



Secret Power of Persistence

Text: Matthew 7:7-11

Business Administrator Michael "Sully" Sullivan

1. Sully gave three reasons why many of us find our prayer lives lacking: 1) busyness that masks laziness, 2) pride, and 3) we don't truly believe that God is who He says He is. Which of these do you most identify with, and how do you see that dynamic at work in your own life? (For helpful tips on what and how to pray when you don't feel like it, check out the Study Deeper below.)
 - a. What are the things in your life that fill up your time and interrupt your prayer life? What disciplines can you practice to create margin for a more consistent prayer life?
 - b. Sully asked a great question: What would it look like if I depended on God as much as my cell phone? What areas of your life do you not depend on God? How do you think your life would be different if you relinquished control and depended more on God?
 - c. "What you believe will always reveal itself in what you do." If an objective third party were to follow you around for a full week, what do you think they would say about your beliefs? Do you think your actions line up with what you profess to believe? Why or why not?
2. Read Matthew 7:7-11.
 - a. What do these verses teach about the character of God?
 - b. How should those truths affect how we approach God in prayer?
3. Jesus' first encouragement is for us to Ask.
 - a. Sully said we often don't give God the opportunity to provide because we don't ask. Why don't you ask God? Are you afraid of what He might respond with? Is it fear of spoiled expectations? Do you just not believe that He will hear and respond at all?
 - b. What is your current "big prayer"? How are you hoping God will answer that prayer?
4. Jesus' second encouragement is to Seek, to seek more of God and to align our hearts with His.
 - a. Read Jeremiah 29:12-14. While prayer certainly includes asking, what would it look like to shift more of your focus in prayer to seeking God and being with God?
 - b. What do you know of the heart of God? What would aligning your heart with His look like? What would your life look like as a result?
5. Jesus' third encouragement is to Knock, which focuses on the idea of persistency in prayer.
 - a. What do you want to be more persistent in praying for or about? Is there anything you have given up praying for?
 - b. What practical tools are you using to remind yourself to "knock"? How have those tools been helpful for your prayer life?

Challenge: Make an honest evaluation of how many minutes you spend in prayer per day. Add that up with your group members. What is the total amount of time spent in prayer among your entire group? Now commit to a next step to take to enhance your prayer time and repeat this exercise during your next group session. More importantly, share what benefits you have received by growing in your prayer life. It's not about checking a box or spending more minutes in prayer than the next guy. It's about Asking, Seeking, and Knocking because our God is our perfect, loving Heavenly Father who loves to spend time with His children and it brings Him joy to meet the needs of His children.

Prayer: Close your group time by praying over the issues and dynamics brought up throughout your discussion. What hurdles to prayer do you need the Lord's help to overcome? What truths about who God is do you need His help to believe and live out? Pray for each others' "big prayer" requests and over those areas where your group members desire greater persistency in praying for, especially if they have perhaps given up on bringing that request before God.

STUDY DEEPER
What to Pray When You Don't Feel Like Praying
And how to do it.

I didn't know that I was hiding. I've always been good at praying. Or so I thought.

My dad left when I was 7. I've always looked to God as my Father, my provider. What I didn't realize is that God wants to be more than just my provider.

God longs to be my soul's confidante—deep where I feel lonely, where I struggle to receive and make space for me.

Loneliness is something I usually cover up by getting things done. It looks good because I'm well rewarded for checking boxes and being productive. Even in ministry.

But at the end of the day, even though I've accomplished a lot, I don't feel like I've fully lived. Because what I really want, I didn't make space for: to be known. I did not nurture my soul with God.

I find it easier to take care of others and get things done for God, rather than be vulnerable with my needs.

But God is showing me prayer is an intimate soul conversation to be loved and known, rather than a spiritual transaction to be made better.

Praying touches the part of me that is in process, uncertain, full of questions and doubts.

That is why praying is hard to do. And when I don't know how to pray, it makes me feel ashamed.

Jesus understands and says, "Come to me, weary and heavy-laden. And I will give you rest." – Matthew 11:28

Notice Jesus doesn't say, "Come to me strong, cheerful, without worries."

Jesus said the opposite. We're invited to come to Him weary—whether confused, numb, anxious, angry or stressed. Jesus tells us to simply come. Imperfectly His. As we are.

Even though this is Scripture, in our Christian culture, our desert prayer times are often met with well-meaning encouragement like, "Relationship with God isn't a feeling."

Although partially true, this can de-humanize our connection with God. The Psalmist reminds us there are no easy answers. "He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." Psalm 103:14

Sometimes, it takes more faith to tell God we don't know how to pray—rather than praying for faith to pray like we used to.

This is how I began to discover God's "whispers of rest" – powerful Scriptures affirming God's love for me and learning about soul care: practical ways to feel God's peace and presence.

I started learning how to love myself the way God loves me. I began researching ways to spark joy and take simple actions to prioritize my well-being. I didn't know it at the time, but these new daily rhythms became a new way prayer for me, which became a book I wrote called Whispers of Rest.

This is how I began praying new intimate prayers. Here are six I uncovered.

6 SOULFUL WAYS TO PRAY WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE PRAYING

1. When you're overwhelmed, whisper His name.

Remember receiving a first love note? It didn't have to be long. Yet your heart felt known seeing your handwritten name. It kept you company in the daily grind. Whisper His name and listen for His echoes return in the quiet. God names the stars and He whispers your name.

"He heals the broken hearted ... He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them."
—Psalm 147:3-5

2. When you don't have words to pray, rest knowing Jesus is praying for you.

Your silence will not drive Jesus away. Nothing can separate you from His love. Not even your unrest. He'll never get tired of you. Sometimes, the greatest prayer we can experience is God's complete understanding and compassion. His presence.

"Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died ... is also interceding for us."
—Romans 8:34

3. When you are too stressed to pray, take care of you.

We are a generation who doesn't know how to express our souls to God, even though we drive ourselves exhausted, doing for Jesus. "Chronic overloading is not a spiritual prerequisite for authentic Christianity. Quite the contrary, overloading is often what we do when we forget who God is." – Richard Swenson.

Extend yourself the kindness and comfort you generously give others. Ironically, the times we most need God's comfort are the times we deprive ourselves of soul-nurturing time.

We feel selfish. Yet, God says, we can only comfort others, with the comfort we first receive ourselves. (2 Corinthians 1:4)

Instead of layering on guilt, let God love you through your choices to prioritize taking care of you.

4. When you feel numb, invite Jesus into your world. Journal.

Instead of struggling to reach Jesus, invite Jesus to enter your world. Research in an article by The New York Times shows the power of writing your personal story can lead to behavioral changes and improve happiness. Even 15 minutes of expressive writing makes a difference.

When we journal our stories with God, we give Him space to rewrite our stories with us.

“For the word of God is living and active ... It penetrates dividing soul and spirit..” – Hebrews 4:11–12

The “word” is the Greek word logos—translated as living voice. God is not limited to the written word. God uses everything living to speak into our lives. This includes journaling.

5. Have an honest conversation. Take a walk. Find God's love notes.

Max Lucado in a Breathcast interview said prayer must be an honest conversation with God and not a repetitive act.

“I don't pray for long periods of time ... my prayers are relatively brief. The times I really feel blessed through prayer is when my prayers are sincere—when I kind of think through what I'm going through, or I'm going through a hard time and I use that prayer to talk to God about everything.”

Take a walk outside and let God touch you. Research shows that just 10 minutes can refresh and help with anxiety, depression in school, work and everyday life.

6. When you're too exhausted to pray, stop, and rest.

“Arise and eat. For the journey is too great for you.” – 1 Kings 19:7

Elijah had done everything he knew to do—even defeating the prophets of Baal. Yet, his problems did not go away and actually got worse!

Stress broke Elijah's spirit. In despair, Elijah woke up to find fresh bread baking on hot stones and water—left just for him.

Not only that. God sent an angel to touch him—twice. God knew Elijah needed physical rejuvenation first—in order to hear His gentle voice, whispering in a gentle breeze.

So, when you find it's hard to pray, don't be afraid. You're standing at the very cusp of who God longs to connect with. The real you.