

Lack of Persistence

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Date: 26 September 2021

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, look with me this morning to Matthew chapter 7. We're going to be reading verses 7 through 11 in just a moment. And we're continuing the series that I began last week, The Enemies of Prayer.

We said last week, and I think we would all acknowledge that believers recognize the benefit of prayer. We all talk about how God answers prayer, how God moves when we pray, and the power of prayer.

And yet we also acknowledge that we seldom pray as much or in the fashion we'd like to pray. And so we began last week talking about The Enemies of Prayer. What keeps us from praying?

And we mentioned three things last week that affect us negatively in our prayer lives. This morning I want to add yet a fourth enemy of prayer. And this fourth enemy is lack of persistence.

Or you could label it another way. Secondly, we have a tendency to simply settle. Several years ago, probably ten or more now, I got a call from a guy one Sunday after I preached on marriage.

[1 : 05] And he said, I wonder if you could meet me one day this week in a local restaurant. And so we got together. And when we met in that restaurant, he told me the reason I asked you to meet me is because my marriage is just not what I want it to be.

And I said, well, describe it to me because I had known him for a long time. And he seemed like a very likable fellow. And his wife seemed like they got along very well. I didn't see anything would indicate to me there were any red flags in their marriage.

And so I said, well, just tell me about your relationship. And he said, well, I want you to understand we don't ever fight. I said, we've never fussed much. And said, we just get along real well. We don't argue about anything.

We come in and go to work. We come in. We sit down. We enjoy the evening together. I have our meals. It's pleasant. We talk. He said, but the truth is our relationship is more like the relationship between a loving brother and a loving sister than it is a husband and wife.

And so I asked him, have you been to counseling? We have. Have you read some books? And we talked about different things. And pretty soon it became apparent when I asked him, what are you going to do about this? And he said, well, I don't see anything I can do about it.

[2 : 14] He said, it's not what I want, but I'm going to be faithful to my commitment, and we're just going to hang in there until the end. And I thought to myself, man, that's really and truly sad because this guy had lots of years of life left.

And yet it became apparent he had come to the place in his life where he was simply going to settle. Now, when you take that illustration and you apply it to people's prayer lives, I want to tell you, I think there's a lot of similarity.

I think there are a lot of believers out there who, when they first became a Christian, someone told them, you need to pray. And so they began to pray, and people told them how to pray, and they followed that routine. And they prayed, but after a while, they didn't see answer to the prayer the way they thought they might see an answer.

And so like that man in his marriage, a lot of people have just come to the place where they've said, well, this is just how it is. And they don't have great expectation for prayer.

And so they've come to the place they've just simply settled. And a lot of that, I believe, is the product of not persisting in prayer passionately.

[3 : 24] So look with me to Matthew chapter 7 and verse 7. This is a part of the Sermon on the Mount, and this is what Jesus says about prayer.

Keep asking, he writes, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened unto you.

So the first thing Jesus tells us is that we're to pray with passion and with persistence. And he uses these three words, and I don't know about you, but when I was somewhere along their age, the age of some of these older ones up here earlier, first verse I ever memorized in the scripture was Matthew 7, 7.

It was this verse. And in those days, we used the King James Version, and it talked about asking and seeking and knocking, right? Well, today they've changed those words slightly in the modern translations, and that's asking and searching and knocking.

We look at those, and we have a tendency to think, well, you know, that's just said three times a little differently, but really it's the gist of the same thing. And there's great similarity between asking and seeking or searching and knocking.

[4 : 47] But I want you to see there's also a pretty substantial difference between each of those words, and even when you talk about any of those words individually, there's a wide spectrum of ways that you can do that.

For instance, let's start with that first word. He says, ask, and it shall be given you. There's a lot of ways we can ask, and we can ask in a lot of different fashions at a lot of different levels.

How many of you have ever asked something out of just idle curiosity? I mean, you're hearing somebody tell about something, and it's not that you have a probing interest or that you're nosy or you really got to know what's going on there, but you just find it interesting and curiously you ask them a question.

And sometimes, as soon as you ask that innocent question, you find out, boy, you've stepped into something that somebody didn't want to tell you about, right? And so they kind of climb up, and they kind of let you know that subject's off limits, and you just quickly back away, and you really didn't mean to step over the line.

You were just asking out of idle curiosity. And then there are times you ask, and you really do want an answer. It's not life-threatening. It's not going to be life-altering, but you just want to answer, right?

[6 : 02] You say, can you tell me where the bread is here in this grocery store? Can you tell me where the ice cream counter is? Can you tell me how much this costs? Can you give me directions to some place?

You just need the information. It's no big deal. You want it, and you simply ask. And boy, there are other times when you really, really do ask.

I mean, you need somebody's help. You're in a bind, and you really ask in an intense fashion. And here's what I found. When we really need help, and we really do ask somebody for something, sometimes if it's life-threatening, we just blurt it out, and we get to it.

But sometimes if it's one of those things we need, and we need it badly, have you ever noticed we can be even embarrassed to ask? Any of you ever been that way? You're just kind of embarrassed to ask somebody?

Let me give you an illustration. I'm out on Lake Hartwell. It's about six, seven years ago, probably six years ago. My granddaughter's scout is 10 or 11 years old, and she's with me and my wife, and we're on this boat I had.

[7 : 13] I'm only telling you this because you need to understand the size of the boat. It's not a huge boat, but it's a bigger boat than you can paddle. It's not a rowboat. It's about 19 foot long.

It's got a pretty good-sized engine on the back. It's fiberglass in weight, and we're just out cruising around the lake having a good time. Had a house down there on the lake at that time.

Lived down there about 13 years. And so we're just having a good time. My granddaughter's 10 years old. We're cruising around, and all of a sudden the boat sputters, and it cuts off.

And we're stranded out here in the middle of Lake Harrell, and we can see the landing, but it's about a mile away. And so I do what any good man does.

I go to the back as though I don't really know anything about engines, and I kind of look at it like the answer's going to pop out at me, and it doesn't. And so I go back, and I try it again, maybe hit it a time or two, you know, and go and try it, and still nothing happens.

[8 : 11] And so I'm standing there trying to analyze what it possibly could be. I make sure I've got gas in the thing. And then I scratch my head, and I realize, well, you know, I've got a paddle here. It's one of these boats.

They put a little paddle in there. I guess the Coast Guard requires you to have it. So you've got a paddle in there about this long, right? As heavy as that fiberglass boat is, you're not going to move that thing very far. And so I paddle on this side a while, and I'd go to the other side of the boat, and I'd paddle there a while, and I'd paddle over here a while, and I'd go back, and I'd paddle over there a while.

And my little 10-, 11-year-old granddaughter finally looks at me and says, well, Papa, you've got a whistle on that keychain. I said, I know that. He says, why don't you blow it?

That's what it's for, isn't it, to let people know you need help? And I said, yeah. Well, why don't you blow it?

Well, because I don't want to. I just want to paddle. And so I paddle for about 10 minutes, and I'm maybe to the back of the church here, you know, by that time.

[9 : 17] And she says, Papa, I really do think you need to blow that whistle. And so I pick up the whistle. I look around. There are boats going by me all the time, right? But I'm embarrassed.

I don't know why. I just, I don't want to ask somebody, would you stop what you're doing and tow me to this landing? I think I'll just paddle. So I paddle a couple more minutes, and I'm sitting at nowhere. She's just sitting there giving me one of those granddaughter looks like, you know, you need to blow that whistle.

So I said, why don't you blow the whistle? So she blows the whistle. And it's only about a minute until somebody comes by, and they say, you got rope? And I said, yeah. And I throw them rope, and they tie me up.

And three minutes later, I'm at the landing, right? But I'm fearful about asking. And I just wonder at times if all of us are like that.

We know help's available, but we just hate to ask. So Jesus says, you have to ask. Keep asking.

[10 : 18] Not just once. Keep asking, and it will be given to you. And then he says, keep searching. Keep searching. Now, again, there are a couple levels of searching, isn't it?

How many of you wives have ever sent your husband to find something, and he actually came back with it, right? It just doesn't happen. Husbands are notoriously bad searchers. Children and grandchildren are even worse.

I think they learned from their dads, right? My granddaughter, Scott, knew I needed to blow that whistle, but I want to tell you something. She couldn't find an object in a room that you told her how to get there and find it if it had a flashing light on it, right?

She's just incapable. And I've watched her before, and I'll say, it's in there on that table, and she'll walk in there, and she'll kind of do this thing when she was younger. She would just kind of go. And she's looked at it, and then she looks at it again, and then she looks at it again, and then she'll come back and say, I couldn't find it.

You ever had that happen? There's that kind of searching when you don't have much interest in it, when it's just something somebody tells you to do, and you're just half-heartedly looking for that object.

[11 : 22] But let me ask you this. You moms ever been in the mall with your daughter or your son? They're three or four or five years old, and you turn to look at a dress, and you turn back around, and they're gone?

Boy, you remember that sense of panic that comes over you? And you quickly drop what you're doing, and you start looking, and if you don't find them within about 30, 45 seconds, what do you do?

You're calling their name out. You feel a little bit embarrassed, but you're calling their name out, and pretty soon you're enlisting the help of others to help you find that child because, man, you don't want them to go missing.

About five years before I retired, I got a secretary who is in another office and came into our part of the office complex, and she said, Pastor Gene, her husband, has just called, and he's got an elderly father who has Alzheimer's, and he's wandered off this morning, and they can't find him.

And he wondered if you could rally some men to go to that part of town and help look for that man. And so I said, of course, and about 10 minutes later, there were 15 of us, and we're on our way over to that part of town, the west side of Greenville, and we get over there, and we had a little map, and we said, you take this street, and I'll take this one, and we divide out the area, and we looked for about five hours as intensely as we could look.

[12 : 42] And finally, they found him several blocks from his home behind a church laying out there on the grass. He was okay, did all right, but I'm going to tell you something. That was a frantic search because we knew this man's life is on the line.

Jesus says, when you pray, search like that. Jesus says, when you pray, ask. Keep asking. Keep searching.

And then he says, knock. Not just knock, but keep knocking. Now, I don't know if you've ever thought about this or not, but there are different levels of knocking too.

Did you know that? We don't always knock the same. Sometimes you're selling something, or you're taking a survey, or you're out on church visitation, and you're new at this.

I've been with folks, and you go into the door. He said, here's a family that's visited our church, and we're going to go out there and see them. And it's new to somebody, and they're a little bit afraid.

Can you identify with that? And you know how they knock when they go to the door?

[13 : 41] I see them do this. I see them do this. Pastor, I don't think they're here. Let's go. Right?

Because they don't want them to be there, right? Because they're scared. That's one way to knock. And then, of course, there's that time you're invited to somebody's house, right? And they're your friends, and you know them.

You're not timid about that, but you're not going to tear the door down. You go to the door. If they don't have a doorbell, you know what you do? You knock about like this. You go. And you stand back, and you're waiting. Pretty soon, they open the door, and they greet you, and you go in, and you have a wonderful time together.

But there's another kind of knocking. We don't see it very often. You may have never seen it.

December 2016, about two months before I retired.

It's 2 o'clock in the morning, two weeks before Christmas, almost exactly. My wife and I are in bed asleep, and the front door from our house is about from here to that double door leading out of the church to where our bedroom is.

[14 : 46] Well, 2 o'clock in the morning, all of a sudden, the loudest pounding you can imagine, and it's like this. Not quite like this, but much louder. And it goes on and on.

And it lasted for at least two to three minutes. We are suddenly awakened. It frightens us, scares us, and it just won't let up. And you can tell it's more than one person pounding at the door.

You think, is the house on fire? What in the world is wrong? You jump up. We put on clothes. We get to the door. And when I got to the door, here stands a man and a woman and his two daughters, college-age daughters that I all know.

She's been a person who was on our staff at one point in time. I open the door, and they rush into the door, and they all throw their arms around me simultaneously.

And they're sobbing. And their face says, something horrible has happened. And they tell me their 19-year-old son, they just learned a few minutes earlier, their 19-year-old son coming from Charleston was run over by a transfer truck on 385.

[15 : 57] It's immediately taken his life. And they're looking at me, and they're telling me this, and they're saying, Pastor, what do we do? What do we do? What do we do?

They're frantic. And they're needing answers, and they're wanting help. Now, here's my question to you. When you pray, do you pray like that?

Can you imagine what it would take you, what would have to happen for you to go to someone's home in the middle of the night, 2 in the morning, and just pound incessantly, unashamedly, as hard as you could, at a door?

Can you imagine the state of emergency you have to be in to do that? Have you ever prayed like that? Because I have a feeling when Jesus says, ask and keep asking, and search and keep searching, and knock and keep knocking, he's not talking about those entry levels of asking and searching and knocking.

He's talking about that person who just persistently ask and ask and ask, and that person who searches and they turn it upside down, they're looking everywhere, and that person who goes to that door and they just pound and pound and pound and say, I cannot be turned away, I need your help, please, please, please come and help me.

[17 : 22] I want you to notice the second thing in this passage. He promises us in verse 8, there will be an answer, but it will only come when we persist.

Look at verse 8. The one who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and the one who knocks, someone will open the door for him.

I'm going to make a simple, short statement about this, and I hope you'll listen carefully. When I read that, it's so assertive. Jesus says, the one who asks will receive.

The one who searches will find. The one who knocks, it will be given to him. I'm going to shock you when I say this, but I'm going to tell you something.

Only two things I know to say about that. Either Jesus told a lie, or that's the truth. I mean, either Jesus just exaggerated or told an outright lie, or that must be the absolute truth.

[18 : 31] There's no in-between for that statement. He says that to us. If you ask, you'll receive. If you seek, you'll find. If you knock, it's going to be opened unto you. So is he right?

Or did he just exaggerate? Is that a lie? Well, if he lied to us, I want to tell you something. There's not any reason in the world for you to ever pray again, because God is not there, and he doesn't listen, and he won't answer even if he could.

Or what he said was truth, and I believe it is. And if it is, then I want to ask you something. Why in the world wouldn't we pray in that fashion?

How foolish is it? It's just like me on that boat with the whistle there and not blowing it. He's saying there's help available. You know what? I just refuse to. I'm not going to ask like that.

I'm not going to ask persistently. I'm not going to seek. I'm not going to knock. And that's altogether foolish to have that mentality. Here's the third and final thing I want to say to you today.

[19 : 35] There is a sensible rationale for why God will be faithful in answering. And you know what that is? We are his children, and he loves us. Now look at what he says in verses 9 to 11.

What man among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for fish, will give him a snake?

If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him? Jesus lays out the rationale for this bold, assertive statement he makes about God answering prayer.

He says, listen, why wouldn't God answer prayer? Think about it, he says. Those who are dads know this. If your son comes to you and says, hey, dad, I'm hungry.

Could you give me some bread? What dad is there that says, no, but I tell you what, I have a pile of rocks I'll give you. Or he says, son comes and says, dad, could you give me some fish?

[20 : 44] I'm hungry. And he says, no, but how about a snake? There's not a dad in the room that does that kind of thing. Truth of the matter is, every one of us who are dads or moms for that matter, we want to give to our kids, don't we?

I know at times I think they think, no, dad doesn't want to give to me. He's stingy or he's wanting to hold out on it. But I want to tell you something, almost every dad I meet, they're generous with their kids and their grandkids.

And here's what I found. If they can do it, they will do it. If they know it's good and in the best interest of the child. There have been times I've looked at my son or daughter and said, no, I won't do that.

Well, can you afford to do it? Yeah, I can afford to do it. But I know this, it's not in your best interest that I do that. That's not something you really need. It's going to be harmful to you.

It's going to be hurtful to you. So no, I won't do it. But I'm going to tell you something. If it's in their best interest, if it's good for them, there's not a man in this room, I would guess, who would say, I have the means.

[21 : 49] I know it would be good for my child. But you know what? I just want to withhold from them. We're exactly the opposite. God's built us in a different fashion. Even among lost people, not just people who are believers, dads want to do good.

But recognize this about us. Every dad in the room, I don't care how good a dad you are. I don't care how fine a Christian you are. You're evil. You're not completely evil.

You do some good things, but you know this. You've got an evil nature to you. You know that you can be self-absorbed and you can be selfish just like I can. And so Jesus says this.

If you guys who are dads can give good things to your children and you're evil, think about our Heavenly Father. He's not evil. He's perfectly righteous.

He's perfectly good. He has everything. Everything's at his disposal. He owns everything that exists because he made it all. So if you ask him, why in the world would he want to withhold from you if it's

in your best interest?

[22 : 51] It just doesn't make sense. And so Jesus says the problem in our praying is that we're not persistent. Now I want you to turn to one last passage and we'll go home.

Look with me to Luke chapter 18. Luke chapter 18. And I want you to look at verse 1 through 8. I'm not going to explain this parable. It's self-explanatory.

But I want you to just look at it and read it and hear what Jesus says. This is the parable he gives on persistence. Luke 18 verse 1. Then he told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not to become discouraged.

Any of you ever get discouraged in praying? Anybody here? Boy, I have. There was a judge in one town who didn't fear God or respect man.

A widow in that town kept coming to him saying, Give me justice against my adversary. For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, Even though I don't fear God or respect man, yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will give her justice so she doesn't wear me out by her persistent coming.

[24 : 06] Then the Lord said, Listen to what the unjust judge says. Will not God grant justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay to help them?

I tell you, he will swiftly grant them justice. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find that faith on earth? Jesus is telling us to persist in prayer.

I want to tell you one story, and I close the message. How many of you know the name Bob Goff? G-O-F-F, Bob Goff. Any of you ever heard that name?

Anybody here? I see one or two back here. He's written a couple books. One is called Love Does. In this book, he says, in essence, that if you love, it's not something you say.

It's something you do. Now, I don't recommend a lot of books because I'm not a big, big, big reader. So if a book, if I read a book on taste, it's a good, good book, okay?

[25 : 15] Write that down. Go home and order it today on Amazon. It'll be one of the best books you've ever read. It's a short, easy read. It's funny. You'll laugh yourself sick. It's called Love Does, Bob Goff.

You're not writing. You need to be writing, okay? Love Does, Bob Goff. Go home, buy that book. True story. Here's what happened to Bob Goff. He's a West Coaster, right?

He's about my age. He lives on the West Coast. Years and years ago, he goes to college after finishing high school, just does mediocre work all through high school, all through college.

His parents are educators. They keep saying, Bob, you need to get serious about your studies. Bob doesn't get serious about his studies. I guess he probably knew, to be honest, he's a pretty smart guy. And so he just thought he could just wing it, get through school the best he can.

He goes to high school, just makes subpar grades. Goes to college, just gets through. Receives Christ somewhere in his college experience. He's devoted to two things. Young life, if you know about that organization.

[26 : 20] And the other thing is surfing, right? He's just a beach bum. He gets through college, and God speaks to his heart, and God says, Bob, you need to go to law school. You need to be an attorney.

Because if you were an attorney, and you used your gifts in the way you could use your gifts, you could change the world. So guess what Bob Goff does? He goes.

This guy doesn't lack confidence. He goes, and he takes the LSAT. It's the pre-law school test you take to get in and see if you've got the aptitude for it. He does miserably, okay?

And so he applies to all the law schools that were on his list, has a long list, applies to all these. A few weeks later, he gets back rejection letters just by the basket full. They all say, no, no, no, you can't come.

So he decides, well, which one do I really want to go to of all those on the list? And here's his favorite law school. So it's on the West Coast. He goes, makes an appointment to see this dean of the law school one week before classes start.

[27 : 23] He walks into his office. The guy seats him. He says, I applied to your law school, but y'all rejected me. And he said, I just came to make a personal appeal to you because I think I'd make a great lawyer.

Guy says, why do you want to be a lawyer? He says, is it because of the money? No, I want to change the world. And God's told me that I could change the world if I would just become a lawyer.

So I need to go to law school.

He says, well, he's looking at his transcript. I'm sure you're a fine young man. I'm sure you've got a lot of abilities. You can't come to this law school.

We just can't bend our policies to allow you in. He says, but thank you for coming. And there are a lot of other schools. And maybe there's a school out there who would let you in. He doesn't think so, but maybe.

And he shows him to the door. But he's very polite to him. So he works that day, the dean does.

And when he goes out for lunch, they've got a bench just like this right outside the dean's office.

[28 : 20] And guess who's sitting there? Bob Goff sitting on that bench. And so he walks by and he says, can I help you? Was there something else? And he said, no, sir. He said, I just wanted to remind you of one thing.

He says, what that? He says, you can change this whole thing by saying four words. The dean looks at him curiously and he says, what are those four words?

Go buy your books. He says, well, I'm sorry I'd like to, but I can't. So he goes on to lunch. When he comes back, he fully expects Bob Goff will be gone.

But guess what? Bob Goff's still sitting on that bench. When he comes walking by, just as he gets up to him, he says, you can say those four words and it'll change everything. He says, go buy your books.

And dean smiles and walks on in his office. That day he leaves. When he leaves to go home, Bob Goff's sitting there. He looks at him, just say those four words.

[29 : 18] Dean smiles, walks home. So he goes home. He tells his wife about it and all I could. The next day he comes to work. Guess what? Bob Goff's sitting on that bench. Now he's a little bit annoyed, right?

But he thinks this guy is really persistent. He walks in his office. He comes out for lunch. There's Bob Goff. He goes away to lunch, comes back. There's Bob Goff.

The next day he comes to work. Bob Goff's still sitting there. Just say those four words. Guy grins, goes in his office. He does that for seven days and finally school starts.

Okay? Law school starts. He thinks now this guy will be gone because he sees he's not getting in.

First day of classes, Bob Goff's sitting there. Second day of classes, Bob Goff's sitting there.

Third day of classes, Bob Goff's sitting there. Fourth day of classes, Bob Goff's sitting there. Fifth day of classes, a whole week now, Bob Goff's sitting there. He thinks, well, that's over.

[30 : 13] The next week, second week, first day, Bob Goff's sitting there. When he walks by, and this time, he's really perturbed. Why don't you just go do anything but get out of my office?

And so he comes walking by, and Bob Goff looks at him and says, just say those four words. He walks on past him, and just as he gets to his door, he turns around and looks at him.

He says, go buy your books. He graduates from that law school. He is now a professor at Pepperdine University and is the pro-council of the Ugandan government, where he has saved tons and tons and tons of abused children from wix doctors.

He has changed the world. The whole reason I tell you that is, that's what persistence looks like. Are you persistent in praying?

There's a prayer that my wife and I have been praying for nearly 50 years. We're seeing God right now begin to answer that prayer.

[31 : 21] We believe in the next week or two, I'm going to be able to tell you something that God has done in answer to that prayer. We've been praying that prayer nearly 50 years, day in and day out.

Are you persistent in your praying? Let's bow together in prayer. Father, I pray that we'd recognize that prayer is not something we do.

Hit and miss. That it's not something we just throw a little effort at every now and then. That it's not something we do to feel good about ourselves. That we don't just pray for the psychological value. But that we believe that you are the creator of the earth. The maker of all things. All power is in your hand. And Lord, when we come into your presence, when we bombard heaven, we believe because of your love for us.

Because you are a good and righteous God. That you will move. And Father, I pray that even now people would not give up in prayer.

[32 : 27] That right here in this room, you'd awaken and renew a spirit of the need to pray. Please, oh God, do that. For we make this prayer in Christ's name and for his sake alone.

Amen.