

Stage IV. The Great Galilean Ministry

E. The Appointment of the Twelve Apostles and Teaching on the Mount

12. Teaching on the Mount, Part XI:

Loving God Means Persisting in Prayer

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #078

Base Text: MT 7.7-12 (Parallel Text: LK 6.31)

7 *"I command you to keep on asking, and it will be given to you; likewise keep on seeking and you will find; keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who continues to ask, receives; the one who continues to seek, finds; and to the one who continues to knock, the door will be opened.*

9 *"Which of you will give your son a stone if he asks you for bread? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will you give him a snake?*

11 *"Since you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who keep on asking him!*

12 *"So in everything, I command you to keep on behaving toward others in the same way you are wanting them to do for you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."*

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	On a Mountain in Galilee
Timeline	May, 31 AD (Month Sixteen)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage IV: The Great Galilean Ministry
	E. The Appointment of the Twelve Apostles and "Teaching on the Mount"
Title	12. Teaching on the Mount, Part XI Loving God Means Persisting in Prayer

COMMENT:

Jesus' second discipleship issue in the series of three that closed his "Teaching on the Mount" was persistence in prayer. He had already given a succinct primer on the essentials of private prayer earlier (MT 6.5-15; DJN #074). Now he returned to the single most important battle we face in following his example in a life of prayer: our tenacity in never giving up.

Jesus modeled, and taught his disciples to pray in three different ways: (1) privately (2) corporately, and (3) living in continuous fellowship and silent heart-communication with the Trinity in everything we do. Of these, most of us struggle the most with private prayer.

There is a special dynamic of God's presence that we experience when we gather in prayer with two or more believers. Praying without ceasing as we learn to commune in God's presence in silent, heart-prayer is a source of abiding joy, and a constant process of growth throughout our lives. However, praying in private on a regular basis

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raises a constant series of new challenges for us. It is too easy to give up. Jesus knew our need, and gave us this special command and promise to encourage us in a lifetime of prayer.

The Lord commanded constancy in private prayer. He used three present tense imperatives to reinforce this point: **"I command you to keep on asking... seeking...knocking"**

Jesus' point is that we must NEVER give up. Developing a powerful private prayer life--like Jesus--is no easy endeavor; it is one of the most difficult things we will ever attempt. However, success is guaranteed if we only do ONE thing: keep at it.

Yes, we will despair, and give up at times. We will face seasons of boring, spirit-sapping dryness. Our minds and concentration will wander. We will fail to stick with our appointed prayer time, and abandon our practice of prayer so many times we will think we are hopeless. We will probably become convinced that we are the worst disciple on earth in the realm of private prayer. This is all normal in developing a life-style of private prayer.

Jesus would say to us: *"So what? Get up. Pray today. Forget about what lies behind you, and press ahead right now. Let tomorrow worry about itself."*

Jesus only requires that we never give up on ourselves, for HE will never give up on us. We must simply keep going. Begin again. And again. And again...until we become convinced that no how many times we fail, we will try again. This attitude is guaranteed to prevail in private prayer: Bull dog tenacity expressed in stubborn persistence. This is what Jesus commands.

The Lord gave us two precious promises regarding persistence to buttress his command. First he said that **"everyone (bar none) who continues to ask receives.."** By repeating the phrase three times, for those who continue to ask, seek, and knock, Jesus accentuated that the promise applies to absolutely everyone who persists in prayer. We are guaranteed answers to our request to learn how to pray like Jesus if we just continue in the discipline.

This issue of persistence in private prayer is so important that Jesus would address it two more times in his ministry (LK 11.1-13; 18.1-8). I think it would be safe to say that in the 300 verses in the gospels in which Jesus teaches about prayer, this is the one truth that our Lord would have us put into practice more than any other. Persistence will surely open the door to every other aspect of prayer.

To further encourage our persistence, Jesus offered a second promise in today's text. After pointing out that we are sinful, and yet we know how to give good gifts to our children, Jesus reminded us that our Father is infinitely good, and longs to give us what we ask for--much more than we desire or need. God's goodness assures that he will keep on giving nothing but good and perfect gifts to those who keep on asking. In other words, because God is perfectly good, he gives only perfectly good gifts to us. This is certain.

Jesus ended this command/warning about persistence in prayer with the "golden rule." We often forget that the context for this famous saying of Jesus was instruction in prayer. What does persistence in prayer have to do with the golden rule? Everything.

Doing for others in the same way that we want them to do for us begins with prayer. How often do we desire others to pray for us? As soon as we are in jam the first thing we do is call on God, and then we enlist everybody we can to pray for us. When we enter the realm of need that only a direct answer from God will meet, we want others to pray for us more than anything else.

The truth is that the most important things we need in life all come exclusively from God, as answers to prayer. Forgiveness, eternal life, guidance in decision-making, peace that passes understanding...this is just the beginning of the list. If we truly care about other people we will become tenaciously persistent in intercessory prayer for them. Obtaining the gifts that only God can provide for others, by praying fervently for them, is the necessary beginning to living the golden rule. If we do not care enough about others to really pray for them, the chances are that we will do little else for them.

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APPLICATION:

What is your persistence in prayer rating, on a scale of 1 to 10? What does Jesus' command say to you about this number? Do you need to improve it? How much?

How will you put Jesus' most important command and warning about prayer into practice today? Tomorrow? Every day?