

HOW TO PRAY FOR THOSE YOU LOVE
MATTHEW 15:21-28

INTRODUCTION:

The woman did not belong in the circle of our Lord's disciples. She was obviously an outsider. She was by race a Canaanite, and thus not a part of the people of God. All of the company following Jesus was men and she was a woman. Her religious background was very different from that of the disciples since she was a Canaanite, and yet this woman becomes an example for us of someone praying for a loved one.

The woman's prayers were directed to Jesus, the teacher from Galilee. She addressed Him as the Son of David, the Lord. Her petition to Him was on behalf of a daughter. This daughter was under the control of demonic spirits. These demonic spirits were threatening her life with total destruction. It was with a certain desperation that she search Jesus out when He came into her region and made her appeal to Him. I want us to focus on how this woman approached Jesus with this heart rendering need. If we will learn from her, we too, can have our prayers answered that we pray on behalf of those we love.

I. PRAY EARNESTLY.

Matthews description of the actions of this woman reveals real earnestness in her appeal to the Lord. He uses the word "crying out" to describe her appeal to Jesus. All effective prayer is full of earnestness. You will remember the word of James in his letter, "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

We can learn from the earnestness from this woman something of the source of earnestness.

1. Pray earnestly because of the urgency of the need.

The language the lady used in her appeal to Jesus reveals the depth of her daughter's need: "My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession." The words used for suffering indicate that it was an extreme case of demon possession, that the very life of the girl itself was threatened by this spiritual condition. Doubtlessly, the desperate woman had exhausted all of the helps that were available to her. She came to Jesus out of desperation.

This is something that marks effective prayer. Effective prayer is always full of heart and emotion. Effective prayer always has in it an element of hunger and desperation. Could it be that our prayers are ineffective because we have

failed to realize the desperate spiritual condition of those that we love? Our incipient universalism keeps us from believing that our loved one is actually in danger of hell fire. Would it change the tone of your appeal before God? If you really believed that your loved one is in danger of spending an eternity in total separation from God?

2. Pray earnestly because of your love for the person.

This is a daughter for which this woman prays. Everyone knows of that special love relationship between a mother and a daughter. It is one of the most beautiful things in all of the human family. This mother love added earnestness to this mother's prayers as she presented them to the Lord Jesus.

One of the biggest hindrances in our prayer life may well be our lack of love for those for whom we pray. If you are praying for someone you really love, doubtlessly the prayer will be expressed with earnestness.

We do not want to be like the man who called his doctor very late one stormy night. Over the phone he said, "Doctor, my wife is very, very sick. Can you come out and help me? You must come over right now." The doctor replied, "I would love to come over, but my car is in the shop. If you

will come and get me, I'll be glad to help." There was silence on the phone for an extended time. The man was heard to say, "You mean, you want me to come out on a night like this?"

It may be that is the way we approach God. We want to turn the case over to Him but we do not want to be involved in it in anyway. Any such praying lacks serious energy. It lacks heart. It will prove to be ineffective. Effective prayer for a lover one always involves earnestness.

II. PRAY PERSISTENTLY.

The persistence of the woman in her prayers is exemplary for all of us. Every thing in the circumstance seemed to discourage her prayer, but she kept on praying. Read with me Matthew's account of the inner exchange between the disciples, Jesus and the woman.

"Jesus did not answer her a word. So His disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away for she is crying out after us.'" He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.' The woman came and knelt before Him. 'Lord, help me!' she said.' There are some obvious things in this statement.

1. Pray persistently when He is silent.

The first reaction of Jesus to the cry of this woman was seemingly to ignore her. Instead of turning to her and giving her his attention, he did not make any response at all. This is most unusual in the life and ministry of Jesus.

The only other time I recall Him giving such silence to someone was when He stood in the presence of His judges at His final trial. They were not making an appeal to him like this woman but were rather deriding him and seeking a bases for His condemnation.

Why was He silent? Scholars have debated this act of Jesus and its significance. My own understanding is that His silence in this situation was a means of drawing the woman to greater faith. She was a Gentile, a Canaanite, but He wanted her to come to a solid faith in Him.

There are times, as all of us know, when God doesn't seem to hear our crys for those we love. We cry out earnestly, and nothing happens. What do you do when you have prayed and nothing has happened? We learn from this woman that you keep on praying. Persistence is a quality of effective prayer.

2. Pray persistently when others discourage you.

How are to understand the words of the disciples? When they urged Jesus to send her way, what were they asking? Were they asking Him just to dismiss her as a Gentile nuisance? Or were they asking Him to go ahead and grant her request just to get rid of her? My impression is that it was the first possibility rather than the latter possibility. They saw her as being a Gentile who had no right to make any appeal to the Savior. They saw her as a nuisance and expressed it. This in any case was no encouragement to this woman in her desperate need. She understood the disciples were not encouraging her prayers but rather discouraging what she was doing. What do you do when others discourage you? What do you do when somebody says to you, "Prayer won't help! You might as well accept things as they are! They will never be any different!" If you follow the example of this woman you persist in prayer when others discourage you. Persistence is a constant quality in effective prayer.

3. Pray persistently when you seem to be denied.

When Jesus spoke to the woman, what He said was not much help. He said to her, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." This obviously put her on the outside for she was not one of the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Did Jesus mean this to be a denial? Or was He again putting the faith of the woman to the test?

While we know that the basic mission of Jesus was to the people of Israel, it became rather obvious early on there was obvious a broader dimension to His ministry. The wise men that worshipped Him at His birth were not from the House of Israel. The Roman centurion who came to Him and received help was not from the House of Israel. But Jesus wanted this woman to come to a larger faith so He seems to deny her. What do you do when you seem to be denied? You do what this woman did - you keep on praying. She knelt before Him and said to Him, "Lord help me!"

This is an example of persistence in prayer. Have you given up praying? Is that the reason you did not fill out an Operation Andrew Chart that contained the names of those you love? Is it because you tried praying once and nothing happened. Learn from this woman that effective prayer is marked by persistence.

III. PRAY HUMBLLY.

The approach to this woman to the Lord Jesus is a beautiful example of humility. When Jesus replied to her appeal by saying, "It is not right to take the children's bread and to toss it to the dogs." She had a response. Her

response was an expression of humility. "Yes, Lord," she said, "But even the dogs eat the crumbs that falls from their master's table." The dogs in question in this account were little pet dogs that would play around under the table while the family was eating. They were not those mutts that run up and down the back alley, but favorite pets. While she does not make any claim to be a son or daughter who is worthy of sitting at the table, she does take the place and claims the rights of the little dog beneath the table.

1. The humble acknowledge that others are more deserving.

She was not envious of the bread that the children sitting at the table enjoyed. She was not angry because they seemed to have privileges that were not hers. She was ready to admit that they were more deserving than she. Instead, she is willing to take the lowly place and to make her appeal one out of humility.

Do we realize really how unworthy we are before God? Do we realize just how remarkable it is that God would ever give attention to our prayers? If we are humble, we do.

2. The humbly gladly take the lowly place.

The woman does not ask for the bread that the children enjoy - only the crumbs that fall from the table. She sees the blessings of deliverance for her daughter as being only a crumb that might fall from the table. She is appealing to the generosity of the Lord that He would give her such a crumb. She gladly takes the lowly place. Do we gladly take the lowly place?

IV. PRAY BELIEVINGLY.

The emphasis of our Lord in His response to the woman is upon her faith. He answered her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." Then, Matthew announces that from that every hour her daughter was healed. All effective prayer is an expression of faith.

It would be appropriate I think to understand the earnestness, persistence, and humility as really being a part of the faith. Jesus did not commend her earnest, persistence, or humility, but her faith! But the faith is the center and faith and the core of the prayer that we are to pray for those we love.

1. Faith goes to the one who can hear and answer.

It was faith that caused this woman to put herself in an embarrassing situation. It was faith that caused her to speak up when she had not been

invited to speak. It was faith that thrust her into the presence of Jesus with her appeal. What she had heard about Him assured her that He was the only hope for her precious daughter. So, she came to Him. This is the way of faith.

2. Faith has confidence in his ability.

Did you notice that there are no conditional words in the appeal of this woman? She made her appeal to Jesus with the full confidence that He was able to do what she asked Him to do. As the Lord, the Son of David, the Messiah of Israel, He had authority over demonic spirits. A word from Him would set her daughter free. She was confident of this.

Are you confident that Jesus is able to meet the need of your life? Are you confident that He is the only one that can meet their spiritual need. Your petitions to Him ought to be an expression of this inner spiritual confidence.

3. Faith receives what it desires.

The response of Jesus is most remarkable. He said, "Your request is granted." That thing that she wanted more than anything else in the world, He would give her because of her faith.

What if Jesus were to say that to you today? I remember reading of a testimony of answered prayer that Dr. Charles Blanchard, one of the early presidents of Wheaton College in Illinois, gave. It was that of a railroad engineer in New York. Dr. Blanchard heard the man stand and share out of his own experience about his conversion. The man testified that he had been in Philadelphia in the hospital desperately ill. In fact the doctors came in and actually announced him dead. But his wife refused to receive the announcement of the doctors. She was kneeling beside his bed and praying. When they said he is dead she replied, "No, he is not dead, he cannot be dead. I have prayed for him for 27 years and God has promised me that he should be saved. Do you think God would let him die now after I prayed 27 years and God has promised, and he is not saved?"

The doctors kept trying to comfort the woman and saying to her, "Well, I do not know anything about that, but I do know he is dead."

They proceeded to do some of the things that you do when a patient is dead.

In an attempt to satisfy the wife, the doctor brought in other doctors, and they examined the man, and announced that he was dead. But she was persistent.

She kept saying to them, "No, he has to be saved. God will bring him back if he is dead. He is not dead, he cannot die until he is saved."

After 13 long hours with the woman kneeling beside his bed in an attitude of prayer continuously, the man finally opened his eyes and his wife said, "What do you wish, my dear?" and the man said to her, "I wish to go home." She said to him, "You shall go home." When the doctors refused to let him go, the woman was persistent. She said, "You have had your turn. You said he was dead already. I'm going to take him home."

Dr. Blanchard reported hearing the man bear testimony that when he got home under the loving witness of his wife, he received the Lord Jesus as his Lord and savior. What an example of believing prayer, refusing to take "no" for an answer. Holding on until the victory comes.

This is the kind of praying that we need to do with those that we love.

