

Persistence in Prayer

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by Mark Nickles



Women Praying

[Matthew 15:21-28](#) tells us of a Canaanite woman seeking Jesus out; that he might heal her daughter of demon possession. Often, a study of the passage focuses on Jesus' words to this desperate mother. However, there is also a wonderful lesson on persistence and earnestness in prayer, wherein the Canaanite woman is a magnificent model.

First mentioned in verse 22, the woman is said to have come to Jesus, ***"crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.'"***

At the very least, her address of our Savior as "Son of David" tells us that she was familiar with the Messianic prophecies. At the most, it informs us of a deep, abiding faith. I subscribe to the latter, based on what she says a few verses afterward.

Jesus gives no answer to her first plea, which seems, on the surface, a bit cold. However, it is important to remember that not all prayers are immediately answered. Most Christians can relate at least one experience during a season of prayer in which the need was great, and God

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seemed silent. However, if they persisted, they can also testify to the fact that, if He is sometimes silent, there is a reason. The woman in this passage persevered, and experienced the truth of a caring Savior who acts on behalf of those who follow him.

When Jesus finally broke his silence, it was not with the most encouraging words: ***"I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel,"***

was his answer to the disciples, who wished him to meet her need so that she would stop making a scene. Though this statement was directed at his disciples, I suspect Jesus intended the woman to hear it. This is primarily due to the nature of this encounter, which appears increasingly as a test of her faith. She proves herself committed, as she abandons her long-distance appeal and approaches Jesus to kneel before him in verse 25. Desperately she pleads,

"Lord, help me!"

Just when it seems the challenge could not become any more formidable, Jesus replies, ***"It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."***

With this statement, Jesus employs a form of speech used by the Jews at that time: they who were called the Children of God were known for referring to Gentiles as dogs. A repulsive characteristic from a sinfully proud people, Jesus used it as yet another testing tool.

In consistent, unflustered form, this determined mother gives an answer worthy of the greatest scriptural minds of her time or ours, in verse 27: ***"Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."***

With this, the woman displays her belief in Jesus' ability and goodness, as well as her humility. Referring to the "crumbs" of blessing which she would gather, she displays her confidence that what she is asking, though an insurmountable problem for man, is as nothing to God. Her persistence also indicates her belief that Jesus will grant her request. Finally, in humble form, she accepts the delineation of "dog", not in recognition of the greatness of the Jews, but of the God who chose them.

Hopefully, my reason for referring to this woman as a great example of persistence in prayer is obvious. Calling out to God initially, and hearing nothing, she redoubles her efforts where many of us might give up. She struggles at prayer. She labors at it. And all the while, she assumes God's power is absolute, and his goodness and willingness to meet her need without question. That, combined with her humble spirit, worked for her a miracle which affected not just her daughter's life, but undoubtedly the lives of family members and friends in a profound way.

If a Christian is going to be tenacious in anything, if any region of life calls for a resolute stubbornness, and dogged persistence, let it be in the one thing that can bring clarity to God's word, God's will, and God's way. Let it be in prayer!

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