

“Prayerful Persistence”

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Genesis 18:16-28,32-33

Luke 11:1-13

[Abraham said to the Lord,]

“Wouldn’t you spare the city if there are only fifty good people in it?

You surely wouldn’t let them be killed when you destroy the evil ones.

You are the judge of all the earth, and you do what is right.”

Let us pray... O God,

We ask that you answer us in our time of need;

Help us find what we seek with all our heart;

and let us into your realm that is even now, on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen

When you go to have your car worked on – and they ask you if you are going to wait,
say, ‘Yes’.

Say, ‘Yes’, if you can – or give them a call if they tell you it’s going to take
more than a day to get the job done.

This helps to get the job done right, if not quicker.

By your presence – or by calling to check on progress every so often,
you are showing the mechanic that your car means something to you,
and that the mechanic’s work is important to you as well.

Now, don’t call so often as to be a nuisance,

but check in often enough to let them know you care about what’s going on.

I’m no expert on automotives, but I know that *being present* matters,
and that is what it takes to keep you on the road.

Prayer kind of works that way –

making the effort to be present with God, is important.

You may not always see how your relationship with God is developing right away,
but making the effort to pray helps in building a rapport over time with
the One who can see clearly, both the problems and progress ahead –
and that applies to auto mechanics as well as God.

Prayer is one of those skills that everyone should know how to do –
like maintaining your automobile.

It’s what it takes to keep you on the road of faith.

It helps with those situations in life that can’t be anticipated
because it keeps you open to unforeseen options;
and prayerful persistence – as in perseverance,
pays off in *both* our scripture lessons today.

Willard, p.2

The story of God's visit with Abraham & Sarah continues
as the three angelic beings are departing.

The Lord tells Abraham they are going to Sodom and Gomorrah
to investigate the terrible reputation of the people there
and to see if there is any goodness at all.

Abraham must have been aware that his nephew Lot & family
were living in Sodom when he asks the Lord about sparing the city.
He intuitively knows God will judge the people of Sodom and Gomorrah
and he asks if they would be spared even if only as few as
fifty righteous people could be found.

In the RSV translation of the Bible, Abraham continues to bargain with God, asking
"if there were only 45", then "30", or "20", and finally for the sake of
"10" good people would the city be spared?

Each time he prefaces his request with "please don't get angry, but..."
Yet without showing any irritation at Abraham's *persistence*,
the Lord readily agrees, appearing to be persuaded.

Don't we expect God already knows what the options and outcomes will be?
And Abraham states the obvious:

'You are the judge of all the earth, and you do what is right.' Gen. 18:25^b

Yet it is as if Abraham is reminding God that God is a God of mercy,
and as a result, God seems to relent from violent retribution.

But does it seem possible that God is using 'reverse psychology' on Abraham?
Could this really be a test for Abraham?

Was God working to provoke a compassionate response from Abraham –
as well as getting him to learn *perseverance* in seeking God?

In the Gospel story from Luke, Jesus tells his disciples a parable
about a person who goes next door to a friend's house
in the middle of the night seeking some bread for unexpected visitors.

Jesus makes the point that even though the neighbor says he won't help,
he gets up anyway to find some bread.

He does this – not because this fellow is his friend,
but is provoked to act with compassion because of
that person's urgent and persistent request.

Through this parable, was Jesus likewise provoking his disciples
to learn to pray with perseverance in seeking God's help –
to speak from the heart and the gut?

"You are God. You are a God of compassion. Help me! Have mercy!"

Willard, p.3

Jesus sent out his disciples as homeless pilgrims who would have to ask
for food and shelter – to seek until they found it;
to knock until the householder's door opened to them.
Again, we see guidance for how the Church was planted, took root,
and spread beyond its beginnings in the Middle East.
This had to be done with a single-minded *perseverance*.

This is also true about how God searches for us.

The angels in the story of Abraham will enter Sodom and Gomorrah
to seek out the righteous to save them – and did.

This is also true about the Gospel itself –
of God coming into our world as Christ to save us,
as an enduring example of God's compassionate *persistence*.

We believe God has been revealed through scripture
and according to today's lessons, through *persistent* prayer.

Abraham's "prayer" appears to be simply a conversation with God,
like he is talking to another person.

The disciples talked regularly with Jesus – just like Abraham spoke with God,
without realizing they were praying, too.

Still they wanted to imitate Jesus' way of prayer.

Therefore, Jesus gave them the 'Lord's Prayer' and also challenged them to be
like that man who sought help from a neighbor in the middle of the night.

Furthermore, he assured them that God could be asked for help.

And if everyday people respond to a persistent and desperate plea
despite inconvenience, how much more so will God –
whom Abraham and Jesus acknowledge as almighty and merciful?

Jesus gave them a formula for prayer,
but he was also telling them to make it their own.

He was challenging them to ask, seek, knock, dig –
to find out what it means to be a follower of God.

Where is God's will in response to their own most desperate need?

He was encouraging them to *persevere* in developing their own dialogue with God –
just as each of us must do.

We must *persist* in our efforts as individuals and as a congregation
to figure out what it means to be a Christian in this time and place.

We have to look at these ancient stories, the psalms, the parables –
unpack them from the interpretations others have made
and figure out what they mean to us.

Willard, p.4

Red Skelton, – the great classic comedian,

has given us a marvelous example of how we might do this.

There is a video clip on the internet of Red Skelton

“unpacking” word for word, the meaning

of the American Pledge of Allegiance –

as told to him by his school teacher years ago.

With Nancy Bell’s help,

I would like to explore the Lord’s Prayer in the same way...

1:	Hear now the Lord’s Prayer...	2:	Take back, lift away, break
	‘Our’		asunder, free us
2:	Yours, mine, together	1:	‘our debts’
1:	‘Father’	2:	Sins, grief, shame, past due
2:	Creator, could be Mother, too		obligations
1:	‘who’	1:	‘as we forgive’
2:	Somebody, a being	2:	As we free
1:	‘art’	1:	‘our debtors’
2:	Exists, has being, is creatively	2:	Those who hurt us, those we hurt
	alive	1:	‘Lead us not’
1:	‘in Heaven’	2:	Don’t send us
2:	In a place far above, beyond –	1:	“Into temptation”
	the home of beauty, truth,	2:	Into testing, risk, compromise
	and goodness	1:	‘but deliver us’
1:	‘hallowed’	2:	Carry us, guide us through
2:	Blessed, worthy, precious, lovely	1:	‘from evil’
1:	‘be thy Name’	2:	From all that is unworthy,
2:	Be how you are known and called		hurtful, and false
1:	‘Thy Kingdom’	1:	‘For thine is the Kingdom’
2:	Your place of power, everywhere	2:	Yours is the realm of all that
1:	‘come’		there is
2:	Arrive, get here	1:	‘the power’
1:	‘on Earth’	2:	Omnipotence with compassion,
2:	My home, our home		the strength of love
1:	‘as it is in Heaven’	1:	‘and the glory’
2:	Your home	2:	The beauty, light, and truth
1:	‘Give us’		unfolding
2:	Provide, render, surprise us	1:	‘for ever and ever’
1:	‘this day’	2:	Always, the future, and right now
2:	today	1:	‘Amen’
1:	‘our daily bread’	2:	Truly, truly let it be so
2:	What we need today, now – of	1&2:	Amen
	money, food, fuel, love		And may God bless!
1:	‘and forgive us’		

Genesis 18:16-28,32-33

16 When the three men got ready to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked part of the way with them.

17 The Lord said to himself,

“I should tell Abraham what I am going to do,

18 since his family will become a great and powerful nation that will be a blessing to all other nations on earth.

19 I have chosen him to teach his family to obey me forever and to do what is right and fair.

Then I will give Abraham many descendants, just as I promised.”

20 The Lord said,

“Abraham, I have heard that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are doing all kinds of evil things.

21 Now I am going down to see for myself if those people really are that bad. If they aren't, I want to know about it.”

22 The men turned and started toward Sodom.

But the Lord stayed with Abraham, 23 who asked,

“Lord, when you destroy the evil people,

are you also going to destroy those who are good?

24 Wouldn't you spare the city if there are only fifty good people in it?

25 You surely wouldn't let them be killed when you destroy the evil ones.

You are the judge of all the earth, and you do what is right.”

26 The Lord replied,

“If I find fifty good people in Sodom,

I will save the city to keep them from being killed.”

27 Abraham answered,

“I am nothing more than the dust of the earth.

Please forgive me, Lord, for daring to speak to you like this.

28 But suppose there are only forty-five good people in Sodom.

Would you still wipe out the whole city?”

“If I find forty-five good people,” the Lord replied,

“I won't destroy the city.”

32 Finally, Abraham said,

“Please don't get angry, Lord, if I speak just once more.

Suppose you find only ten good people there.”

“For the sake of ten good people,” the Lord told him,

“I still won't destroy the city.”

33 After speaking with Abraham,

the Lord left, and Abraham went back home.

Luke 11:1-13

[1] He was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased,
one of his disciples said to him,
"Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

[2] And he said to them,

"When you pray, say:

‘Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

[3] Give us each day our daily bread;

[4] and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive

every one who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation."

[5] And he said to them,

"Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him,

‘Friend, lend me three loaves;

[6] for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey,

and I have nothing to set before him’;

[7] and he will answer from within,

‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut,

and my children are with me in bed;

I cannot get up and give you anything’?

[8] I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything

because he is his friend,

yet because of his importunity

he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

[9] And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find;

knock, and it will be opened to you.

[10] For every one who asks receives,

and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

[11] What father among you, if his son asks for a fish,

will instead of a fish give him a serpent;

[12] or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

[13] 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!"