

Ask Persistently

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Key Scripture

Luke 11:9 (ESV): "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

Sermon in One Sentence

Through persistent prayer, believers engage with a generous God who delightedly responds to their faithful requests, revealing His character and strengthening their trust.

Introduction

How many times have you started something, full of conviction and purpose, only to have your zeal wane when the going got tough? Perhaps it was a new diet, a fitness regime, a challenging book, or even a spiritual discipline. We live in a world saturated with instant gratification, where the expectation often falls short of the reality that many good things, especially in the spiritual realm, require sustained effort. This tendency to give up prematurely often infiltrates our prayer lives, leaving us wondering if God truly hears or cares.

The problem, then, is not usually a lack of desire to pray, but a lack of persistence *in* prayer. We approach God with our requests, even earnest ones, but our resolve often crumbles when answers don't arrive on our timeline or in our preferred package. We subtly lose faith in the process, perhaps even in the One to whom we pray.

Today, we are going to dive into the profound teachings of Jesus on prayer, specifically focusing on the call to persistence. Our passage from Luke 11, nestled within a larger discourse on prayer, challenges us to re-evaluate our approach, urging us to "ask, seek, and knock" with an unwavering faith that trusts in God's goodness and willingness to respond.

Historical & Biblical Context

The Gospel of Luke was written by Luke, a physician and Gentile convert, likely in the early 60s AD, to Theophilus (Luke 1:3-4) and a broader Greek-speaking audience. Luke's Gospel is known for its emphasis on prayer, the poor, women, and the Holy Spirit, presenting Jesus as the compassionate Savior of all people. This specific passage (Luke 11:1-13) immediately follows the disciples' request for Jesus to teach them how to pray, mirroring a common practice of rabbis teaching their disciples a distinctive prayer. Jesus responds with what we know as the Lord's Prayer, followed by a parable of the persistent friend (Luke 11:5-8) and then the famous "ask, seek, knock" exhortation.

This context is crucial because it highlights Jesus' intentional instruction on *how* to pray, not just *what* to pray. The parable of the persistent friend is not an outline of how to annoy God until He gives in, but rather a vivid illustration of how much more willing our perfect Heavenly Father is to give good gifts than even a reluctant human friend. Jesus is combating the natural human tendency to give up or to doubt God's readiness to respond. He uses hyperbole to impress upon His disciples the importance of faith-filled, sustained prayer, assuring them that God is not like the grumpy neighbor, but like a loving Father who delights to give. This teaching remains profoundly relevant today, challenging our often-lukewarm prayer lives and calling us to a deeper, more enduring communion with God.

Main Point I — The Divine Mandate: "Ask, Seek, and Knock"

Scripture: Luke 11:9 (ESV): "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

Jesus uses three progressively intense verbs to describe the nature of persistent prayer: "ask," "seek," and "knock." "Ask" (Greek: *aiteo*) suggests making a request, an initial petition. "Seek" (Greek: *zeteo*) implies a more earnest, active search, involving effort and investigation. "Knock" (Greek: *krouo*) describes a strenuous, repeated action, standing at the door and continuing to rap until an answer comes. Each verb builds upon the last, painting a picture not of a single, casual request, but of an sustained engagement with God. This isn't demanding a vending machine God, but pursuing a relationship with a Father.

The grammatical structure in the original Greek underscores this persistence. All three verbs—"ask," "seek," and "knock"—are in the present imperative, which conveys a continuous, ongoing action. It's not "ask once," but "keep on asking." It's not "seek briefly," but "keep on seeking." It's not "knock occasionally," but "keep on knocking." Jesus is instructing His disciples to adopt a posture of continuous, earnest, and unwavering petition before God. This isn't about wearing God down, but about demonstrating our faith, dependence, and sustained desire for what is good and aligned with His will.

Main Point II — The Divine Assurance: "It Will Be Given, You Will Find, It Will Be Opened"

Scripture: Luke 11:9 (ESV): "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

Just as Jesus commands persistence, He immediately provides a threefold promise of divine response. For every "ask," there is the promise, "it will be given to you." For every "seek," the assurance, "you will find." And for every "knock," the guarantee, "it will be opened to you." These are not mere possibilities; they are declarations of certainty, directly from the lips of Jesus Christ. This parallel structure emphasizes the direct correspondence between our persistent spiritual activity and God's benevolent response. Our faithful action does not go unregarded or unrewarded by our Heavenly Father.

It is crucial to understand that "given," "find," and "opened" do not always mean an immediate "yes" to our precise desires or on our precise timetable. God's answers are always in accordance with His perfect wisdom, His loving character, and His ultimate redemptive plan. Sometimes the answer is "yes," sometimes

it is "not yet," and sometimes it is "I have something better." The promise is that God *will* respond, He *will* be found, and the door *will* be opened for His good purposes. The persistent asker, seeker, and knocker develops a deeper trust in God's character, even when the answer isn't exactly what was initially envisioned. God's response is an act of His grace and sovereignty, shaping us as much by the waiting as by the receiving.

Main Point III — The Divine Giver: "How Much More Will the Heavenly Father Give?"

Scripture: Luke 11:13 (ESV): "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Jesus concludes this teaching with a powerful argument from the lesser to the greater, a common rabbinic method of reasoning. He contrasts imperfect, fallen human parents ("you, who are evil" – acknowledging human sinfulness, not condemning their parental love) with the perfect, holy Heavenly Father. If even flawed human parents know how to give good gifts to their children, how infinitely more will a perfectly loving and infinitely good God give good things to His children? The logic is irrefutable. Our generous God surpasses all human generosity.

The crowning "good gift" Jesus highlights is the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit is given to believers at conversion, Jesus is here speaking of the ongoing empowering, filling, and guiding presence of the Spirit in our lives for daily living and service. This emphasis tells us what God values most: empowering us for His purposes. While we can pray for anything according to His will, the ultimate gift He wants to bestow is more of Himself through the Spirit. Persistent prayer, then, isn't just about getting our needs met; it's about drawing closer to the Source of all good and receiving the very Spirit of God to live a life pleasing to Him. This promise cements the character of the Divine Giver – not a reluctant neighbor, but a zealous, benevolent Father who delights to give His children the very best, especially His indwelling presence.

Illustration

In the life of George Müller, the 19th-century evangelist and director of orphanages in Bristol, England, we find an extraordinary testament to persistent prayer. Müller famously relied solely on prayer for all the needs of his thousands of orphans. He never made appeals for financial help, instead bringing every need directly to God in prayer. On one occasion, the children were gathered for breakfast, but there was no food in the pantry. Müller stood before the empty dining room, blessed the empty tables, and prayed with unwavering faith for their daily bread. Immediately after, a baker arrived at the orphanage with enough bread for all the children, explaining that he had been awakened in the middle of the night by a strong urge to bake bread for Müller's orphans. Almost simultaneously, a milkman's cart broke down outside the orphanage, and he offered his perishable milk to avoid spoilage. Müller consistently received answers like these, not because he was special, but because he practiced persistent, simple faith in a God who delighted to answer. His life demonstrated that God truly hears, finds, and opens for those who persistently ask, seek, and knock.

Practical Application

1. Dedicate a specific time each day for focused, persistent prayer. Start small if needed (e.g., 15 minutes), but commit to consistent, uninterrupted time where you bring your requests to God without distraction.

2. Journal your prayers and God's answers. Documenting your petitions and how God responds (yes, no, wait) will build your faith, help you recognize His hand, and encourage persistence when answers are delayed.

3. Pray with others who can hold you accountable. Join a prayer group or find a prayer partner to lift burdens together and mutually encourage sustained prayer, especially for long-term requests.

4. Identify one specific, significant area of need or desire and commit to praying persistently for it. This could be for a prodigal child, a personal spiritual breakthrough, a family member's salvation, or a community need. Don't give up until Christ returns or God clearly directs you otherwise.

5. Begin each prayer session by asking God for the Holy Spirit's anointing and guidance. Following Jesus' example, prioritize asking for spiritual empowering and insight as the ultimate good gift God desires to give.

Discussion Questions

1. What prevents you most often from praying persistently? (e.g., doubt, busyness, fear of not getting what you want)

2. How does the parable of the persistent friend (Luke 11:5-8) reshape your understanding of God's willingness to respond to prayer?

3. What is one specific request you have brought to God repeatedly, and what has been the greatest challenge in continuing to pray for it?

4. How does understanding Jesus' promise regarding the Holy Spirit in Luke 11:13 impact what you prioritize in your prayers?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the privilege of prayer, for the invitation to come boldly before Your throne. Forgive us for our wavering faith and our quickness to give up. Strengthen us, Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, to ask persistently, to seek diligently, and to knock earnestly. May our hearts trust in Your perfect wisdom and Your boundless love as we await Your good and perfect answers. Amen.

Benediction

Now go, empowered by the Spirit, to live a life of persistent prayer, trusting in the faithfulness of our God who delights to give good gifts to His children.