

KINGDOM.

LESSON 29

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Commit your group and this lesson about preaching God’s kingdom to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] PROVERBS 1, 3, 4 and 5
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Proverbs 1, 3, 4 and 5). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [GOD'S GREATNESS] (5) JEREMIAH 32:17
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Review two by two.

(5) God is all-powerful. Jeremiah 32:17. Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) [THE PARABLES OF JESUS] THE INTERCEDING FRIEND and THE PERSISTENT WIDOW
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“The parable of the interceding friend” in Luke 11:5-10
and “the parable of the persistent widow” in Luke 18:1-8 are parables about
BOLD AND PERSISTENT PRAYER IN GOD’S KINGDOM.

“A parable” is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal. We will study these parables by using the six guidelines for studying parables (See manual 9, supplement 1).

A. THE PARABLE OF THE INTERCEDING FRIEND

Read Luke 11:1-10.

1. Understand the natural story of the parable.

Introduce. The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story.

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes. Jesus told the story in the form of a question. The question Jesus asked and the situation he pictured is included in verse 5 to 7, with the emphasis on verse 7. Jesus gives the answer to this question in verse 8.

The story is about three friends. In order to distinguish between them, we will call them “the needy friend”, “the interceding friend”, who is the host, and “the very able friend”.

The request of the host or interceding friend. It is late in the evening. Unexpectedly, a needy friend appears at his door. This needy guest is tired from a journey he has been making and he is hungry. He expects hospitality, food and a place to sleep. But the host did not expect guests; he was completely unprepared and has no food in the house. In his great predicament, he goes to the house of his very able friend. Here, the host becomes an interceding friend. The interceding friend asks his very able friend to lend him three loaves of bread. He promises to return the three loaves to him the next day. At this point the host became an interceding friend.

The possible answer of his very able friend. Would the interceding friend’s very able friend give him a negative answer? His very able friend had already locked the door of his one-room home and he and his family were already lying on their sleeping-mats. If the very able friend would get up, walk across the floor and remove the huge bolting bar from the door, the noise would scare his family out of their sleep. Would his very able friend say, “I am sorry, but I

can't get up and give you anything"? In ordinary life on earth, it is possible to regard the host's very able friend as a person who is reluctant or even unwilling to give him what he needs.

The three loaves of bread. These were bread-cakes, which were flat and round pancakes, just enough to feed one person in one meal.

2. Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.

Introduce. The context of "the story" of the parable may consist of "the setting" and "the explanation or application" of the parable. The setting of the parable may state the *occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the story of the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of this parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is contained in Luke 11:1-4.

One of Jesus' disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Jesus then taught them "the Lord's Prayer". Compared to the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, the prayer in Luke 11:2-4 is shorter. The third and sixth petitions in Matthew's Gospel are included in the second and fifth petitions in Luke's Gospel. Jesus probably taught the Lord's Prayer several times to people. His intention was not to demand that Christians use the exact same words every time they pray it. The Lord's Prayer serves as a model or pattern for Christians to pray.

At this point, Jesus told the parable of the interceding friend.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Luke 11:5-7.

(3) The explanation and application of the parable is contained in Luke 11:8-13.

The implied answer of Jesus in verse 7 is, "None of you will receive such a refusal from a very able friend to whom you go for help." And the actual answer of Jesus in verse 8 is even better. The very able friend will certainly get up and give him whatever he needs! His motive may be because he is a true and sympathetic friend, but if not, he will still get up and he will certainly give the interceding friend whatever he needs, because the interceding friend did not stop asking!

For the explanation of Luke 11:9-13, see manual 11, supplement 9. "The parable of the asking son." Jesus says, "Keep on asking!" "Keep on seeking!" "Keep on knocking!" All three verbs are imperatives and in the present tense. Hence they express persistence or perseverance! Thus, Jesus continues to emphasise the effectiveness of prayer. The main message of the parable of the asking friend is that God the Father will not disappoint any of his children, when they pray! He will answer the kind of prayer that is accompanied by seeking and knocking, that is, by faith that acts and that perseveres!

3. Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.

Introduce. Jesus did not intend every detail in the story of the parable to have some spiritual significance. Parables are not allegories. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the central point or main theme or lesson of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the story of the parable.

Discover and discuss. Which of the details in the story of this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes. Jesus explains only one detail and that is the man's boldness.

The three friends are relevant details. They are the needy friend, the host or interceding friend and the very able friend. These three friends illustrate the situation of prayer. "The needy friend" represents the specific need a Christian may have, especially unexpected needs, which may include needy people whom God places on their way! "The interceding friend" represents the Christian, you or me. He is the one who is willing to be a friend at midnight to his needy friend. He is the one who cares for others when everybody else is sleeping. And "the very able friend" represents God the Father, but with this difference, that the motive of the very able friend in the story of the parable was that of an ordinary and unwilling human person on earth, while the motive of God is never questionable!

The boldness of the interceding friend is a relevant detail. This is the only detail that Jesus explains. It is not only implied in the story, but is especially a part of Jesus' application of the parable. "Boldness" means fearless frankness, confident insistence or shameless persistence. Once more it is clear that a parable has but one central point, one main message. The main message is that God the Father will answer bold and persistent prayers (intercessions) of Christians! All the details of the story reinforce this main message.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Introduce. The main message (central theme) of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables.

A parable normally has only one main lesson, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the one main lesson.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the interceding friend in Luke 11:5-13 teaches about “bold and persistent prayer in God’s kingdom”.

The main message of the parable is the following. “Even a friend on earth, with whatever motive, will certainly help you when you ask him for help. But your Friend in heaven, whose motives are unquestionable, will always answer bold and persistent prayers!”

Verse 8 says, “Because of his boldness, he will give him as much as he needs.” The word boldness can best be translated with fearless frankness, confident insistence or shameless persistence. It means to boldly ask for something specific and to keep on asking without feeling ashamed or afraid to ask”.

Bold and persistent prayer or intercession is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom! The genuine people in God’s kingdom pray or intercede with fearless frankness, confident insistence and shameless persistence (Hebrews 4:16).

However, when we intercede we may find that there is a difficulty and delay with the answer. It may be as if God is saying, “I cannot give you anything” or “I cannot give it to you at this moment!” When that happens, it is not easy to hold fast to our confidence that God hears our prayers. Then our faith is tested and we have to learn perseverance.

Like Abraham in Romans 4:20-21, we must not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God. With full persuasion that God is able to do what he has promised, we must ask and ask and ask. This is what God is looking for from us. God so highly prizes our confidence in him, that he will do anything to train us in the exercise of this trust in him. Blessed is the Christian who does not give up when God delays to answer or when God is silent or when God apparently refuses to give. Blessed is the Christian who believes that God can do what he has promised. Such faith perseveres, even persists shamelessly if there is a need, and cannot fail to receive as much as he needs!

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

Introduce. Some parables are similar to one another and can be compared. However, the truth in all the parables has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct clear teaching of the Bible.

Discover and discuss. How does what each of these Bible passages teach compare to what this parable teaches?

(1) Pray with freedom and confidence.

Read Hebrews 4:16. “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” All Christians may approach God with freedom and confidence. They are exhorted to approach God’s throne of grace with confidence. There they will receive mercy for their problems and grace for their sins. There they will find grace to help them in their time of need! (cf. Hebrews 11:6)

(2) Do not pray with many unnecessary words.

Read Matthew 6:7. Jesus Christ warns that “keeping on babbling like pagans” is not the same as persistent prayer. It is not the many words and also not the force with which we pray that has effect. What is important is that our few words are spoken in faith that God hears and will answer the prayer in his own time and in his own way.

6. Summarise the main teachings of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main teaching or message of this parable of the interceding friend? What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes. The parable of the interceding friend teaches praying or interceding Christians some very important truths.

(1) The interceding friend must see the urgent need.

Intercession has its origin in seeing the urgent need of people. The needy friend was hungry and had nothing to eat. He also could not buy bread at that time of the night. If we want to learn how to pray for others, then we must open our eyes and hearts to the needs around us.

Christians should know that spiritually there are thousand millions of non-Christians who live in midnight darkness of sin, ignorance and indifference. They are perishing for lack of knowledge of salvation in Jesus Christ. Many of them are also socially outcast, economically poor, emotionally broken, intellectually illiterate and physically sick. They are underfed, neglected, persecuted, live spiritually sick or fruitless lives, just like sheep without a shepherd. Many live in cities, towns and neighbourhoods around us. Nothing, nothing but prayer to God for help, will avail!

(2) The interceding friend must love the needy friend unselfishly.

The host or interceding friend was a real friend at midnight. He took his weary and hungry friend into his house, but also into his heart. He did not make excuses, saying, "I have nothing to give to you." No, at midnight, when all shops were closed and everybody was sleeping, he went out to look for a way to help his needy friend. He sacrificed his own sleep and the comfort of his warm house. He denied himself (Luke 9:23). His love was not self-seeking, but self-sacrificial (1 Corinthians 13:5). Christian love forgets itself for the sake of others. Love takes other people's needs and makes them its own. Christian love finds real joy in living and dying for others just as Jesus Christ did. It is the lack of Christian love that often causes so many shortcomings in the prayers of Christians. True Christian love must pray and will pray!

(3) The interceding friend must sense his own inability to help.

The interceding friend was very willing to give his needy friend what he needed, but he simply had *nothing* to give! He had neither means nor power to give. He himself had arrived in a situation of poverty and impotence! It was this sense of not being able to help that caused him to pray and beg. He acknowledged his own poverty and powerlessness to his very able friend. He said, "I have a hungry friend, but I have nothing to set before him". This realisation makes intercession strong. Only the conviction that the super-natural power of God is needed to save people from sin and judgement, will urge us to intercede. The feeling, that everything we can do to save people is utterly insufficient, will stimulate us to intercede. The knowledge, that only God can give life and growth to people, will send us begging. Intercession seemed to the interceding friend as his only hope to find help, the only way to express his love for his friend in need. This is a *warning* to Christian workers who think they can work in their own strength and wisdom. This is at the same time an *encouragement* to Christian workers who feel weak. The simplest and weakest Christians can pray down the blessings from the Almighty God.

(4) The interceding friend must believe that his very able friend will help.

What the interceding friend did not have, another friend could supply! The interceding friend had another friend living nearby, whom he knew was both able and willing to give what he needed. He was sure that if he only asked, he would receive. Therefore he went out at midnight to his very able friend's house to ask for the bread that he needed. Our very able friend is nobody else than the Almighty God. He is very near to every Christian and hears and answers every prayer that is in accordance with his will. He can and is willing to help! The Bible is full of promises that God hears our prayers, and that God is both able and willing to give what we need. Also the testimonies of many Christians urge us to believe that what we cannot possibly do for the needy people ourselves, God can and will do in answer to our prayers (intercessions).

(5) The interceding friend must pray with boldness and persistence.

The interceding friend asked his very able friend for help, "Friend, please lend me three loaves of bread!" *However, the faith of the interceding friend encountered a sudden and unexpected check:* his very able friend refused to give help! His very able friend said, "I can't get up and give you anything." How little did the loving heart of the interceding friend count on this disappointment! But the interceding friend decided not to give up at this setback. So he kept on pressing his plea, "I have a friend in need. You have abundance. I am your friend. Please help me!" The interceding friend refused to accept a denial. Instead, he asked (prayed) with greater boldness or persistence. He kept on knocking on his very able friend's door and he refused to stop asking for help! The love of the interceding friend for his needy friend must win!

(6) The interceding friend knows that disappointment is impossible!

Jesus says, "I tell you, because of the man's boldness or persistence he will give him as much as he needs." If we will only believe in God's faithfulness, then intercession will be the first thing we do when we seek help for other people! Then intercession will be the last thing for which we cannot find time! Intercession will be hard work, but a hopeful work as well as a joyful work, because all the time we intercede, we know that God will answer in his own time. Disappointment is impossible, because Jesus says, "He will give him as much as he needs." Time spent in prayer will yield more than time given to work only! Prayer makes your work worthwhile as well as fruitful! Prayer opens the way for God to do his work in us as well as through us at the same time. Through prayer we secure the presence and the power of God to go with us. The secret of fruitful work is first to receive from God and then to give to people. Between our powerlessness and God's almighty power, intercession is the blessed link.

Conclude. The characteristics of the true intercessor are therefore:

- a knowledge of the needs of people
- a Christ-like love to meet such needs
- a consciousness of personal inability to meet those needs
- faith in the Almighty God who is able and willing to answer prayer
- courage to persevere asking in spite of difficulties
- and the assurance that God will answer in his own time.

B. THE PARABLE OF THE PERSISTENT WIDOW

Read Luke 18:1-8.

1. **Understand the natural story of the parable.**

Discuss. What are the true-to-life elements of the story?

Notes.

The judge. Judges are more likely stationed in cities than in the smaller towns. This particular judge was anti-God and anti-people: he did not fear God and he did not care about people. He only cared about himself. He never asked himself the question, “What does God want me to do?” or “What do the people in general approve or disapprove?” He was a judge without any love for justice and without any sympathy for the oppressed and underprivileged.

The widow. “The widow” is a picture of a helpless and oppressed person. Widows are pictured in the Bible as belonging to the underprivileged and often the oppressed.

The confrontation. This widow had been unjustly treated. Maybe someone deprived her of the little she possessed or prevented her from receiving what she was entitled to receive. The widow went to the judge, hoping that he would confirm her claim and give her whatever justice demanded. However, the rude judge flatly refused to have anything to do with her. The widow returned home disappointed, because she knew that her cause was just.

The perseverance of the widow. Evidently the judge knew that her case was just. But he also knew that she would not be able to give him a bribe and that she had no influence in the city. A little later the widow tried again - with the same result. But she refused to give up! So she went again and again and again, pleading with the unjust judge to do justice. Finally, the judge got sick and tired of her nagging. So he said to himself, “I will grant her justice or else she will wear me out completely with her nagging.” What finally conquered the judge was her *persistence!*

2. **Examine the immediate context and determine the elements of the parable.**

Discover and discuss. What is the setting, the story and the explanation or application of the parable?

Notes.

(1) The setting of the parable is contained in Luke 17:20-37 and Luke 18:1.

Jesus had just told his disciples about the long and increasingly difficult time before his second coming. Instead of losing heart, Christians should persevere in prayer. Jesus used the story-illustration of an unjust judge to teach the lesson of persevering prayer.

(2) The story of the parable is contained in Luke 18:2-5.

(3) The explanation or application of the parable is contained in Luke 18:6-8.

3. **Identify the relevant and irrelevant details of the parable.**

Discuss. Which of the details in this parable are really essential or relevant?

Notes.

Jesus does not give any of the details any particular meaning.

The unjust judge. The wicked judge and God are exact opposites of each other. The wicked judge did not care about anyone except himself, but God cares for people, especially those who believe in him! The wicked judge delayed and stalled (in the hope of receiving a bribe), but God will quickly see that believers get justice!

Jesus Christ used the illustration of an *unjust* judge to highlight the contrast with a *just* God! His purpose was to emphasise the absolute certainty that God would answer prayer! Thus he wanted to encourage us to have that kind of faith that believes that God in his own time will answer every prayer!

The perseverance of the widow. Jesus said, “She kept coming to the wicked judge with her plea”. This is the only detail which Jesus assigns essential significance. In verse 1, he says that it represents Christians who “always pray and not give up”! “The widow” represents “the elect or Christians” who cry out to God day and night (verse 7).

“That she continually bothered the wicked judge” represents bold and persistent prayer! It is not boldness and perseverance in prayer that leads to more faith, but faith in a God who really exists and hears and answers prayer that leads to bold and persistent prayer! In this parable, Jesus contrasts the character of the righteous, loving and almighty God in heaven with the character of a wicked, selfish and proportionately powerless judge on earth.

That is why Jesus asked if he would find that faith, namely, the faith that believes that God in heaven is completely different than this wicked judge on earth! And the faith that God will quickly do right to a Christian who prays boldly or persistently to him. That kind of faith expresses itself in bold and persistent prayer. Jesus wants every person to examine himself if he has this kind of faith; if he really believes that God will quickly act when he prays boldly or persistently.

4. Identify the main message of the parable.

Discuss. What is the main message of this parable?

Notes.

The parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8 teaches about “bold and persistent prayer in God’s kingdom.”

The main message of the parable is the following. “Even an unjust, selfish and proportionately powerless judge on earth can in the end be moved to do justice towards an insignificant opponent. The perfectly just, loving and almighty God in heaven can, want to and will do justice with much greater speed to Christians who pray with boldness and perseverance!”

Will the almighty and loving God keep on putting his elect people (Christians) off, just like the wicked judge did? “No”, says, Jesus. God is the exact opposite and will act quickly and see that they get justice! This truth should encourage the faith of Christians! God will certainly quickly answer Christians who pray with boldness and perseverance (cf. Hebrews 11:6)!

Jesus then ends this parable with an application in the form of a challenging question. The question is asked, not for the purpose of speculation, but for the purpose of self-examination. “When the Son of Man comes, will he find that faith on earth? He is referring to faith that boldly perseveres in prayer like the faith of the widow?” Jesus wants each Christian to examine himself if he really believes that God will quickly act upon bold and persistent prayer.

Bold and persistent prayer is one of the fundamental characteristics of God’s kingdom. The genuine people of God’s kingdom pray with fearless frankness, confident insistence or shameless perseverance.

5. Compare the parable with parallel and contrasting passages in the Bible.

(1) How does what each of these Bible passages teach compare to what this parable teaches?

Read Exodus 22:22-23; Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Psalm 68:5.

If people in the world take advantage of underprivileged people like a widow or an orphan and these people cry out to God, then God will certainly hear their cry and act! God, who is mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and who accepts no bribe, defends the cause of the orphan and the widow! God will be a father to the fatherless and a defender of the widows. In the same way God will care for the Christian who prays with boldness and perseverance!

(2) Who are God’s elect or chosen ones?

Read Jeremiah 31:3; Luke 10:20; John 6:44,37; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:28-30; 9:6-21; 11:1-8; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2:4-10; Revelation 7:3; 13:8.

“God’s elect or chosen ones” is a title for genuine believers in Jesus Christ. God will certainly not let his chosen ones down! Before the foundation of the world, God has elected (predestined) them in a sovereign way for salvation, for his service and for his glory. He loves them with an everlasting love. Therefore he will make certain that they will also be vindicated! He will answer their bold and persistent prayers and he will bring justice to them.

(3) Which kind of promises will God fulfil throughout the centuries before his second coming?

Read Psalm 34:18-19; Isaiah 43:2; Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 4:17.

The Lord will deliver us from all our troubles and he will be with us when we pass through difficulties and persecutions, which are like turbulent rivers or raging fires. In all our circumstances, he will work for our good. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear and also provide us with a way of escape out of every temptation. Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. Therefore, pray with faith that expresses itself in boldness and perseverance.

C. A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN TEACHINGS OR LESSONS OF THE PARABLES ABOUT BOLD AND PERSISTENT PRAYER IN GOD’S KINGDOM

Discuss. What are the main teachings or lessons of the parables about persistent prayer in God’s kingdom?

What did Jesus Christ teach us to *know* or to *believe* and what did he teach us to *be* or to *do*?

Notes. The Lord Jesus Christ regards bold and persistent prayer so important for us to learn, that he tells three parables about it in the Bible:

- “the parable of the asking son” in Matthew 7:7-12
- “the parable of the interceding friend” in Luke 11:5-8
- “the parable of the persistent widow” in Luke 18:1-8.

In these parables he teaches us that prayer will not be easy and that we must expect difficulties, which can only be conquered by bold persistence and determined perseverance. Christians must expect difficulties when they pray.

(1) There is a difficulty with respect to prayer on our side.

Our difficulty with respect to prayer is summarised in Isaiah 59:1-2, which says, “Your sins have hidden God’s face from you, so that he will not hear.” Because particular sins stand between us and God, certain prayers are not answered. The difficulty with regard to prayer is then on the side of the person praying!

Another difficulty with respect to prayer is in the parable of the asking son (Matthew 7:7-12, see manual 11, supplement 1). Although God is more willing and able to give us what we need and ask for in prayer, our unwillingness to pray (ask), to act (seek) and to persevere (knock) stand between God and us. The difficulty with regard to prayer then is also on the side of the person praying!

(2) There is a difficulty with respect to prayer on the side of the world.

In Ephesians 6:12 is written, “Our struggle is against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” The difficulty with regard to prayer is then on the side of evil in the world. There are also difficulties to overcome in the heavenly realms (Greek: epouranios), here the dwelling place of demons. They too must be overcome (cf. Daniel 10:12-13; Mark 9:25-29).

(3) There is a difficulty with respect to prayer on the side of God.

In the parable of the interceding friend and the parable of the persistent widow, Jesus Christ presents the difficulty with respect to answering prayers as being on the side of “the reluctant or even unwilling friend” and “the unjust judge”! The difficulty with regard to prayer then is on the side of God. Jesus contrasts these two imperfect examples on earth (the rich friend and the unjust judge) with the perfect God in order to spur Christians on to believe that bold and persistent prayer can overcome every obstacle.

But our difficulty with regard to prayer becomes at the same time God’s difficulty to answer prayer. His wisdom, his righteousness and love, does not dare give to us what would harm us, if we received it too soon or too easily. Sin and its consequences often make it impossible for God to give at once (Psalm 66:18; James 4:2-3). In order to break through the power of sin in our own lives (Psalm 32:1-5) or the sin in the lives of the people for whom we pray (Daniel 9:1-23), is the reason why the struggle in prayer is such a reality (Colossians 4:12-13). When we plead with God for the removal of these known and unknown obstacles, our persevering prayers will bring us into a state of brokenness and helplessness before God (Psalm 51:1-17). Our break with every known sin, our surrender to God, our wholehearted agreement with God’s will as well as our growing faith to take hold of God’s promises, will at the same time overcome the hindrances on our side as well as the hindrances on God’s side. As God conquers us, we conquer in our prayers. As God gains the victory over us, we gain victory in prayer!

(4) The benefits of bold and persistent prayer are great.

Maybe we feel that God’s demand that we should pray with boldness and perseverance is unreasonable or at least incomprehensible. But in physical life, continual exercise develops muscles, hard work develops endurance and difficulties develop character. In education, the daily overcoming of new intellectual problems develops insight and wisdom. It is in the meeting and the mastering of difficulties that our highest attainments are found.

In spiritual life it is exactly the same principle. If we would only have to ask (in prayer), immediately receive and go away, we would suffer loss. The difficulties in our own lives, the difficulties in the people for whom we pray and the difficulties in the heavenly realms call us to pray with boldness and perseverance. It is in this persistent struggle of prayer that many heavenly blessings are found.

It is in our struggle in prayer that we discover how little we delight in fellowship with God, how little faith we have and how little we allow God’s Holy Spirit to control our lives. In persistent prayer we are brought to know our weakness, shortcomings and unworthiness. In persistent prayer our own will, strength and goodness are crucified. But in persistent prayer we also learn grace to live for God’s glory, faith in God’s promises and dependence on God’s strength. Thus, our difficulty in persistent prayer becomes our greatest privilege, because the difficulties that must be overcome bring us our richest blessings!

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD
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Take turns in the group *to pray short* to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two’s or three’s and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples, build the Church and preach the kingdom.
2. Preach, teach or study “the interceding friend” and the parable of “the persistent widow” together with another person or group of people.

3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **Proverbs 6, 7, 8 and 10** each day. Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. **Review series K: "God's greatness"**. (1) God is incomparable. Isaiah 40:25-26. (2) God is all-glorious. 1 Chronicles 29:11. (3) God is sovereign. Ephesians 1:11-12. (4) God is all-knowing. Hebrews 4:13. (5) God is almighty. Jeremiah 32:17.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. **Romans 8:1-17**. Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on preaching God's kingdom. Include your notes on quiet time, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.