Christ Jesus came to the world clothed in humility, he will always be found among those who are clothed with humility. He will be found among the humble people.”

When we approach God, like Abraham, we must approach Him with humility, realizing our own unworthiness to receive His hand of blessing. I am not worthy!! Are any of us really worthy of His blessing? We must understand how small we are and how great God is when we approach Him in prayer. We must come into His presence with humbleness of mind and spirit. We must approach God in dust

and ashes! When we do this, God's heart is moved. God still responds to dust and ashes!

“Courage, brother! Do not stumble,  
Though thy path be as dark as night;  
There's a star to guide the humble,  
Trust in God and do the right.”

#### 5. Challenging prayer (Gen.18:29-31)

“And he spake unto him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there...”

Do we ever challenge God in our time of prayer? The Bible says “he spake unto him yet again” (vs. 29). Once again, we see the persistent attitude and prevailing prayer of Abraham for the righteous in the city of Sodom. Abraham did not give up. He did not throw in the towel. How often do we give up in our praying? Abraham intercedes for Sodom six times (vv. 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32). Moreover, as each part of his request was granted, he seems to have been encouraged to come back and try the same approach again.

F. B. Meyer writes:

“It looks at first sight as if he forced God back from point to point, and wrung his petitions from an unwilling hand. But this is a mistake. In point of fact, God was drawing him on. ... This was the time of his education. He did not learn the vast extent of God's righteousness and mercy all at once; he climbed the dizzy heights step by step; and, as he gained each step, he was inspired to dare another.”

In these verses, we see Abraham challenging God to do more by sparing the city of Sodom if only forty, thirty, twenty, and even ten people would be present. Abraham was willing to place a challenge

before God, since He knew that the great and glorious God could do something marvelous, if He was willing to answer his prayer. In a sense, Abraham challenged God, since he knew God could get the job done! He knew that God could do a great and marvelous work. Are we ready to pray to God in this way? Are we willing to challenge God to do something great and wonderful?

Malachi 3:10 gives us a principle for today:

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

Sometimes our God is too small! We don't believe that God really hears our prayers and will answer them in the way that we pray. We must learn the secret of sometimes challenging God to act in a mighty, great, and wonderful way. Our prayers will only be as big as our God!

#### 6. Conquering prayer (Gen. 18:32)

“And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake.”

God is seen to agree with Abraham throughout his petitioning process. The conquering aspect of Abraham's prayer is this; he actually brought God to the place, where God agreed that He would not destroy the city, if only ten righteous people were found. This is conquering prayer. Conquering or prevailing prayer is a type of prayer that moves the heart of God and finds a way into the counsels of the Godhead. It is prayer that makes a difference.

We need to realize afresh and anew the power of prevailing prayer and what it can do for our lives, our families, and our church. We must put God to the challenge and see what God will do! Our God is far greater than we could ever imagine and He can do wonderful things for our lives when we do business with Him. When examining Abraham's prayer, we can see how persistent prayer can impact the heart of God and pay off. We can see the power of persistent prayer. Prayer changes things!

## 7. Communing prayer (Gen. 18:33)

“And the Lord went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.”

Prevailing prayer keeps us in contact and communion with God. Prayer keeps us close to God. Persistent prayer is heartfelt praying that keeps us in fellowship with God.

“My God and I go in the fields together.  
We walk and talk as good friends should and do.  
We clasp our hands our voices ring with laughter.  
My God and I go in the meadows hue.”

### B. Epaphras' intercession for the saints (Col 4:12)

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

Here is another example of prevailing prayer. Epaphras was a man who knew how to wrestle with God in prayer. He knew about the power of prevailing and persistent prayer. He knew that prayer touched the heart of God and made a difference. The expression “labouring fervently” is one Greek word which was used of entering a contest that would involve a struggle. It speaks of intense labor and striving. We get our English word “agony” from this word. This puts wrestling with God by prayer into focus. Praying is hard work. Seeking God’s blessing takes time. We must learn to talk with God and mean business with God. We must learn to wrestle with God in secret.

D.L. Moody once said:

“Some men's prayers need to be cut short at both ends and set on fire in the middle.”

This simply means that our prayers can lack life and aggressiveness. They can lack faith and be nothing more than passing words in the wind. Let us learn the secret of wrestling with God in prayer and

expecting God to answer our prayers. Let's get rid of our prayer clichés and talk to God!

E. M. Bounds added:

“Prayer, to be efficient, must have life. It must be living. It must be energized by all the forces that can be kindled in the soul by a great faith, a great need, and a great desire.”

Of course, the energy for wrestling with God in prayer must come from the Holy Spirit (Eph. 6:18; Jude 1:20 – “praying in the Holy Ghost”). If we do not pray with the Spirit's assistance, we become the victims of our own carnal delights and selfish desires. We must pray in the spirit or under the Spirit's power, direction, and have His ministry operating in our lives. God wants us to be an Epaphras. He wants us to intercede for the saints in prevailing prayer. Instead of fighting the saints, we should be praying for them. We only have time to pray!

Ephesians 6:18

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

“When my heart was so broken  
That I could not pray,  
When love wasn't easy to see.  
Someone was there, somebody cared,  
Somebody prayed for me!

Somebody went to the throne of Heaven  
Somebody lifted my name,  
Bringing me into His holy presence  
Saying what I could not say.

Somebody showed me the things of His mercy  
Darkness was all I could see.  
Somebody pleaded the blood of Jesus,  
Somebody prayed for me.”

### C. Elijah's intercession for rain (James 5:16b-18)

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

This example of prevailing prayer is also important and applies to our lives today.

There are three promises related to prevailing prayer.

1. God uses righteous people (vs. 16b).

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Elijah was a righteous man, who prayed, and received answers to his prayers. His prayers were powerful and touched the heart of God. We get our English word "energy" from the one Greek word (energeo) that is behind the English words "effectual fervent" (vs. 16b). These are the energetic and powerful prayers of righteous men that move the heart of God. This means that when we pray, we should pray with power and energy, which is one of the character traits of a righteous person ("a righteous man"). A righteous man is a man who loves God and lives for God. He seeks to be right, do right, and live right. We can have a much more effective prayer ministry with God, when we clean up our lives, and do what is right. Effectual prayers, are effective prayers, that get answers from God! The truth is this, only as we live in a clean, holy, and righteous manner, can we expect answers from God. Get clean and get answers!

2. God uses regular people (vs. 17).

What does the Bible mean, when it says that Elijah was a man of like passions? It means that Elijah was just like you and me in many ways. He was human! He was a man just like us - "a man of like feeling," or "of similar suffering," like you and me. Do you know what? God uses ordinary people just like you and me to get His will done on earth. Sometimes we think God only works with an elite crowd or the

super-duper saints. This is not the case. God works with the common folks, whose hearts are right before God, and who believe that God still answers prayer.

Robert Stevenson, grandfather of the famous Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, was respected in his own right as a gifted engineer. In 1872, 100 years after he was born, a celebration was arranged to honor his memory. As part of the festivities, a parade was held displaying many banners. One of them stood out as best expressing the spirit of that occasion. It was held high by a farmer, and it bore this simple message: ONE OF US. The common people found great joy in the fact that Stevenson was identified with them. Elijah was like us, and this reminds us that God uses ordinary people, who are yielded to Him.

### 3. God uses resolved people.

Elijah was committed to praying. Elijah had resolve. He was dedicated, and determined to pray, and receive answers to his prayers. The Bible says he “prayed earnestly that it might not rain” (vs. 17) and then “prayed again” (vs. 18) that it might rain. This example of persistent, prevailing prayer is recorded in 1 Kings 17-18. Elijah prayed for no rain and then later prayed that God would send rain. The point is this, we must pray and believe that God is going to do something wonderful. Like Elijah, we need to pray fervently, believing that God is going to answer our prayers. “Continue in prayer” (Col. 4:2). There is no other hope but prayer!

1 Kings 18:41

“And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.”

Elijah had the ear of faith. He could hear the rain even before it began to rain. My friend, we must pray and believe the rain is coming! We must pray and believe the blessing is coming. Elijah was a man, just like you and me, but because he was a righteous man and a praying man, God answered his prayers in wonderful ways. The lesson for our lives today is that God does still answer prayer. God moves when His people move in the ministry of prayer.

When examining Elijah's prayer, we can see how persistent prayer pays off, and how it can impact the heart of God. We can see the power of persistent prayer. Prayer changes things! Prayer brings down the rain! Prayer brings down God's blessing!

2 Chronicles 7:14

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

#### D. A neighbor's intercession for bread (Luke 11:5-10)

"And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

This final example of prevailing or persistent prayer is my personal favorite. After giving the well known prayer to His disciples (Luke 11:1-4), the Lord continued with the subject of prayer. Christ gave an illustration designed to show how God is ready and willing to both hear and answer the petitions of His children. The parable has to do with a man who had a guest arrive at his home at the midnight hour. "Surprise, we're here!" Unfortunately, he did not have enough food on hand. So he went to his neighbor, knocked on his door, and asked for three loaves of bread. At first the neighbor was annoyed by the pesky midnight interruption and didn't bother to get up. However, because of the prolonged shouting of the pesky neighbor, the house owner finally gave in, and brought the neighbor what he needed. Jesus uses this illustration to teach the importance of prevailing and persistent prayer.



## 1. The sure request (vv. 5-6)

“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?”

The request was for bread. Apparently the man’s friends were weary from their traveling and needed to be fed at the midnight hour. The neighbor wanted to make sure they were well fed before retiring. This was an urgent request. By the way, we are living in the “midnight” hour. We are living in the midnight hour when Jesus is going to come again! What are we doing for God? Are we knocking on the door of Heaven seeking to help wayward souls, who are going to an everlasting hell? God must stir our hearts again!

“I hear the sound of a mighty rushing wind  
And it’s closer now than it’s ever been.  
I can almost hear the trumpet  
As Gabriel sounds the call  
At the midnight cry, we’ll be going home!”

## 2. The slow response (vs. 7)

“And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.”

You may be thinking that asking for bread seems like a neighborly thing to do. Yes, but it was midnight and there were no convenience stores on the block! What if someone would knock at your door at midnight? Don’t you think you would be a little grumpy? You were just in a deep sleep, and all of a sudden someone is banging on your door, and won’t stop banging. I’m glad that God is never grumpy. I’m thankful that God is always awake, ready to hear us, and ready to help us in the time of need.

Psalm 121:4

“Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”

There are two observations related to this response.

a. It began with rejection (vs. 11:7a) – “trouble me not”

Sometimes we are just like this person. We don't want to be troubled with someone's problems or needs. In short, we don't want to awake and serve the Lord (Eph. 5:14). We want to do our own thing, have it our way, and always take the easy path. Listen, sometimes we must get up at midnight, and give what we have to the Lord. Serving the Lord takes sacrifice!

b. It moved to reasoning (11:7b) – “my children are with me in bed”

This is just an excuse! We often have our excuses. We say that we can't serve the Lord and do something for Him. We have our reasons, but they will not stand in the court of Heaven, nor will they count at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

Vance Havner used to say:

“An excuse is a reason stuffed with a lie.”

Why don't we stop making excuses and just wake up, get up, and give up our lives for the sake of Jesus Christ? It's time to serve the Lord (Rom. 12:11).

3. The simple solution (vs. 8)

“I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.”

Persistence is the simple solution to the problem. How do you get your neighbor out of bed? You keep beating on the door. He will eventually get up! The word “importunity” speaks of persistence and diligence. Jesus taught that persistence pays off. The neighbor's persistent knocking on the door of the house owner will eventually yield bread and provide him with the necessary loaves that he needs.

4. The supernatural promise (vv. 9-10)

“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.”

Jesus is now going to apply this illustration to the ministry of prayer. The supernatural promise is this; when we are persistent in our prayer life, God may answer our prayers. The believer is pictured, as the pesky neighbor, knocking on the door at midnight, and God is the One who answers our requests.

This supernatural promise is described in two ways:

- a. It's simple (“Ask,” “seek,” “knock”) - 11:9
- b. It's sure (“given,” “opened,” “receiveth,” “findeth”) - 11:10

In applying this illustration, we must be careful to avoid certain conclusions. It doesn't mean that God is annoyed by our persistent requests like the neighbor in the illustration. Furthermore, it doesn't suggest that the only way to get our prayers answered is to pray persistently for a length of time. Sometimes, God answers our prayers without being persistent.

What this parable is teaching is that we do not have to become discouraged in our time of praying and petitioning. God knows we are knocking at the door of Heaven. God's ears are not closed. The prayer parable teaches that we should not grow weary in our prayer lives but “Keep on asking ... keep on seeking ... keep on knocking.” And yes, keep on believing! This is a lesson on persistent, prevailing prayer. Sometimes God answers our prayers the first time we ask, but in other cases, He answers only after a time of prolonged asking.

Charles Spurgeon used to say:

“Prayer pulls the rope down below and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others give only an occasional jerk at the rope. But he who communicates with heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all his might”

Have you been knocking at Heaven's door? Do we really believe that God is going to answer our prayers?

So how long should we keep knocking on the door?

1. Until God answers our prayer in the way we asked (1 John 5:14).
2. Until God assigns a different answer to our prayer (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
3. Until God absolutely shuts the door and opens another (1 Cor. 16:9).

Dr. John Walvoord put it well when he said:

"Prayer is much like a check to be countersigned by two parties. I sign the check and send it up to heaven. If Jesus Christ also signs it, it does not matter how large it is -- it'll be honored."

Psalm 126:5-6

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

Dearly beloved, persistent prayer is what is needed today. Many times we start to pray, but deep down we don't really think God is going to do anything. We don't really expect from God. We don't think the harvest is going to come in. We don't believe God is still the God of miracles. We don't believe He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We don't really believe in His power. Shame on us! We have forgotten that it's the midnight hour!

The poet Adam Baum wrote:

"Pray on, when rough and dark your pathway,  
And you cannot see the light;  
When every spark of hope has vanished,  
And bright day has turned to night.  
Pray on, for God doth surely hear you,  
Noting well each sad request;

Pray then in faith, truly believing  
That He always gives what's best."

We must learn to ring the doorbell of heaven! We must learn the secret power that is behind persistent and prevailing prayer. God wants to hear our knocking, and sincerity, so we might receive His divine help and assistance. God wants us to beg for His blessing. We are beggars in need of God's rich blessing. God takes great delight when His children humbly bow before Him, and depend upon Him.

Someone said:

"Heaven is full of answers to prayers for which no one ever bothered to ask."

1 Chronicles 4:10

"And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested."

Oh God, bless me indeed! We need this same type of heartfelt and hopeful praying today. We need earnest and persistent praying for God's blessing for our lives, our families, and church ministry. The answer is prayer. I will say it again. There is no other hope, but prayer. We must unite together in prayer – believing prayer, persistent prayer, prevailing prayer, expecting great things from God.

The old saying is still true:

"Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God."

This has always been true in connection with prayer. When we ask God to do great things, we should expect great things to happen. When in prayer you clasp your hands, God opens His. Dear friend, light a fire in your prayer ministry and life, so you can receive from God. Send your prayer up to Heaven with some fire and faith and keep on keeping on! If we do business with God, then God will do business with us! When it comes to prayer, we must keep the oil in our lamp, and keep praying to God earnestly, faithfully, and expectantly. We used to sing a song in youth group that would help motivate us to keep praying and serving the Lord. It went like this:

“Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning,  
Give me oil in my lamp I pray.  
Give me oil in my lamp  
Keep burning, keep me burning,  
Keep me burning till the break of day.”

May this be true in connection with our prayer lives and ministry today! Let's keep the oil in our lamps and the prayer fire burning bright. When we do, God will answer our prayers, bless our lives, and show us great and mighty things (Jer. 33:3).