

Believe Series: Sermon II, PRAYER
Pastor Kim Engelmann
West Valley Presbyterian Church

The Scripture in the video we just saw reminds me of Blue
Blue is our Golden Retriever (picture)
If she could read the Bible this parable about persistence would be her favorite part

We live in an Eichler Community – our house is half glass
Eichlers were created in the 1950's to bring the outside "in"
Our house is old, but I like it...especially because our sliding glass doors make it easy
to access the outside from a lot of different rooms in the house

Now Blue, likes to sit at the door and whine if she has to go out. And it is easy enough
to let her out.

But then when she wants to come back in, if you are doing something else, like maybe
eating dinner with company and you don't want her running around under the table, or
you might be taking a nap, or watching your favorite show and you are at the climax of
the show...and you want her to wait five minutes
Or maybe find a squirrel and forget about coming in for awhile

You can hang up that wish because its not going to happen...
Blue will not give up

Many times we have told her "No! Wait!"
And we can see her through the glass door...and she can see us...that's the problem
First she whines,
We say NO! Wait!

Then she barks...it's a short little bark that means "over here, in case you haven't
noticed...I am at the margins of your life right now and you need me to be in the center
of it again...shedding on your carpet and ripping up trash from the garbage...so right
now...focus your attention over here right now and open the door please...

We say NO again – maybe we are busy...Maybe her paws are muddy and we want her
to go away forever...maybe we are just plain sick of her...
But she persists
She begins to eat the glass...or rather she tries to bite it...her tongue licks at it...and her
teeth try to grab a corner of it as you can see here
It's this freak show thing, happening on the other side of the glass; this dysmorphic
looking face, pressed against the glass, in a weird contorted appeal for assistance...

We say NO again...we are tired of her

Then she stands on her hind legs and begins to dig – She wants to dig through the glass door
NO! We tell her. GET DOWN!
She keeps at it
NO! We say. WAIT!
She does not wait.
BLUE! STOP IT!
Our house is older
Large glass door panes like ours can and do break
She is digging now against the glass like a frantic wild thing, being pursued by a voracious lion or tyranasaurus rex
IN EXASPERATION WE LET HER IN.
Her persistence has won out.
We have lost. She knows it. She thinks its funny.

When Jesus told the story in this parable about persistence in prayer, I think he meant it to be funny.
Its 2AM...the kids are sleeping...you have to get up early the next morning...
You are deep in sleep...dreaming about let's say the Hawaiian islands
The relaxing music is playing, the waves are gently lapping the white shoreline, someone is about to hand you a luscious piece of pineapple...
And then you are jolted out of bed...BAM BAM BAM at the door...A voice cries out
I need bread!
Your annoying needy neighbor has come over with one more demand
Come on! Go away! Leave us alone! You cry out
But he wont!
He persists! BAM BAM BAM
Weary and bleary eyed you stumble to the kitchen and,
just to get rid of him, you give in and you give this “middle of the night” intruder – who has shaken you from your REM Hawaiian sleep vacation - the bread he asks for

In the cartoon that you saw, the person handed the annoying “middle of the night” intruder the bread out the window

I thought that was kind of a soft touch.

I always imagined the annoying neighbor getting hit in the head with it, as the person he woke up, throws it at him, out the window.
“Just go away! Leave me alone! Please! Whatever it takes!”

But one way or another the neighbor got what he asked for

As with BLUE, persistence wins

Jesus' point here is obvious - that we have a God who actually *wants to give us good things*

If someone who doesn't want to give us anything, will end up doing it, just to get rid of us

How much more will God give us the desires of our heart if we just keep asking... because God's a good God

He does not withhold good things from us

Jesus tells us KEEP AT IT. DON'T GIVE UP. GET ANNOYING. GET SOME PASSION so that you can STICK TO YOUR PRAYERS. **CARE ABOUT SOMETHING ENOUGH TO KEEP BRINGING IT UP TO GOD.**

I know for myself, I am too passive in prayer.

I give up too easily.

Sometimes I think I don't persist because I don't believe God is listening. I think if I really believe I had God's ear, that he was really listening, I'd keep at it rigorously.

TODAYS CHALLENGE: I want you take the paper in your pew and write down something right now, that you are going to pray about for the next three months... every single day. Do that right now.

And make it specific enough so that when God answers you, you will know it. Write on the back **"Persist!"** (*and then I want to hear your stories*)

Of course the immediate reaction is – Yes but God doesn't answer us the way we want. Perhaps, from our perspective. And we must always recognize that God is God, and we are not. However, sometimes it takes generations for prayers to be answered. And Jesus commands us to persist. So that's today's challenge. Persist in prayer.

Just let me reframe prayer for you, for a minute –maybe just get you a little excited
Do you realize that in prayer you have access to the Creator of the Universe?

I mean, if I told you that right now if we called in to Washington DC we could talk to the president – in person – you would be so excited.

You and I can talk to the One in charge of the entire universe, at any time. You and I have access to incredible spiritual resources beyond our wildest dreams, just by going into prayer.

We have a personal relationship to the God of all Creation.. It's personal. It's a conversation. It's a relationship.

But...it takes discipline. It takes commitment. And it takes persistence. **The first rule of prayer is persistence.** Prayer, true prayer, is not for cowards. It isn't easy to keep at it. It isn't easy to remain faithful in it. Sometimes it seems God is far away. A lot of times, it looks as if nothing is happening.

Much the way when we work out, we don't see ourselves getting thinner or stronger by the minute. We have to work out so that gradually over time, we become fit. But if we give up in our training...we go backwards.

The purpose of prayer is to persist in building a relationship with God that deepens over time. To not only know about prayer, what it is, the biblical importance of prayer, but to experience God in all his wonder, mystery, intimacy.

AW Tozer in the mid 20th century pastor put it this way, in describing the difference between those who talk about prayer—and those who experience a relationship with God through prayer.

“Between the scribe who has read and the prophet who has seen there is a difference as wide as the sea. We are today overrun with orthodox scribes, but the prophets, where are they? The Church waits for the tender voice of the saint who has penetrated the veil and has gazed with inward eye upon the Wonder that is God. And yet, thus to penetrate, to (have) a living experience of the holy Presence, is a privilege open to every child of God.” A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

Let's look at how Jesus prayed. The first thing he did in order to pray is that **He was persisted in seeking stillness** for prayer.

“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

“In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles...” (Luke 6:12-13).

“Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray” (Mark 6:45-46).

It seems that anytime Jesus went missing he went praying. He prayed when the demands got busy. He prayed when the decisions were important. He prayed when his energy was depleted.

He didn't always pray alone, but when he did he went to the desert or the mountain. He removed himself from the noise and set an example for us; and that's the second rule of prayer:

Seek stillness. Prayer is conversation between God and us. To hear his voice we have to ruthlessly eliminate busyness from our lives.

That's why the Psalmist wrote: "**Be still and know that I am God**" (Psalm 46:10).

Have you ever tried to talk to someone that didn't stop moving? Or kept tapping their fingers on the table? Or was always looking around the restaurant and not at you? It wasn't much of a conversation, was it?

If Jesus needed to withdraw to pray, to hear God's voice, how much more do we need to withdraw to hear God's voice. Prayer takes discipline and determination.

We must choose a time and place to pray...as much as we choose a time and a place to work out...

It isn't going to happen unless we intentionally commit to doing it. We must **seek stillness in prayer**. This choice is hard, and not for cowards.

I've often felt weak in the prayer room.

Maybe you have too.

You have a desire to pray.

You're just not sure how.

Endless books have been written on prayer.

Just the volume of them alone has made you think you need to go to a school of prayer and get a degree in prayer before you can even start praying.

Now think about this...the disciples felt the same way

They wanted to pray.

They had come to know Jesus as their Master teacher and friend.

He was like them.

But he was unlike them. There was something about his prayers that made them think he knew something they didn't.

So they asked, "**Lord, teach us to pray**" (Luke 11:1). If you've ever wanted to pray more or better or deeper or . . . more like Jesus did . . . then you are in good company. Apparently so did Peter, Andrew, James and John.

Did you know that **prayer is the only thing**—at least that is recorded—**that the disciples requested "How To" directions on?**

They didn't ask about how to walk on water.

They didn't ask about how to multiply loaves and fish (Can you give us a how to manual Jesus on how to make more with less?)

They didn't ask about stilling storms or how to tell better stories when preaching.

But they did ask Jesus to teach them how to pray.

And instead of giving them a lecture on how to do it, Jesus gives them of all things a prayer itself

I love that...

And it wasn't the type you hear from religious leaders. Long words. Theatrical lines. Jesus gave them a simple prayer...basically saying Keep it simple.

“And he said to them, ‘When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us each day our daily bread,

and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:2-4)

This is the Luke version...short sweet to the point...

Paraphrased it might read; “**Father, you are holy and good. We want to live in your kingdom. We need your help—give us just enough for today. We need your forgiveness. Others need it too. Keep us on the right path.**”

Ann Lamont has made it even simpler. She has whittled prayer down to three basic things

Thanks!

Help!

Wow!

Pretty simple right? Look at the prayers of those who came to Jesus. Simple, honest requests from the heart.

A leper's prayer: “If you will, you can make me clean” (Mark 1:40)

- **The ruler of the synagogue: “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live” (Mark 5:23).**
- **Bartimaeus cried out “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47).**
- **The tax collector prayed “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13).**

It's that last one that gave birth to what is called **The Jesus Prayer**. Philemon, a 6th century Egyptian Monk advised: “**Keep watch in your heart; and with watchfulness say in your mind with awe and trembling; ‘Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me.’**”

An anonymous 19th century Russian peasant who wrote *The Way of a Pilgrim* used this prayer as he breathed. As he inhaled he would mentally pray “**Lord Jesus Christ**” and then, as he exhaled “**have mercy on me.**”¹ Some add the words “a sinner” at the end of the line.

(do it together)

It's another simple prayer you might use to develop the habit of praying. Don't be concerned with the number of words or the right words.

It is better to pray short with heart, than long without heart.

To sum up then...the three rules of prayer...

Persist in prayer (keep at it...which takes discipline)

Seek stillness in prayer (choose to find a quiet place)

Keep it simple, from the heart (be authentic)

In your bulletin you have an announcement about the Teen Challenge benefit dinner.

Peggy Albert, head of missions is sponsoring a table or two at this benefit depending upon how many of you want to go. So please talk to her if you can spare the time that evening. You will hear amazing testimonies.

Right now teen challenge has kids/young adults sleeping on the floor in their facility because they have no room for the kids who need help. I sit on the Development Committee for TC, and yesterday they gave me this book. Its called 50 years of miracles.

I am going to put it in the back, in the lobby, for you to look at. Every single page is chock full of stories – that's all it is – a bunch of stories of addicts, criminals, gang members, drug dealers, who have their lives changed because of Jesus Christ.

But do you know how this all started?

50 years ago a skinny country preacher named David Wilkerson felt God telling him to pursue him in prayer. He felt led to sell his television set (which was a big deal back then) and spend the time he was spending watching TV, which was about 2 hours a day, in prayer instead. So he did it.

Do you see the intentionality? The choice? The discipline.

David Wilkerson began spending 2 hours a day alone with God, and it was during one of those prayer sessions, that his eyes fell on a Life magazine article in his office... reviewing

The Michael Farmer trial in New York (1957) – where the gang The Egyptian Dragons beat and stabbed two teens in Highbridge Park in Manhattan... An artist had sketched an ink drawing of the 7 defendents in court.

Here are DW words,

“I started to flip the page over. But as I did, my attention was caught by the eyes of one of the figures in the drawing. A boy. One of seven boys on trial for murder. The artist had caught such a look of bewilderment and hatred and despair in his features that I opened the magazine wide again to get a closer look. And as I did...I started to cry...I was dumbfounded by a thought that sprang suddenly into my head – full-blown as though it had come into me from somewhere else. Go to New York City and help those boys.”

That was the beginning of Teen Challenge. It is now an international organization. 50 years later, all these people in this book have been changed by Jesus Christ; because one man decided

To spend two hours in prayer, instead of watching TV.

Friends, more things have been wrought by prayer than this world realizes. Persist and know that heartfelt, simple prayer in stillness moves mountains.

End in prayer...Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us. Teach us to pray. Amen