

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 2". In part 2 we will consider how God delights in persevering prayer, how the Holy Spirit works in answer to prayer and more examples of persistent prayer in the Bible.

POINT 4. GOD THE FATHER DELIGHTS IN PERSEVERING PRAYER.

Let us read Luke 11:9-13. "So I tell you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Matthew 7:11 says, "How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

With this illustration, Jesus continues the application of the lesson of the parable of the unwilling friend. The three exhortations are followed by three promises with regard to prayer. But each exhortation implies more than the previous one.

First. Asking implies humility and a consciousness of need.

We ask as children ask their parents and as servants ask their masters.

Second. Seeking implies asking as well as acting.

The word means *seeking to find, investigating to discover, desiring to possess*. For example, it implies that besides praying for understanding of the Bible, we should study the Bible ourselves, meet with other Christians to discuss the Bible and strive to live in harmony with the Bible's teachings. Another example. It implies that besides praying for the needy person, we should desire to find help for his need and research what help would be best suited for him.

Third. Knocking implies asking and acting as well as persevering.

We knock again and again until the door is opened. Moreover, all three verbs are in the present tense and this means that perseverance is implied in all three actions. "Keep on asking, keep on seeking and keep on knocking"!

When we fulfil the conditions with regard to prayer, God promises to fulfil the promises with regard to prayer. Everyone who asks will receive. Everyone who seeks will find. For everyone who knocks the door will be opened. God promises that *not a single Christian will be disappointed*. If even earthly fathers, who are sinful and weak by nature, provide their children only with good things and with nothing that will harm them, how much more will our heavenly Father provide us with *the Holy Spirit*, who is *the Source of every good gift* on earth.

POINT 5. THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS IN ANSWER TO PRAYER.

In the early church, the rule was, "We must ask and God must give." In the book of Acts we read of several examples of how God delights to give the Holy Spirit as the Source of every good gift in answer to prayer. In Acts chapter 4, the apostles prayed together, the Holy Spirit filled them and the result was that they spoke the word of God boldly. In Acts chapter 6, the apostles made it their priority to pray and to preach the Gospel. The result was that the word of God spread and that the number of disciples multiplied. In Acts chapter 6 and 7, Stephen was a man full of the Holy Spirit, and the result was that his opponents could not stand up against the

wisdom of the Holy Spirit by whom he spoke. In Acts chapter 10, Peter prayed, the Holy Spirit showed him a vision and the result was that an army officer became a believer, together with his relatives and close friends. In Acts chapter 12, the church prayed earnestly to God for Peter who was locked in prison. The result was that the prison walls, chains, gates and guards, even the whole Roman Empire as represented by Herod was powerless in the presence of a praying church where the Holy Spirit wielded power! In Acts chapter 13, the church leaders prayed and as a result the Holy Spirit gave them new insight into God's plans as well as called them to be his partners in sending workers to other parts of the world. Wherever there is prayer, there the Holy Spirit is at work. God, our Father, still delights to give the Holy Spirit in these ways to Christians who ask him.

POINT 6. EXAMPLES IN THE BIBLE OF PERSISTENT PRAYER.

The first example of persistent prayer is Abraham.

In Genesis 18:16-33 we read how Abraham persistently interceded for the wicked city of Sodom. He pleaded with God that if there were 50 righteous people in the city, that God would spare the city. God granted him his request. Abraham continued by asking if there were 45 righteous people, that God would spare the city. Again God granted him his request. Abraham again and again renewed his request, up to six times, until he was convinced that God graciously answered his "*shameless persistent*" prayer. He stopped when he knew God's will and then he rested in God's will. It was God's will to destroy that wicked city, and yet, because of Abraham's prayer, God saved Lot and his family from the disaster. We Christians have a salvation and promises for the nations that Abraham never knew. Let us begin to plead more with God on the behalf of the non-Christian nations!

The second example of persistent prayer is Jacob.

In Genesis 32:22-32 we read how an angel of God met Jacob in the dark and wrestled with him all night till daybreak. When the angel said, "Let me go", Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The angel gave him a new name "Israel", which means, "You have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." Throughout all ages, God's children understood what the parable of the unwilling friend and the parable of the unjust judge taught. They teach that God holds himself back until what is "flesh and self and laziness" in us is overcome. After we have struggled with God in prayer and he has overcome us, he can and will bless us. *Shameless boldness* in prayer claims the blessing from God. *Shameless perseverance* in prayer struggles with God in prayer until God grants the blessing!

The third example of persistent prayer is Moses.

Moses was a very humble man (Numbers 12:3) and yet he prayed with shameless boldness and persistence. In Exodus 32:30-34 we read that after Israel had made the golden calf, Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights (Deuteronomy 9:18-19) and prayed, "What a great sin these people have committed. Please forgive their sin - but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." *Shameless persistence* in prayer prays so long. *Shameless boldness* in prayer makes such a request. Moses would rather die than not have his people forgiven and given back to him.

Then in Exodus 33:12-23 God promised that he would send his angel to go with the people of Israel. But Moses prayed, "If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" Moses was not content until, in answer to prayer, God promised that he himself would go with them! Moses was an intercessor and he used shameless persistence and boldness in his prayers to God and he conquered.

The fourth example of persistent prayer is Elijah.

In 1 Kings 18:20-46, Elijah first prayed for fire and then for rain. In order to prove to the idol worshippers that the LORD is the true God, he prayed for fire from heaven to strike the sacrifice that was drenched with water. *Shameless boldness* claims an immediate answer and receives an immediate answer! Fire came down from heaven and consumed not only the sacrifice, but also the stones of the altar! Thereafter, Elijah told the king that after three and a half years of draught, heavy rain would fall. Elijah climbed to the top of the mountain and started to pray for rain. He sent his servant to see whether any clouds were forming and the answer was, "There is nothing there!" He sent his servant back again and again, until after the seventh time he saw a cloud as small as a man's hand rise from the sea! The small cloud grew into a rainstorm. It rained and the earth produced its crops again. *Shameless perseverance* does not stop praying until God answers. In James 5:16-18 we read that this Elijah was a man just like us. He was a righteous man. And the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective!

The fifth example of persistent prayer is Jesus.

In Luke 6:12-13 we read that Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and he spent the night praying to God. Jesus was persistent in prayer, because he was praying to God about who would become his disciples and later the apostles, who would continue his task on earth. We read, "When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles."

In John 17 we read how Jesus prayed in the evening before he was crucified. He prayed for himself, for his disciples and for all people who would become believers through the work of his disciples. For himself, he prayed especially that he would glorify God the Father in heaven by completing his God-given task on earth, which included his death so that people might be saved. He also prayed that God the Father would glorify him through his resurrection, ascension and enthronement in heaven, when he would sit at the right hand of God the Father. For his disciples he prayed especially for their unity, joy, protection, sanctification and mission to the whole world. For other Christians in the world he especially prayed for their unity so that the people in the world would believe in the work of Christ. He prayed that all Christians would one day be with him where he would be and that they would see his glory. And he prayed that God's love for him would also be in all Christians and that he himself would be in them.

In Luke 22:39-46 we read how Jesus prayed with perseverance late in the night before he was crucified. He withdrew to some distance from his disciples, knelt down and prayed. Because he was in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, so that even his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he was praying persistently, an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. He must have prayed for some time, because the disciples had fallen asleep.

In Hebrews 7:25 we read, "Jesus always lives to intercede for his people." After his resurrection from the dead and ascension into heaven, Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father and he prays with perseverance for us Christians! When we Christians on earth join him in this ministry of persistent prayer, we will also experience the work of his Holy Spirit in our lives and in our ministries.

POINT 7. OTHER TEACHINGS IN THE BIBLE ABOUT PERSEVERING PRAYER.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Paul teaches the Christians, "Be joyful always. Pray continually. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." While the people in the world can only *be happy* when things go well, Christians can *be joyful* even in difficult situations. Christians do not rejoice because they experience pain and hardship. Christians rejoice over the fact that God is in control of their difficult situations and that in the end he will wipe all their tears away. Their joy is centred in God, not in their situations. Christians can be joyful in difficult situations, because they pray and make all their wishes known to God. At the throne in heaven, they find grace to help them just when they need it (cf. Hebrews 4:16). To pray continually does not mean to pray every moment of the day without stopping. It rather means that there should be *no decline in the regularity of the habit to pray to God in the midst of all circumstances of life*. It expresses the same encouragement as in Romans 12:12, which says, "Be faithful in prayer." Ephesians 6:18 says, "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying." Colossians 4:2 says, "Devote yourselves to prayer."

The apostle Paul not only teaches Christians to pray with perseverance, but he also gives a good example. In 1 Thessalonians 3:10 he says, "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith." In 2 Thessalonians 1:11 he says, "We constantly pray for you." In Ephesians 1:16 he says, "I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."

Part of his persevering prayers is giving thanks. Paul teaches Christians to give thanks in all circumstances. A Christian can give thanks even amidst anguish, persecution and difficulties, because in Jesus Christ a Christian is more than a conqueror! Jesus Christ has overcome the world (cf. John 16:33) and Christians will overcome together with him.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

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