

Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. A teacher will teach from the Bible that a disciple of Jesus prays. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matthew 7:7). Paul says, "Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). And James says, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). The Bible teaches much about prayer. The fourth series of 8 teachings is about "The practice of prayer". The four topics are: "A disciple is motivated to pray", "A disciple is sensitive to the physical aspects of prayer", "A disciple persists in prayer" and "A disciple is convinced about the effects of prayer". Every topic will be in two parts. Today we will learn about "A DISCIPLE PERSISTS IN PRAYER - PART 1". In part 1 we will meditate on the parable of the unwilling friend in Luke 11, the parable of the unjust judge in Luke 18 and on the difficulty as well as privilege of persistence.

POINT 1. THE PARABLE OF THE UNWILLING FRIEND.

Let us read Luke 11:5-8. Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs." This is a parable about three friends. Listener, you are *the friend at midnight*. It is late in the evening. Unexpectedly, *a needy friend* appears at your door. He is tired from a journey he has been making and he is hungry. He expects hospitality, food and a place to sleep. But you did not expect guests and so you have no food in the house. In your great predicament, you go to the house of *a rich friend* of yours and ask him to lend you three loaves of bread. You promise to return three loaves to him the next day.

In this parable Jesus Christ teaches us to pray persistently for other people. *Every Christian should be an intercessor.*

Jesus Christ teaches us the 6 parts of true intercessory prayer.

One. The intercessor must see the urgent need.

Intercessory prayer has its origin in seeing the urgent need of people around you. 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. Spiritually, there are thousand millions of non-Christians who live in midnight darkness of sin, ignorance and indifference. They are perishing for lack of the Bread of Life, which is Jesus Christ. Moreover, physically, there are millions of Christians who are underfed, neglected and persecuted, or who live sickly and fruitless lives just like sheep without a shepherd. Many of these needy people live all around us in our towns. Nothing, nothing but prayer to God for help, will avail!

Two. The intercessor must love the needy friend unselfishly.

The friend at midnight 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. The Bible says, "Love is not self-seeking". Christian love forgets itself for the sake of others. Love takes other people's needs and makes them its own. Love finds real joy in living and dying for others just as Christ did. It is the lack of love that causes so many shortcomings in our prayers. True love must pray.

Three. The intercessor must sense his inability to help.

The friend at midnight was very willing to give his needy friend what he needed, but he simply had nothing to give! He had no means or 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 go out and beg. He acknowledged to his rich friend his poverty and powerlessness. He said, "I have a hungry friend, but I have nothing to set before him". It is this sense of inability that caused him to intercede. This awareness of "I have nothing!" 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 of how utterly insufficient everything is that we can do to save people 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 friend at midnight as his only hope to find help, the only way to express his love for his needy friend. This is a warning to workers who think they can work in their own strength and wisdom. This is at the same time an encouragement to workers who feel weak. The simplest and weakest Christians can pray down blessings from the Almighty God.

Four. The intercessor must believe that his rich friend is able and willing to help.

What the friend at midnight did not have, another friend could supply! The friend at midnight 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 rich friend's house to ask for the bread that was needed. Our rich friend is nobody else than the Almighty God. He is very near to every Christian. 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 ourselves, God can and will do in answer to our intercession.

Five. The intercessor must pray with boldness and persistence.

The friend at midnight interceded with his rich friend for help, "Friend, please lend me three loaves of bread!" However, the faith of the friend at midnight encountered a sudden and unexpected check: his rich friend refused to give help. His rich friend said, "I can't get up and give you anything." How little did the loving heart of the friend at midnight count on this disappointment! But the friend at midnight decided not to give up at this setback. So he kept on pressing his plea, "I have a needy friend. You have abundance. I am your friend. Please help me!" The friend at midnight refused to accept a denial. Instead, he asked with "boldness" or "persistence". He kept on knocking on his rich friend's door and he refused to stop asking for help. His love for his needy friend had to win! The main lesson of this parable is verse 8. "Because of his boldness, he will give him as much as he needs." The word *boldness* can best be translated with *shameless boldness* or *shameless persistence*. It means to boldly ask for something specific and to keep on asking without feeling ashamed to ask. When we intercede we may find that there is difficulty and delay with the answer that we expect from God. It may be as if God is saying, "I cannot give you anything." When that happens, it is not easy to hold fast to our confidence that God will hear. 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 had 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.

Six. The intercessor must be certain that his rich friend will help at just the right time.

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 successful. 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. 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 power of prayer; *courage* to persevere asking in spite of difficulties; and the *assurance* that God will answer in his own time.

POINT 2. THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE.

Let us read Luke 18:1-8. Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said, "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men..... And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' For some time he refused, but finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will God not bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

In the previous chapter, 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 illustration of an unjust judge to teach the lesson of persevering prayer. This judge was anti-God and anti-people. He only cared about himself. He was a judge without any love for justice and without any sympathy for the oppressed. The widow is a picture of a helpless and oppressed person. Moreover, she has 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. A little later she 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. 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. What finally bowled him over was the *persistence* of the widow. So he said to himself, "I will grant her justice or else she will wear me out completely with her nagging."

Then Jesus teaches the lesson of this parable. If an unjust judge can be moved to do what is right by persistent asking, how many thousand times more would God, the righteous judge, not do what is right to Christians who pray persistently? Will the almighty and loving God keep on putting Christians off? No, says, Jesus. God will act quickly and see that they get justice! This truth should encourage our faith! God will certainly answer Christians who pray with perseverance! Jesus then ends this parable with a challenge to self-examination, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find that kind of faith, namely, *faith that perseveres in prayer* like the faith of the widow?" Jesus wants each believer to examine himself if he really believes that God will quickly act if he prays persistently.

POINT 3. THE DIFFICULTY AND THE PRIVILEGE OF PERSISTENCE.

The Lord Jesus Christ regarded persistent prayer so important for us to learn, that he told two parables about it. In both parables he let us know that prayer would not be easy and that we must expect difficulties, which could only be conquered by persistent and determined perseverance.

One. The difficulty may be on the side of the intercessor on earth.

In the parables, Christ presented *the difficulty as being on the side of the unwilling rich friend and the unjust judge*. They were unwilling and unjust! However, in our prayers to God, *the difficulty is rather on our side, not on God's side*. God is more willing to give good things to those who ask him than any earthly father is willing to give bread to his child. God will act more quickly to do justice to Christians than the unjust judge. *Persistent prayer is not needed to make God willing to act, but is needed to train us in faith and perseverance*. Jesus Christ could not find any earthly illustration of a loving father or a willing friend in order to teach us the lesson of persistent prayer. Therefore he used the illustration of the unwilling friend and the unjust judge to encourage us to have that kind of faith that believes that perseverance can overcome every obstacle.

In Isaiah 59:2 is written, "Your sins have hidden God's face from you, so that he will not hear." *The difficulty is on our side*. We are sinful and we lack spiritual willingness to persevere. But at the same time our difficulty in praying becomes God's difficulty in answering as well. His wisdom, his righteousness or love does not dare give to us what would harm us, if we received it *too soon or too easily*. The sin in our own lives and its consequences are what make it impossible for God to give at once. To break through the power of sin in our own lives or the sin in the lives of the people for whom we pray, is what makes the struggle of prayer such a reality.

Two. The difficulty may also be in the heavenly realms.

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." *There are difficulties to overcome in the heavenly realms* as well.

Three. The difficulty will be overcome when God conquers us.

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. Our surrender to God and 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 in us as well as the hindrances in heaven. As God conquers us, we conquer in our prayers. As God gains the victory over us, we gain victories in prayer.

Maybe we feel that God's demand that we should pray with perseverance is unreasonable or at least incomprehensible. 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 a Christian would only have to ask, immediately receive and go away, he would suffer loss. The difficulties in us, the difficulties in the people for whom we pray and the difficulties in the heavenly realms call us to pray with 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 and unworthiness. In persistent prayer our own will, strength and goodness are crucified. But in persistent prayer we also receive faith in God's promises, dependence on God's strength and grace to live for God's glory. Thus, our difficulty in persistent prayer becomes our greatest privilege, because the difficulties to be overcome bring us our richest blessings! Our difficulties in persistent prayer become God's unimaginable possibilities! Ephesians 3:20 says, "God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine"!

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. No one has time to pray. So make time for prayer and learn to pray persistently.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and make disciples” and Internet on www. Etc

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to “Discipleship training on the air”.