

Be persistent in Everything. Luke 11:1-13

I remember many years ago I seemed to need to exercise every single day – almost like an addiction. Now you would think what's wrong with that! And I even read an article that asked the question: If you exercise more than the minimum recommended for you, do the benefits increase?

And the conclusion was: More IS better especially the effect that “more than recommended” has on the reduction of high levels of anxiety such as we may be experiencing in the times we are now living in.

Mark Twain said: “I’m an old man and I have had many problems in my life, most of which never happened!” We spend too much time needlessly worrying.

I wonder if you feel restless instead of feeling at peace?

We have just read the passage where Jesus’ disciples were restless – they were worried about Jesus’ impending death. And one of the good things they saw in Him was His commitment and persistence in prayer and how it helped Him. Jesus often went off by Himself to spend time in prayer with His Father which turned His restlessness into a sense of rest enabling Him to continue His journey.

So wouldn't you, like the disciples then, want to know how to pray so you can turn from restlessness to peace and rest?

In response to their request, Jesus started with teaching them how to pray – like the first try at it. Thus we have the Lord's Prayer. Now I was going to teach you how to say the Lord's prayer in sign language, but since we are going live – it is a little difficult to do.

Jesus assures the disciples and us that we are not praying to someone out there – unconnected and far away. Our prayer is to Our Father. Luke presents a shorter version of the prayer than in Matthew. But we are encouraged to look upon God as a loving Father who delights in us and supplies all we need.

Jesus ascribed to God the name “Father” just as Isaiah had prophesied - 63:16 . . . But you, oh Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name. And in Psalm 9:10 – those who know Your name trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You.

But remember, before we ask anything for ourselves, we are to give God glory or as it says in Luke – Keep His name Holy.

Then we ask for God to provide for us daily – this means not all at once. If we received from God all that He has planned for our lives in one big dose – we would be overwhelmed. Because we cannot store it up and then cut off communication with God. And we dare not be self-satisfied, If you are running low on strength, ask yourself, how long have I been away from the Source – from God.

And of course, Jesus teaches His disciples and us about forgiveness, which is the cornerstone of our relationship with God. God has forgiven our sins so we must forgive those who have wronged us.

To remain unforgiving shows we have not understood that we ourselves deeply need to be forgiven. Think of some people who have wronged you. Have you forgiven them? How will God deal with you if He treats you as you treat others?

Jesus is teaching also about the importance of being persistent in our prayers. And this is not to change God's mind – it is to change our heart and mind and help us understand and express the intensity of our need. Persistence in prayer helps us recognize God's work.

So to help His disciples and us understand this, Jesus tells another parable. Now Jesus tells this story to illustrate the difference between the responses from God and the responses others and even maybe some of us may give.

Persistence – continuing in an opinion or course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition. And the continued or prolonged existence of something. In our Scripture the word referred to an act of “shameless insistence” on the part of the person who tried to wake up his friend to get some bread at such a late hour.

Are you wondering why he even tried that – why would you disturb a friend in the middle of the night because you had another friend who suddenly popped in – and you didn't have sufficient food available.

Would you instead just say to your friend – I haven't much food, but you can rest here for the night. After all it seems like he just dropped in unannounced anyway.

In those times it was the Jewish custom to provide hospitality then and there and not wait till morning to feed a traveller. So could it be more about shame or was it about pride. Thinking that if he went to such lengths to provide for his travelling friend, how proud others would be of him.

Jesus left it open to the disciples and to us to speculate as to the true motive of the man who disrupted an entire household by persistently banging on the door in the middle of the night. When the door is open, as it customarily was all day, welcome. But when the door was shut, it was okay to knock once, maybe twice, but if there was no answer, wait 'til day break.

But we are so blessed to have an open and permanent invitation to pray to God – anytime, anyplace and under any circumstance – without hesitation or reservation, with persistence and determination.

God doesn't say my door is shut - go away and wait until the morning when my door is open. He is not like the householder who was resistant to welcome anyone in need. God tells us to seek what we need, to keep on seeking, asking and knocking – even when we may feel that His door is shut. Needs constantly arise. Prayer therefore must be an ongoing act of faith.

Praying helps US! God moves us to pray to relieve our distress and to help us to accept the answer He gives, which is always in keeping with what He knows is best for us - illustrated by Jesus in His analogy of a father whose gifts are given for the good of his children.

God our Father is totally the opposite of the reluctant friend in the parable. Moreover, God's response to real needs . . . to required necessities . . . to recurring petitions goes beyond the bare minimum. He is the God of "how much more"!

If earthly fathers are good to their children, how much more our heavenly Father! After all, He has given us the best of all gifts– not the least of which is the Holy Spirit. His spiritual gifts in particular meet our spiritual

needs . . . satisfy our deepest longings . . . open up so many options for abundant living.

Why be restless when we as children of God can get up in the morning, and go about our daily tasks and routines, then retire for the evening rested in mind and spirit, if not in body, simply because we have the wonderful privilege of talking to God, in Jesus' name, without shame?

God our Father wants to bless us with the peace that surpasses all human understanding if we live the Christian life one day at a time, take the time to pray, ask God to guide us each step of the way, seek His will as our goal for the day, and knock as often as we want.

We are currently in lock down again and there are limits on what we can do and what we can buy. But God has given us a wonderful privilege - there is not and never will ever be a limit to how many times we can chat to God; there is no quota; no restrictions; we can do and say whatever is in our hearts and our minds every single second of every single day to God.

So, as Paul wrote while in prison: "Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer your prayers of petition to God. Because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel." Amen.