



7th Sunday of Pentecost Message Transcript

Prevailing Prayer for the Spirit's Power

Main Point:

When Jesus instructed his disciples on how to pray, he taught them to pray God-centred prayers, with a sense of security in the fatherly care of God. He also taught we are to persist in prayer without doubting God's love.

Therefore, let us prevail in prayer, specifically for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—his power, his gifts, his fullest blessing—all the while rejoicing that the prevailing itself is a great work of the indwelling Spirit of the living God.

Intro |

Today I'd like to tell you a true story, that once you've heard, I'm positive you'll never forget.

How do you I know you'll never forget it?

Well, because it is the kind of story, that has an ending you just can't ignore.

I read this story many years ago, when I picked up a book entitled "Intercessory Prayer" written by a man named Dutch Sheets. Its opening began like this:

"I knew that the girl I was going to pray for was really sick. What I didn't know was that she was comatose, with a tracheostomy in her throat and a feeding tube in her stomach. She'd been in that condition for a year and a half. Seeing her for the first time was like expecting a prescription and receiving brain surgery. Her sister, who had asked me to visit this young lady, hadn't even told me the whole story for fear I wouldn't go at all.

The doctors gave Angie no hope for living, let alone coming out of the coma. Even if she did regain consciousness, doctors said she'd basically be a "vegetable" because of her extensive brain damage.

I don't know if you've ever stood beside someone in this kind of condition and asked God for a miracle, but it can be pretty intimidating. It can also teach you a lot about life and death, about yourself and about our God, especially when you stand beside the same person 60 to 70 times, for an hour or more each time throughout the course of a year.

Things didn't work out as I expected. I figured the Lord would heal this lady through our prayers in a dramatic, easy, quick way. After all, that's how it happened with Jesus, wasn't it? He'd say the words with just the right amount of faith – and viola!

What ended up happening was that I prayed with a completely unresponsive person for three to four hours of my life each week for a year. I experienced humiliation and insults from the staff of the nursing home where she was staying. Tears ... frustrating moments ... times of boldness ... times of intimidation. I never imagine the process taking so long or teaching me so much.

But one day it finally happened. The front page of the local paper read "Woman Awake, Alive, Healthy after Two Years in a Coma." Doctors called it a "medical miracle." "We have no explanation," they said, though they stopped short of giving God the glory.

I don't really need to tell you why this story moves me so much, do I?

When I'm in the middle of praying and believing God for something, and it looks like there is no way anything is going to change ... this story always seems to act like a fresh injection of faith. Kind of like guzzling down a bottle of Berocca or Gatorade, allowing me to power through the wall of doubt, and keep me climbing the mountain of impossibility.

I want to have the tenacity to keep praying, when everything around me says, "there really is no point".

I want the staying power to keep praying, when everyone else is saying, 'it is obviously not God's will'.

I want the perseverance to keep holding onto the promises of God, when doubts scream at me, "just give up."

It is this kind of courageous and tenacious prayer that Jesus talks about.

After watching Jesus pray, his disciples ask him to teach them.

In the process of instructing them, Jesus makes four directions about prayer that are based on four promises about prayer.

Point 1 | Jesus taught: prayers are to be God-centred

Jesus teaches us to make our prayers God-centred.

When the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray, he told them, "*When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.*" (11:2)

Notice that all of the Lord's Prayer is requests, not thanks or praise.

Jesus says our first desire, our first request, should be that God's name be hallowed or glorified, and that his kingdom advance and come.

This is what I mean by God-centred. The glory of God's name and the advancement of God's kingdom are the primary concerns of prayer.

When we have Jesus' priorities, we express them in our praying.

So, point 1 is, let us make the glory of God the centre of our prayers.

Point 2 | Jesus taught: prayers come from a security in the Father's love

Jesus doesn't want us to feel precarious and insecure in our prayers.

He shows by teaching us to call God 'Father' when we pray to him.

Through addressing God as 'Father', Jesus unpacks for us some of the security that is implied through that relationship.

This is the second promise to encourage us in our praying.

"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!" (11:11-13).

The words "how much more" mean that God is much more inclined to hear us and help us when we pray than earthly fathers are.

Jesus wants us to feel secure in the Father's love when we come to him in prayer.

This sense of security is utterly crucial in the life of prayer and the life of worship.

You can't sustain a life of prayer if you believe God is stonewalling you or angry with you or even indifferent towards you.

Prayer is sustained by the confidence that God is our Father and he is MORE inclined to give what we need than the best human father is.

That's the promise. And the direction is: pray with a sense of security in the Father's love.

Point 3 | Jesus taught: prayers that prevail have no doubt of the Father's love

Jesus teaches us to prevail in prayer without doubting the Father's love.

By prevailing I mean hanging in there. Persevering. Persisting. Not giving up. Keeping on asking and seeking and knocking until the answer comes, or until God says, 'Stop praying'.

But hang on a minute!

Part of me begins to ask, "If God is more caring than the best earthly father, then why would he sometimes be slow to respond to our prayers?"

Well, Jesus answers this dilemma by telling a story.

A man goes to his friend's house in the middle of the night to say that a guest just arrived and there isn't enough in the house to feed him.

'Could you please get up and lend me three loaves of bread?' he pleads.

His friend calls out, 'The door is locked! The children are asleep! Don't bother me!'

But his friend keeps knocking and asking until the man gets up.

Notice that it is not because of his friendship, but because of his prevailing, persisting and persevering knocking.

Now, there is no way to gloss over the fact ... this is a very unattractive image of the transaction of prayer.

But, that's the reality of what persevering prayer actually feels like.

I am sure, during the months that Dutch Sheets prayed at the woman's bedside, he felt like he was knocking on a firmly sealed closed door. I'm sure he felt like the only response was, 'The door is locked, Don't bother me!'

Thankfully, Jesus reveals the lesson he desires we learn:

"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (11:9)

Jesus clearly wants us to be like this friend who kept knocking. He wants us to prevail in prayer.

But then he makes a sudden turn and shifts from the image of a grumpy friend to the image of a caring Father.

The point is to show us that prevailing prayer—persisting, persevering prayer—is utterly important for us.

While our minds are filled with unsettling images of a friend who won't help without being annoyed into helping ... Jesus qualifies his point by saying that God is NOT like that friend. He is like the most caring Father imaginable.

Yes, God sometimes gives us what we need only after a long season of prevailing and persisting in prayer.

But it is not because he is uncaring or insensitive or unable.

Why then does he postpone the answer?

Jesus tells us in an indirect way.

When Jesus says, "a good father will not give his son a serpent if he asks for a fish", he means a good father will only give his children what is good for them.

So, when our heavenly Father gives us a slow answer—when he wills that we prevail for a season—it is because he is giving us a fish and not a serpent.

He is giving us what is good for us. There is something in the prevailing—the asking and seeking and knocking—that we need, that is good for us.

And then he gives us a promise:

"For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." (v10) God is very responsive to prevailing prayer.

Point 4 | Jesus taught: Prevailing prayer, prevails for the Holy Spirit

Finally, Jesus teaches that prevailing in prayer should be a prevailing for the Holy Spirit.

"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!" (11:13)

I would love to have time to give example after example of the link between prevailing prayer and the outpouring of the Spirit.

Whether it be at Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:21), or Pentecost (Acts 2), or later in Acts 4:31, prevailing prayer is the pathway to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Application | Let us be a people who prevail in prayer

So let us be a community of pray-ers who pray with God-centred prayers, with a sense of security in the fatherly care of God, with a new resolve to prevail and persist in prayer without doubting God's love.

And let us prevail specifically in praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—his power, his gifts, his fullest blessing—all the while rejoicing that the prevailing itself is a great work of the indwelling Spirit of the living God.