

Lord, Teach Us To Pray

Confidently ✦ Persistently ✦ Compassionately

In the name of the LORD our compassionate and gracious God, dear fellow redeemed:

Have you ever talked to friends and family about their problems with prayer? Do you have some of your own? It's hard to imagine anyone not having questions, especially when you think of God as the Almighty Judge. Who would dare come into His presence? As the prophet Isaiah asked: ***“Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire?”*** (Isaiah 33:14 NIV84) Godly fear is good when it helps us think about what we're saying and not just throw up careless prayers like party balloons.

The good news is that God knows our fears. So He does not wait for us, but comes kindly and mercifully in the person of God's Son Jesus Christ. We ask with Jesus' disciples in today's Gospel: ***Lord, Teach Us To Pray.*** The Lord's Prayer is a wonderful model prayer. But this Old Testament reading from Genesis 18:20-32 about Abraham, “the father of all believers,” is a great reminder that the LORD God has been teaching His people to pray from the very beginning. I love the way the Lord teaches us through the example of father Abraham to pray: ***Confidently ✦ Persistently ✦ Compassionately.***

✦ *Confidently* (vv.20-26)

Many people have this unrealistic idea that the Bible is a book of myths and legends. Here's another reason to correct their foolishness. Even the ***“father of all believers”*** is not presented like some deity with only one flaw that humans have to fix. These are real people in real time with real troubles.

In all your summer travels try to imagine God calling you to leave you home completely and go to somewhere He will show you down the road. By the way, you're already seventy-five years old and childless. Yet God is promising you descendants and the entire land where you walk – though you don't actually ever own more than your burial plot. Sure, your faith shows in many ways. Just following God's call was a huge fruit of faith. Abraham's faith was shining in generosity that allowed his nephew Lot to choose the best land in order to keep their herdsman from fighting over water rights. Abram believed the Lord's promise of the land and built an altar at Hebron. (Genesis 13) Abram's courageous rescue of Lot, another act of faith, has been documented as the first night raid in recorded history. (Genesis 14) He accepted new names for himself and his wife, as well as the covenant sign of circumcision. (Genesis 17; Romans 4:11) All this was evidence of faith which the LORD planted by grace in Abraham's heart. The LORD credited his faith to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:5)

Yet the ***“father of all believers”*** (Romans 4:11) has also shown himself to be a sinner. Twice he lied by saying his wife Sarah was only his sister. (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:2,5,7,9) He thus put his wife and the promise of the Savior through her in danger. Both Abraham and Sarah laughed at the Lord's promise of a son in their old age. (Genesis 17:17; 18:12) They had to wait twenty-five years, but Isaac, whose name means ***Laughter***, would finally be born to a rejoicing hundred-year-old Abraham and Sarah ninety.

Abraham's prayer is a powerful encouragement for all of us sinner-saints who still wrestle with doubt. Prayer honors God with opportunities to show His kindness. God wants us to approach His throne of grace ***Confidently***. God says loving things about Abraham just before our text. He reveals His plans to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Likewise, God tells us His plans about these Last Days and Judgment Day. His loving kindness to us and to Abraham prompts questions that honor God's character. (vv.24f) Finally, this: ***“The Judge of all the earth should do right, shouldn't he?”*** (EHV¹)

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2017. NPH: 800-662-6022; also Amazon-Kindle.

✦ *Persistently* (vv.27-31)

You might think Abraham could stop at “*fifty righteous*” believers for God to find in the city. But Abraham has a real sense about what been going on there. His concerns about the wickedness in Sodom will prove correct. When the LORD’s messengers go to rescue Lot and his family, the men of Sodom try to sexually assault them. Violent perversion was crying out to God in heaven. It had to be answered.

So Abraham proceeds to pray, counting down from *fifty...forty-five...thirty...twenty* – that’s all the righteous people the LORD would need to find, looking for them in order to save the city. Since there is no righteousness apart from God and “*without faith it is impossible to please God*” (Hebrews 11:6), this should have covered the city with God’s grace and protection to spare them utter destruction from above.

Do you ever feel as if you’re asking God too much? About too many tiny things? Maybe afraid you’re not trusting God because you keep asking, but doubts creep in? Someone you love is in the hospital. So you fall asleep praying, wake up twenty minutes later, then fall asleep praying again as you try to put this in the Lord’s hands and trust Him. Is it wrong to fall asleep while you’re praying?

“*Pray without ceasing,*” “*...without letting up,*” the Lord says through Paul. (1 Thessalonians 5:17) If you do that, how can you not fall asleep while praying? You’re always praying! Prayer has been called “the attitude of faith.” It keeps “*asking...seeking...knocking...*” (Luke 11:9f) like Abraham as long as the problem remains. *Persistently* praying for help honors God because He loves “*to do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.*” (Ephesians 3:20 EHV) He’s not bothered by you. He’s honored by your prayers.

God reveals how He feels about His children. Ever have a small child fall asleep in your arms, your own or a grandchild? Such loving innocence warms your heart like nothing else. God our Father feels the same way (Isaiah 49:15f) when we totally rest in His goodness and grace by praying *Persistently*.

✦ *Compassionately* (v.32)

This last one may be the hardest of all because we tend to be so self-righteous even as Christians. Remember how angry Jonah was that the LORD kindly spared the cruel enemy capital of Nineveh? Gospel success, but angry preacher? Disciple brothers James and John, Jesus nicknamed “Sons of Thunder” because they wanted to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village. Anyone out there really anger you for their violence and perversion? They talk “tolerance” but hate Christians who love people and live according to God’s Ten Commandments. Do you ever feel they maybe deserve the fate of the sodomizers in that ancient city? As far as we know it’s still buried beneath the waters of the Dead Sea, the lowest spot on earth, over 1300’ below sea level. Quite the monument for rebellion against God.

Yet Abraham did not condemn them for what they deserved. He prayed for all, not even mentioning his nephew Lot. Humbly, *Compassionately*: “*Please, do not be angry, my Lord, but I will speak just once more. What if ten are found there?*” He said, “*I will not destroy it for the sake of ten.*” God-pleasing prayer is sweetened with Christ-like compassion! Sin is not excused; it’s confessed and forgiven. Our sin too is covered by the grace and mercy of God who would rather save than destroy.

Proof? Abraham received far more than he asked. Not a word about Lot and his family, yet the LORD tried to rescue Lot’s sons-in-law too, but the just laughed. Lot lagged, so the two rescuers finally took him, his wife and their two daughters by the hand and led them out of harm’s way. Then God’s fire and brimstone fell in judgment on the whole area. “*God cannot be mocked.*” (Galatians 6:7)

Pray *Compassionately* means more than just our own needs. How can we cover pastors, teachers of God’s Word – so needy in their personal and professional lives? Folks threatened by crime, terrorism, danger traveling on land, sea and air – what about them? How can we pray more *Compassionately* for our country, our president and all leaders – as God commands whether we like them or not? Together in worship with the Prayer of the Church we address the needs of others. Like children to their father we boldly press the Lord to live up to the meaning of His Name: *Lord, Teach Us To Pray!* Amen.