In response to an earnest request from a disciple, Jesus has just given a helpful pattern for prayer. After giving the pattern for prayer, He turns immediately to one of the primary problems in prayer. For anyone who becomes serious about prayer, the problem will become obvious almost at once. God does not always answer upon our first request. Indeed, we pray earnestly, but nothing seems to happen.

In response to this seeming problem, our Lord calls for persistence in prayer. He calls for us to keep on praying when it seems that nothing is happening. He wants us to pray when everything in us says that it is doing no good. This is a lesson that I need renewed in my heart every week. Let us look at the words of our Lord on prayer to learn about this persistence in prayer.

I. Our Lord Encourages Persistent praying with A Parable.

It is not called a parable in the text, but it is obviously a parable. Our Lord takes something that is known in the world of man to illustrate something that is known in the realm of the spirit.

The parable involves the kind of situation that could have occurred often in the Palestine world of that day. A traveler arrives late at night at the home of a friend. He has probably traveled at night to gain protection from the burning heat of the day. This was commonly done. His coming to the home creates something of an emergency in the family since his coming was unexpected. It is the sacred duty of the family to provide for the guest, but all of the bread baked in the morning has been eaten. There are no provisions to set before the guest.

The host takes emergency measures. He goes to the home of a neighbor and friend even though it is late at night. He ignores the locked door and the darkness
in the house, and begins to knock on the door. His neighbor has already gone to bed with his family. If the house was a typical Palestinian home, it probably had only one room. The room would be divided into two parts. In one part of the room there would be a raised platform. The man, his wife, and his children would be sleeping on pallets on this raised part of the room. In winter they would sleep around fire that would burn through the night. For the man to rise from his pallet and get the requested bread for the neighbor would be a great inconvenience. It would mean disturbing the whole family. His first inclination was to disregard the request, but the neighbor was insistent. He kept on knocking at the door. Finally in response to the persistent request, the man of the house gets up from his pallet, disturbs his family, and gets the three loaves for the friend. He does it not so much out of friendship as just out of an attempt to get rid of him and to get back to sleep. If the neighbor had not been insistent, he would not have received the loaves.

What does Jesus teach about persistent prayer by this parable?

A. The parable presents God by contrast. Jesus did not mean for us to understand that there is any reluctance in God to respond to our prayers. However, there are times that God seems to be like the reluctant friend when we come with our request, and no answer comes. However, Jesus is encouraging us in prayer. He is indicating that if a reluctant friend will get up at midnight to respond to the persistent appeal of a friend for another, how much more will the great God of love and mercy who hears prayer answer our request. God is not selfish and disinterested. It is not an imposition for Him to respond to our prayers. Indeed it delights the heart of God to respond to the appeals of His people. Realizing that God is like this is a great encouragement to persistent prayer.

B. The parable illustrates the nature of persistent praying.
Persistent praying is standing boldly and persistently before God on behalf of another. A key word in the parable is the word, "importunity". The New International Version translates it "persistence". The root idea of the word is "shamelessness". It was an "more than boldness" act for this friend to come at such an hour, and for him to be insistent. He was compelled by his sense of need and duty toward his friend. There was too much at stake. He must have some bread to set before his guest. He forgets about everything else as he knocks at the door.

By this word Jesus puts his finger on the nature of persistent praying. It is boldness in approaching God that is born in a sense of need. It is a spirit of prayer that will not be denied. This is meant by our Lord to encourage us to pray persistently.

II. OUR LORD ENCOURAGES PERSISTENT PRAYING WITH A PROMISE.

The promise is really the application of the parable. In the promise our Lord gives us great encouragement to be persistent in our praying. As we look at the words spoken by our Lord, two things impress us.

A. The condition of the promise.
"I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." In these words Jesus clearly makes persistence a condition of effective praying. You see it first in the verb forms that He used. Ask, seek, and knock are each present tense verbs in the Greek text. The Amplified Bible caught hold of the force of this when it translated it, "ask, and keep on asking, seek, and keep on seeking; knock, and keep on knocking." What Jesus has illustrated in the parable, He now sets forth in the precept. Our praying is to be marked by persistence. If the answer does not come at once, we are to keep on praying. If we do not find at once what we seek, we keep on seeking. If
the door does not open to us at once, then we keep on knocking. This encourages persistence in prayer.

Furthermore, the very words of the exhortation itself encourage persistence in prayer. We are to see progression in the use of ask, seek, knock. To ask is for an inferior person to approach a superior with a request growing out of a sense of need. He may be approaching for himself or for someone else. This word is never used by Jesus of His prayers to the Father. He did not approach the Father as an inferior but rather as an equal. "Seek" means to search and seek as for something that is lost. The person is to not only ask for the thing needed, but to actually seek it earnestly. This indicates that the thing desired is a matter of special urgency to the person praying. "Knock" goes a step further yet. The earnestness is being expressed openly. A persistent knock is being made on the door. Everything in the person is involved in an attempt to break through to the answer.

No wonder many of our prayers go unanswered. They do not reflect this kind of intensity and earnestness. God is moved by those prayers that reflect this kind of spiritual intensity. Persistence then is the condition for effective praying in this promise.

B. The certainty of the promise.

In order to give emphasis and encouragement to persistent praying, Jesus doubled the certainty. First He said, "And I say unto you, Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." In each instance He boldly declares that something good is going to happen when we ask, seek, and knock. As we ask, we will receive. As we seek, we will find. As we knock, it will be opened to us. That in itself would have seemed to be adequate certainty.
But Jesus adds to that another assurance. "For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Again the participles are present tense. If we go on asking, seeking, and knocking, then we can be certain of the results.

Does this mean that if I persist in praying that I will get exactly that which I ask of God? I hope not. "No" is just as much an answer to prayer as "yes". No wise parent always says "yes" to the requests of their child. Sometimes they say "no" because they know that the thing requested is not really the thing needed. No amount of persistence will wear dawn a good parent if he knows the thing requested is not the right thing of his child. Sometimes the wise parent says "wait". The thing sought will be a good thing later, but the person is not ready or the timing is not right. Sometimes God says "Wait". He knows that we might not be ready for the thing we ask. But then there are times when God gives us exactly what we asked for in the moment of asking. We can be certain that as we persist in prayer that God is going to respond to the prayer. He does not allow us to pray on with our prayer being ignored.

But why does God insist on the persistence? Why does He not always answer immediately? Does he get some satisfaction from our labor and waiting? Of this we can be sure, God knows that the persistence is for our good. Sometimes it a matter of testing. The Lord is allowing us to discover whether or not we really desire the thing we have been asking for. Delay sometimes destroys our desire for it. The delay sometimes helps us clarify our understanding of our need. During the delay our request changes. God knows what we need. The truth that Our Lord would thrust upon us is that we must not allow this to discourage us in our prayers. Persistence is a basic principle in prayer.

**CONCLUSION:**
Consider carefully the parable and the promise. They say to us that we need to be persistent in our prayers. If we want to know how to pray, this is one of the basic principles of effective prayer.

Let me encourage you to keep on keeping on in your prayers.