

**Tenacious Prayer**  
Sermon by Pastor Joe Davis  
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**I. INTRODUCTION**

Well, as we prepare to close out our prayer series today, I want to begin by sharing with you a true story that will help prepare our hearts for our final message on prayer, which we'll call, "Tenacious Prayer:"

Roger Simms, hitchhiking his way home, would never forget the date--May 7. His heavy suitcase made Roger tired. He was anxious to take off his army uniform once and for all. Flashing the hitchhiking sign to the oncoming car, he lost hope when he saw it was a black, sleek, new Cadillac. To his surprise the car stopped. The passenger door opened. He ran toward the car, tossed his suitcase in the back, and thanked the handsome, well-dressed man as he slid into the front seat. "Going home for keeps?" "Sure am," Roger responded. "Well, you're in luck if you're going to Chicago." "Not quite that far. Do you live in Chicago?" "I have a business there. My name is Hanover."

After talking about many things, Roger, a Christian, felt a compulsion to witness to this fifty-ish, apparently successful businessman about Christ. But he kept putting it off, till he realized he was just thirty minutes from his home. It was now or never. So, Roger cleared his throat, "Mr. Hanover, I would like to talk to you about something very important." He then proceeded to explain the way of salvation, ultimately asking Mr. Hanover if he would like to receive Christ as his Savior. To Roger's astonishment the Cadillac pulled over to the side of the road. Roger thought he was going to be ejected from the car. But the businessman bowed his head and received Christ, then thanked Roger. "This is the greatest thing that has ever happened to me."

Five years went by, Roger married, had a two-year-old boy, and a business of his own. Packing his suitcase for a business trip to Chicago, he found the small, white business card Hanover had given him five years before. In Chicago he looked up Hanover Enterprises. A receptionist told him it was

impossible to see Mr. Hanover, but he could see Mrs. Hanover. A little confused as to what was going on, he was ushered into a lovely office and found himself facing a keen-eyed woman in her fifties. She extended her hand. "You knew my husband?" Roger told how her husband had given him a ride when hitchhiking home after the war. "Can you tell me when that was?" "It was May 7, five years ago, the day I was discharged from the army." "Anything special about that day?" [she asked.]

Roger hesitated. Should he mention giving his witness? Since he had come so far, he might as well take the plunge. "Mrs. Hanover, I explained the gospel. He pulled over to the side of the road and wept against the steering wheel. He gave his life to Christ that day." Explosive sobs shook her body. Getting a grip on herself, she sobbed, "I had prayed for my husband's salvation for years. I believed God would save him." "And," said Roger, "Where is your husband, Mrs. Hanover?" "He's dead," she wept, struggling with words. "He was in a car crash after he let you out of the car. He never got home. You see--I thought God had not kept His promise." Sobbing uncontrollably, she added, "I stopped living for God five years ago because I thought He had not kept His word!"

Have you ever struggled to keep praying for someone or something after years of what seems like no results? Do you have someone in your life who just seems entrenched in a lifestyle and attitude that's so adamantly opposed to Christianity that you almost feel like it's a waste of time even to pray for them? Are you frustrated with God's timing in answering your prayers? Do you feel like your life is full of unanswered prayers? Are you praying with persistence and perseverance and trusting the results into God's hands or are you defeated and hopeless in prayer? Are you mad at God because you think he hasn't answered your prayers?

Well, today, we're going to spend some time learning what Scripture has to say about these challenges we often face as we pray. We're going to see if we can learn how to move beyond casual, doubting, religious duty prayer to the expectant, persevering, prayer of faith described in the Bible. I'd like to share with you 3 final prayer principles that will move you into a lifestyle of tenacious prayer. And if you're wondering what I mean by tenacious, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as: a) not easily stopped or pulled apart; b) continuing for a long time; c) very determined. It can also mean holding to something tightly,

refusing to let go. And this is the picture Scripture gives us of the lifestyle of prayer and dependence on God to which we're called. So let's begin looking at these 3 principles of tenacious prayer.

## **II. PRAY WITH PERSISTENCE AND PERSEVERANCE (Luke 11:5-10; Luke 18:1-8; Ephesians 6:18)**

The first principle of tenacious prayer you can remember as the 3 P's: *persistent, persevering prayer*. Pray with persistence and perseverance. Tenacious prayer is persistent and persevering, as opposed to half-hearted and easily defeated. The persistent part of this principle is shared with us by Jesus in Luke chapter 11, verses 5 to 10:

***5 Then [Jesus] said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. 9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 "For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.***

Because of his friend's persistence and the fact that he didn't just knock quietly once and then give up, the man fulfilled the request. Just the fact that they were friends wasn't enough to get the man out of his cozy bed in the middle of the night, but the persistent knocking was what finally motivated him to pull back the covers and get his friend what he needed. He realized there would be no sleep until he took care of the issue.

You've probably heard of the "ask, seek, knock" principle and that's what we see here in this idea of persistence. First there's the simple request, the asking. Then there's the seeking, where the request is repeated and some thought and effort is put into figuring out how to get the person to finally grant the request...the seeking involves time and effort and thought. And then the result of the seeking

is the knocking as you figure out what will inevitably motivate the granting of the request...endless knocking that just doesn't stop.

This scenario has sometimes happened at my house. Hailey or Isaac asks for something and gets no response because I'm busy doing something else or talking to someone. When there's no response from me the question is asked again and again, oftentimes with greater volume and urgency. And then finally, the tapping begins on my leg or arm or some other strategy is used to finally drive me crazy to the point where I respond. Can any of you relate to this experience and its effectiveness?

Well, of course, our God is never too busy for us or too distracted with other needs to pay attention to us, and yet this principle of persistence applies somehow to how we pray and affects our effectiveness in prayer. And I think the key for us is this: God wants to see that we have conviction and passion and commitment about the things we're praying about and that we're aware of our desperate need for him, rather than just approaching him lackadaisically and irreverently and expecting him to just give us everything we want every time we throw up a casual prayer. Persistent prayer both builds and demonstrates our faith to God and to ourselves. Ask, seek and knock...this process should characterize the way we pray. Persistence in prayer is important to God.

So that's persistence, but what about perseverance? Well, the persevering principle of tenacious prayer is shared with us by Jesus in Luke 18, verses 1 through 8:

***1 Now [Jesus] was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, 2 saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. 3 "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' 4 "For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; 7 now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 8 "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them***

***quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"***

So first, we need to notice why Jesus was telling this parable. We learn that he's telling it for 1 specific purpose: to show people that they should pray at all times and not lose heart. Prayer is to be continual and persistent. Even when it seems like our prayers aren't being answered, we should be careful not to lose heart and give up. We should keep this perspective on unanswered prayer, shared with us by Bryan Chapell: "God always answers in one of four ways: yes, no, not yet, or immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."

The second thing to notice and really the main point of this parable is that persevering and continuing to ask God for the same unfulfilled requests affects whether or not the requests will be answered. This is basically the knocking part of the "ask, seek, knock" principle we just looked at. Even the ungodly judge who didn't fear God or respect man eventually gave in to the knocking and fulfilled the request just so that the knocking would finally stop. How much more will our good, good Father fulfill our requests, prayed according to his will, when we continue to knock and knock and knock...a process described as crying out to him day and night. That's persevering prayer that shows and grows our faith in God.

But did you notice that troubling question at the end of the parable: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" This kind of praying requires faith and demonstrates faith, doesn't it? It requires a firm conviction that God is there, that he is good, that he is listening, and that he responds powerfully to persistent, persevering prayer. If we just always got immediate answers to our prayers with no persistence or perseverance, we wouldn't need much faith would we? However, faith is needed and grows exponentially when we spend time waiting for God's answers and yet continue to persist and seek and persevere in our requests.

And when the requests are eventually fulfilled in God's timing or perhaps even denied in God's wisdom, we find that our faith is stronger and "of more worth than gold," and that others have had an opportunity to see faith in action and what it looks like to walk through life in patient dependence on God. Others have had the opportunity to see what it's like to rely on God rather than human strength and wisdom. And what joy we experience when we're eventually

blessed to see how God worked behind the scenes in his timing to accomplish miraculous things through our persistent and persevering prayers. I'm certain that each person here could give examples of how God has done this multiple times throughout our lives already. To live a lifestyle of tenacious prayer, we need to persist and persevere and never lose hope in God's ability and willingness to grant our requests prayed according to his purposes.

### **III. PRAY FERVENTLY AND WITH FASTING WHEN NECESSARY (Luke 22:44; Matthew 17:14-21; Daniel 9:3; Nehemiah 1:4)**

The second principle of tenacious prayer is that we are to pray fervently and with fasting when necessary. Do you know what fervent means? It means: "with deep feeling." We often deemphasize our feelings when thinking about our walk with God, and it is important to not try and live our lives by our feelings, which go up and down at a moment's notice. However, our feelings do play a role in our prayers. The Greek word translated, "fervent," also means earnestly, or intently. So the picture we get here of praying fervently, is that God, who sees our hearts, wants to know that we care deeply about the things we're praying for, rather than just going through the motions of praying for things we could care less about. Tenacious prayer is earnest, intent and prayed with authentic feeling and concern for the things we're bringing before the Lord.

The most vivid picture we get in Scripture of fervent prayer is, of course, Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion. In Luke 22, verse 44, we read:

***And being in agony [Jesus] was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.***

While this is an extreme picture of fervent prayer, it gives us a good idea of what's involved. Fervent prayer flows out of authentic care and concern and passion for the things we're praying about and is done with deep feeling, affecting our emotions and even our bodies at times. And the only way we'll ever learn to pray fervently is by coming to deep and firm realization of how desperately we need God and his wisdom and miraculous workings in our lives...when we come to finally give up on our own ability to fix problems, change people's hearts, endure through hard times, and conquer the giants in our lives. And when we truly begin to understand and believe this reality, prayer begins to take on a new and central

meaning in our day-to-day existence and fervent prayer becomes the normal way we interact with God and deal with the challenges we face.

Now as we learn to pray fervently at all times, there are also periods in our lives when we face such acute spiritual warfare, intense struggles, confusing crossroads in our lives, and become so desperate for God's power and wisdom that we're drawn into fasting and extended periods of alone time with God. I've shared with some of you how I experienced this in the months before I first became Associate Pastor here at Union Baptist. I was so at my wits end about what God was doing in my life and where he was leading me that I began to seek him fervently through prayer and fasting. And I really like food! So if I'm ready to fast, you know I'm aware of a desperate need for God's wisdom.

And you know what? God responded powerfully to my fervent seeking of him through prayer and fasting and he brought about some things that I never would have conceived of or even dreamed possible. And he gave me peace in the waiting process as he worked quietly in the background to fulfill my request for guidance and direction. I went down a few rabbit trails while I was waiting for his plan to be unveiled, but as I kept seeking for him and asking for his will, he walked me into his perfect plan in his timing...and my faith grew exponentially as I watched his plan unfold.

The challenge for each of us as we grow in our walk with God, is to learn not to waste time trying to solve problems and fix things on our own...until finally, after long struggles and repeated defeats, we come to the realization that we actually need God. Instead, God is teaching us to turn to him first, seeking him and his will and his miraculous power fervently, knowing through experience that it's a waste of time to try and handle things without him...and that he's the only One who can change hearts, break spiritual bondage, and lead us into his perfect plan.

A few days ago I watched Prince Caspian with Mindy and Hailey. It's a movie based on the Chronicles of Narnia series by C.S. Lewis, and in the movie I saw a great illustration of this concept we're focusing on today. In the movie, King Peter and his siblings have been called in to help the Narnians in a battle with a group of people who want to exterminate them. Peter arrives with arrogance and confidence in his own abilities having forgotten his need to seek out Aslan, the Lion King, who brought about all his previous victories. Peter's younger sister

Lucy keeps telling Peter that they need to seek out Aslan, but Peter is impatient and decides to go ahead without him.

As you can imagine, it doesn't go well. In spite of what appeared to be good planning and a large number of forces carrying out a surprise attack, the battle plan failed and resulted in a huge number of painful casualties for the Narnians. Bickering and bitterness among the ranks broke out and some turned to the dark side. Fortunately, Peter finally developed some humility in the process and agreed to send his sisters, Lucy and Susan, on a mission to find Aslan. You see, Aslan, was ready to help when Peter was ready to need him and make an effort to find him. Aslan needed to be sought out and pursued, a process that involved time, energy, risk and faith...much like prayer involves persistence, perseverance and fervent seeking of our God. But the rewards for finding him and trusting in his power to win the battle were out of this world. Once Aslan showed up, the battle was effectively over and the enemy stood no chance whatsoever.

Do you believe this is the way you also can live today? Do you believe that when you pursue God through persistent, persevering, fervent prayer, he's going to show up and fill you up with his presence and power? Do I believe that the only way I can do all things is through Christ who strengthens me? Is this the way I live my life, or do I usually have to try and figure things out my way and fail, before I'm ready to seek God's way? Do you have a problem in your life or something you desperately need God's wisdom for? Pray fervently about it. Show God you mean it and that it's important to you. Pray with deep feeling, emotion, commitment and belief that God truly is the only One who has the perfect answer and solution. And don't just do it one time. Pray persistently with perseverance. Pray with fasting. Pray tenaciously and keep knocking on God's door! He has a history of responding to those who seek him this way and providing miraculous solutions and wisdom beyond human understanding.

#### **IV. PRAY TOGETHER WITH OTHER BELIEVERS (Matthew 18:19-20; Acts 1:14; Acts 2:42; Acts 4:24-31; Acts 12:5; 1 Timothy 2:8)**

And this brings us to the third and final principle of tenacious prayer: praying together with other believers. There is incredible power in believers praying together according to God's purposes. Matthew 18, verses 19 to 20, is the central passage here:



**19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.  
20 "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."**

Notice Jesus is speaking of people gathered together in His name... they've come together in Jesus' name for the purpose of prayer. And Jesus tells us that when that happens he is powerfully present in a special way and will answer the requests they agree upon.

Next time you read the book of Acts, I want you to notice all the miraculous things God accomplished through the prayers of his saints, and many times directly as a result of their seeking him together in prayer. Over and over again in Acts we learn that these first believers in Christ devoted themselves to prayer, fellowship, and the study of God's Word. We often see them gathered together and praying in unity for God's miraculous working. When Peter was imprisoned in Acts 12:5, we read that "**prayer for him was being made fervently by the church of God.**" And even they were surprised and amazed by what God accomplished as a result. When, as a result of prayer, Peter actually showed up at the place they were praying, they told the servant girl who reported his arrival that she was out of her mind! God shocked even them with the power that works through saints praying together in unity.

In Acts 4, verses 24 to 31, we also see the saints praying together with one accord and what happened when they had prayed? "**...the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.**" Don't underestimate what the power of God can do when his people gather together to pray for his kingdom purposes! Tenacious prayer enlists other people to pray boldly together in unity for God's purposes.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

So, are you ready to live a lifestyle of tenacious prayer? Are you ready to walk through life filled up with the power and presence of God...filled up to all his fullness? Tenacious prayer is persistent, persevering and fervent, and enlists other believers to pray together in unity for the powerful working of God.

My hope and prayer in our study today and in our prayer series as a whole, is that you will never again view prayer as a casual, powerless, religious duty that good Christians should try to do from time to time. Instead, I hope you've come to see it as a precious privilege; your very lifeblood; your only hope for change; the key to walking by the power of the Holy Spirit; an invitation to dwell constantly in the presence of God; your access to the power and wisdom of God; and so much more! I hope you've been drawn to leave dry, mindless, casual, doubting prayer behind and replace it with tenacious, unhindered prayer that brings the power and wisdom of God to bear on both the everyday problems of our lives and the most intense spiritual warfare that could ever come our way.

Prayer is our invitation to dwell with God and walk through life by the power of his Spirit. I want to close today by sharing a couple paragraphs from a book on prayer Rob Burton shared with me recently. The section I want to share speaks of this idea of dwelling with God through prayer and learning through it to walk by the Spirit. Listen closely:

Do we dwell in God?...Is that how we live throughout the day? In our business are we still with God? A Christian is not to run to God in the morning and again at night, using Him as a shelter and a means to our own ends. We are to dwell in God and live in Him from the rising of the sun until the day's end, making God the center of our lives and walking as in His sight.

Does the Spirit of God motivate us, or is it another spirit? Do we wait upon God and say, "Lord, let Your Spirit tell me what to say and do in this situation. Be Lord of my judgment, subdue my passions, control my impulses, and let Your Spirit guide me. Lord, be soul and life to me, and in the triple kingdom of my spirit, soul, and body, be my supreme Master. In every province of my nature, may Your law be set up and Your will be done." We would have a mighty church if we are all of this mind. God save us as a church from losing His presence!

May this describe the way we walk through our days as God's children, constantly in his presence as we share our lives with him and learn to ask, seek and knock... seeking him and depending on him tenaciously... and therein, finding his wisdom and power and accomplishing his purposes as we go. I pray that God brings incredible fruit right here among us from these truths we've learned in this study of prayer.

***Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)***