

Classic Christian Writings:

There are two passages in the Gospel of Luke which throw a flood of light upon the question, What sort of praying it is that prevails with God and obtains what it seeks from Him; and also upon the question, Why it is that many prayers of God's own children come short of obtaining that which we seek of God? The first of these two passages you will find in Luke 11:5-8; our Lord Jesus Himself is the speaker:

“And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine is come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee? I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth.

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

The central lesson in this parable of our Lord's is that, When we pray, if we do not obtain the thing the first time we ask for it, we should pray again; and if we do not obtain it the second time, we should pray a third time; and if we do not obtain it the hundredth time we pray, we should go on praying until we do get it.

We should do much thinking before we ask anything of God and be clear that the thing that we ask is according to His will; we should not rush heedlessly into God's presence and ask for the first thing that comes into our mind without giving proper thought to the question of whether it is really a thing that we ought to have or not. But when we have decided that we should pray for the thing, we should keep on praying until we get it.

Importance Of Importunity

The word translated “importunity” in the eighth verse is a deeply significant word. Its primary meaning is “shamelessness,” that is, it sets forth the persistent determination in prayer to God that will not be put to shame by any apparent refusal on God's part to grant the thing we ask. This is a very startling way that our Lord Jesus employs to set forth the necessity of “importunity” and persistence, in prayer.

It is as if the Lord Jesus would have us understand that God would have us draw nigh to Him with a resolute determination to obtain the things that we seek, a determination that will not be put to shame by any seeming refusal or delay on God's part.

Our Heavenly Father delights in the holy boldness on our part that will not take “no” for an answer. The reason why He delights in it is because it is an expression of great faith, and nothing pleases God more than faith.

We have an illustration of this holy boldness in the Gentile woman in the fifteenth chapter of Matthew, verses twenty-one to twenty-eight. She came to Jesus Christ for the healing of her daughter. She cried, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon.”

But our Lord seemed to pay no attention whatever to her. As Matthew puts it, “He answered her not a word. And His disciples came [to Him] and besought Him, saying, Send her away for she crieth after us.” In spite of His apparent deafness to her appeal she kept right on crying.

Then He turned to her with an apparently more positive rebuff, saying, “I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and she was not of the House of Israel. Then she worshipped Him and kept on calling to Him, saying, “Lord, help me.” And then came what almost appears like a cruel rebuff, when our Lord said, “It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.”

The word that He used for “dogs” was a peculiar word that meant a little pet dog, and was not at all as harsh as it seems, although it was an apparent refusal to hear her prayer. But, as we shall see, our Lord was simply putting to the test her faith that she might get an even larger blessing. Then she said, “Yea, Lord: for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.” She would not take “no” for an answer.

And then came one of the most wonderful words of commendation that ever fell from the lips of our Lord. This

is the way Matthew puts it: "Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith, be it done unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was healed from that hour." That sort of thing pleases God. He would have us have that faith in His loving kindness and in Himself that even when He seems not to hear will trust Him still to hear.

God does not always give us the things we ask the first time we ask them, but then we should not give up; no, we should keep on praying until we do get. We should not only pray, but we should PRAY THROUGH.

It is deeply significant that this parable to persist in prayer comes almost immediately after the request on the part of the disciples of our Lord, in which they say, "Lord, teach us to pray." Then follows Luke's version of the so-called "Lord's Prayer," really the disciples' prayer, and then comes this parable.

Not To Faint Or Lose Heart

The same lesson is taught in a very striking way in the second passage in Luke to which I have already referred, Luke 18:1-8: "And He spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, who feared not God, and regarded not man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came oft unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming. And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge His elect, that cry to Him day and night, and yet He is long-suffering over them? I say unto you, that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith [literally, 'the faith'] on the earth?"

What the central lesson in this parable is, we find in the words with which our Lord Jesus opens the parable, which are really the text of the whole parable; these words are, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint," the clear meaning of which is, that when we begin to pray we ought to pray on and on until we get the thing that we desire of God.

The exact force of the parable is, that if even an unrighteous judge will yield to persistent prayer and grant the thing that he did not wish to grant, how much more will a loving God yield to the persistent cries of His children and give the things that He longs to give all the time, but which it would not be wise to give, would not be for the person's own good to give, unless they were trained to that persevering faith that will not take "no" for an answer. So we see again that God does not always give us at the first asking what we desire of Him in prayer.

The Why Of Asking More Than Once

Why is it that God does not give to us the very first time we ask Him, the things that we ask of Him? The answer is plain: God would do more for us, and better for us, than to merely give us that thing. He would do us the far greater good of training us into persistent faith. The things that we get by our other forms of effort than prayer to God, do not always become ours the first time we make an effort to get them. For our own good God compels us to be persistent in our effort, and just so God does not always give us what we ask in prayer the first time we pray. Just as He would train us to be strong men and women along the other lines of effort, so also He would train us to be and make us to be strong men and women of prayer by compelling us to pray hard for the best things. He compels us to "Pray through."

Many people in these days tell us that we ought not to pray for the same thing a second time. Sometimes they tell us that the way to pray is to ask God for a thing and then "take it" by faith the first time we ask. That is true often-times. When we find a thing definitely promised in the Word we ought to rest upon the naked Word of God, and when we have prayed, know that we have asked something according to God's will and therefore that the prayer is heard and that we have received, and resting there ask no more but claim the thing as ours.

But that is only one side of the truth. The other side of the truth is that there are times when it is not made clear the first time, nor the second time, nor the third time, that the thing we ask is according to His will and that therefore the prayer is heard and the thing asked granted, and in such a case we ought to pray on and on and on.

While doubtless there are times when we are able through faith in the Word, or through the clear leading of the Holy Spirit, to claim a thing the first time that which we have asked it of God, nevertheless, beyond a question there are other times when we must pray again and again and again for the same thing before we get our

answer. Those who claim that they have gotten beyond praying twice for the same thing have either gotten beyond our Master, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, or else they have not gotten up to Him, for we are told distinctly regarding Him in Matthew 26:44, "And He left them again, and went away, and prayed a third time, saying again the same word." The truth is, they have not yet gotten up to the Master, not that they have gotten beyond Him.

There are those, and there are many of them, who, when they pray for a thing once or twice and do not get it, stop praying, and they call it "submission to the will of God" to pray no longer when God does not grant their request at the first or second asking, and they say, "Well, perhaps it is not God's will." They call that submission to the will of God.

But as a rule this is not submission to the will of God: it is spiritual laziness and lack of determination in that most all-important of all human lines of effort, prayer. None of us ever think of calling it submission to the will of God when we give up after one or two efforts to obtain things by our other efforts than prayer. In those cases we call it lack of strength of character. When the strong man of action starts out to accomplish a thing, if he does not accomplish it the first, or the second, or the hundredth time, he keeps hammering away until he does accomplish it, and just so the strong man of prayer, when he starts to pray for a thing, keeps on praying until he prays it through and obtains what he seeks.

How fond we are of calling bad things in our conduct by good names, calling our spiritual inertia and laziness and indifference "submission to the will of God." We should be very careful about what we ask from God, but when we do begin to pray for a thing we should never give up praying for it until we get it, or until God definitely makes it very clear to us that it is not His will to give it.

I am glad that God does not always give us the first time we ask, the things that we seek from Him. There is no more blessed training in prayer than that which comes through being compelled to ask again and again and again, even through a long period of years, before one obtains that which he seeks from God. Then when it does come what a sense we have that God really is, and that God really answers prayer. ...

Quitting On The Verge of Revival

Sometimes we pray and pray and pray, and are almost up to the verge of the attainment of that for which we are praying, and right then, when God is just about to answer the prayer, we stop and we miss the blessing. For example, in many churches and in many communities there are people who are praying for a revival, and the revival does not come at once, it does not come for some time, and they keep on praying, and they have nearly prayed through, they are right on the verge of attaining what they sought, and if they prayed a little longer the revival would have broken upon them. But they get discouraged, throw up their hands and quit. Just on the border of the blessing, but they do not cross into the promised land.

In January 1900 or 1901, the Faculty of the Bible Institute of Chicago instituted a late prayer meeting Saturday nights from nine to ten o'clock, to pray for a worldwide revival. After we had been praying for some time the thing happened that I knew would happen when we began. People came to me, or to my colleague that was most closely identified with me in the conduct of these meetings, and they would say, "Has the revival come?"

"No, not as far as we can see."

"When is it coming?"

"We don't know."

"How long are you going to pray?"

"Until it comes."

And come it did, a revival that began there in that prayer meeting room of the Bible Institute in Chicago and then broke out in faraway China, and Japan, and Australia, and New Zealand, and Tasmania, and India, and swept around the world, with most marvelous manifestations of God's saving power, not merely through Mr. Alexander and myself, but through a multitude of others in India and Wales and elsewhere. In Wales, for example, under Evan Roberts and others, resulting in one hundred thousand professed conversions in twelve months.

And I believe that God is looking to us today to pray through again!

I prayed fifteen long years for the conversion of my oldest brother. He seemed to be getting farther and farther

away from any hope of conversion, but I prayed on, and one morning, my first winter in Chicago, after fifteen years of praying, never missing a single day, God said to me as I knelt in prayer, "I have heard your prayer. You need not pray any more, your brother is going to be converted."

And within two weeks my brother was in my home, shut in with sickness which made it impossible for him to leave my home, shut in for two weeks, and then the day he left accepting Christ over in the Bible Institute in Mr. Moody's office, where he and I went to talk and pray together.

I told this incident once when I was holding meetings in a certain city. An elderly woman came to me at the close of the meeting and she said, "I have been praying for the conversion of my brother, who is sixty-three years old, for many years, but a short time ago, I gave up and stopped praying. But," she added, "I am going to begin my prayers again." And within two weeks of that time she came to me and said, "I have heard from my brother and he has accepted Christ."

Oh, men and women, pray through; pray through; PRAY THROUGH! Do not just begin to pray and praise a little while and throw up your hands and quit, but pray, and pray, and pray, until God bends the heavens and comes down!

From *The Power of Prayer and the Prayer of Power*, by R. A. Torrey.