

Study 8. Desperate and Earnest Faith

Growing Faith Series

Warm-up Question: Share a time in your life when you became desperate about something. How did your desperation affect your prayer life?

Appropriating God's Promises by Faith

For us to receive all that God has given, we must grasp it through faith. There is a fancy term to describe this receiving of God's promises; the word is appropriation, which means to make something one's own. Dictionary.com defines it this way; "To take to one's self in exclusion of others; to claim or use as by an exclusive right."¹The things of God are only given to us as we get a handle on them by faith in God and His promises, through the word of God, the Bible. God has given His precious promises so that we can participate with Him in His work and overcome Satan's temptations in this world:

³His divine power *has given us everything we need for life and godliness* through our knowledge of him who called us by His glory and goodness. ⁴Through these *he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them* you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires (2 Peter 1:3-4).

So how do we appropriate the authority and benefits of the covenant of our God? We receive and grasp them by faith.

¹Now faith is **being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see**. ²This is what the ancients were commended for. ³By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that **what is seen was not made out of what was visible** (Hebrews 11:1-3).

¹The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. **It's our handle on what we can't see**. ²The act of faith is what distinguished our ancestors, set them above the crowd. ³By faith, we see the world called into existence by God's word, what we see created by what we don't see (Hebrews 11:1-3. The Message Translation).

The writer to the Hebrews is saying that our faith is something of substance in the spiritual realm that intersects the physical earth. That is how the King James Version of the Bible translates the Greek phrase: **Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen** (Hebrews 11:1 KJV). Heaven's resources, power, and authority back up our faith in God. God has told us that He watches over His Word to see it fulfilled (Jeremiah 1:12). He has given us His promises, and He waits and watches over them in the hope that His people will trust in His character enough to step out in faith and act upon His word.

¹Dictionary.com on the word appropriate.

How can we appropriate something through prayer? What do you think that means? What are some ways to express faith when asking God for something?

Faith Often Involves Risk

John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard organization of churches, used to say that God spells faith by the letters R.I.S.K. When we step out in faith in God, we risk looking foolish. We may have doubts and questions that come into our mind, such as "What if I have got it wrong?" or "What if I take some action, step out in faith, and wind up looking like a fool?" "What if God does not come through for me?" or "What if I did not hear God correctly?" Oswald J. Smith tells the story of a person that risked looking foolish if God did not back up his step of faith to see a town won to the Lord. This story is told as it would have been spoken, with the English Yorkshire district dialect from the original text:

"An incident is told of a place called Filey, in England, in the early days of Methodism, to which preacher after preacher was sent, but all to no purpose. The village was a stronghold of evil power, and each one, in turn, had been driven out until, at last, it was decided to give it up as a hopeless task. Just before the matter was finally settled, however, the famous John Oxtoby, or "Praying Johnny" as he was called, begged the Conference to send him, and so let the people have one more chance. They agreed, and a few days afterward, John set out on his journey. On the way, a person who knew him enquired where he was going. "To Filey," was the reply, "where the Lord is going to revive His work." As he drew near the place, ascending the hill between Muston and Filey, suddenly a view of the town burst upon his sight. So intense were his feelings that he fell upon his knees under a hedge and wrestled, wept, and prayed for the success of his mission. A miller on the other side of the hedge heard a voice and stopped in astonishment to listen when he heard Johnny say, "Thou munna make a feal o' me! Thou munna make a feal o' me! [You must not make a fool of me]. I told them at Bridlington that Thou was going to revive Thy work, and Thou must do so, or I shall never be able to show my face among them again, and then what will the people say about praying and believing?" He continued to plead for several hours. The struggle was long and heavy, but he would not cease. He made his very weakness and inefficiency a plea. At length, the clouds dispersed, the glory filled his soul, and he rose to exclaim, 'It is done, Lord. It is done. Filey is taken. Filey is taken.' And taken it was, and all in it, and no mistake. Fresh from the Mercy-seat, he entered the place and commenced singing up the streets, "Turn to the Lord and seek salvation," etc. A crowd of stalwart fishermen flocked to listen. Unusual power attended his address, hardened sinners wept, strong men trembled, and while he prayed over a dozen of them fell on their knees, and cried aloud for mercy and found it."²

What actions did the person take which exemplified his faith?

The fact that he continued to plead for several hours showed his faith in God and His promises. John Oxtoby knew from the Scriptures that it is God's will that all be saved and that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), so he risked his reputation and went believing that God would

² Oswald J. Smith, *The Revival We Need*, WRT Books, Xulon Press, Pages 88-90.

move in power for a whole town. What if God was not willing to answer his prayer? He would have returned looking powerless and stupid. His care and love for the lost people in Filey would not allow him to see the people of that town abandoned to the enemy. He appropriated the promises of God's word by faith and stepped out in faith to win the village for Christ. Sometimes we are like children with a check for a million dollars who haven't yet learned how to go to the bank and cash it. The man or woman of God must apply the promises and principles of faith to receive the answer to the prayer they seek. Ignorance of these precious principles exists because of insufficient personal knowledge of Jesus Christ in our lives. If we draw near to the Lord and desire to please Him through a life of active faith, the results in the Church and the world would be surprising. It would change the way we talk, the way we think, the way we act, and the way God would move in and through our lives. God's Word is authoritative and active. What if we believed it? Too many Christians struggle along, desperately begging God for things He has already promised or already declared are given to us. It is often due to a lack of appropriating the promises of God that hinders our prayers from being answered. It's time for the Church to step out and start taking some risks to see God move in answered prayer. Let the Word of God spark and add fuel to your faith.

Desperate Earnest Prayer

Faith trusts God's character and His Word, that God is good and that he will reward those who seek him with all their heart and exercise faith in His promises:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who *earnestly* seek him (Hebrews 11:6 Emphasis mine).

This passage says that it is impossible to please God apart from faith. God is honored when we actively step out believing that He exists, trusting that He will reward us if we seek him with earnestness. The key ingredient, as you may have noticed in the text, is *earnest* prayer.

The word earnest, according to Dictionary.com, means to:

1. Be serious in intention, purpose, or effort; sincerely zealous: an earnest worker.
2. It is showing depth and sincerity of feeling: *earnest words, an earnest request*.
3. Seriously important; demanding or receiving serious attention.³

The early church was an example to us of those that were earnest in their faith. Stephen, a great servant of God that God had powerfully used in miraculous signs (Acts 6:8), had been stoned to death by the Jews (Acts 7:59) after he preached boldly and earnestly to them. After the stoning, a great persecution broke out against the church. King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church and put to death the apostle James, the brother of John (Acts 12:1-2). When Herod saw how it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest the apostle Peter and put him into prison guarded by four squads of four soldiers, intending to kill Peter and wipe out the early church leaders. Something was different in Peter's case, though. We read:

³ www.dictionary.com search on the word earnest.

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was **earnestly** praying to God for him (Acts 12:5).

In the book of Acts chapter twelve, verses 5-6 and 12, the Scriptures inform us that in Peter's case, many people in the church were praying during the night with passion or earnestness mixed in their prayers at the house of Mary, the mother of the disciple, John whose surname was Mark.

Desperate prayer was the young church's only response. They knew that they were powerless to change Peter's situation apart from prayer. They could not get into the prison where he was held, but an angel of the Lord could! We have no idea how long this prayer meeting went on, but we know that Peter's release was only discovered in the morning (Acts 12:18). In answer to their prayers, the Lord sent an angel to release Peter at some time in the night, even though he was sleeping between two soldiers and bound with two chains. All night, desperate and earnest prayer went on for the survival of the early church. Many people praying through the night in one place show a real commitment and fervency in prayer. They would not allow Satan to have his way and destroy the early church leadership without a fight! God wonderfully answered their earnest prayer. Rhoda, the servant girl, was so shocked at seeing Peter knocking on the door that she forgot to open the door and let him in (Acts 12:13-17)!

Why would God allow James to be killed but send an angel to release Peter? What are we to think when God does not answer?

God is sovereign over the affairs of men. If we ask in faith and according to God's revealed will in His Word, and we know that we are not praying with wrong motives for the thing we request, we must leave the results in His hands and know that He is at work in whatever circumstances unfold. The apostle James was not set free; instead, he was killed. When God delivered Peter, it was not his time to die, and the Holy Spirit urged the church to intercede on Peter's behalf. Later on, when Peter died a martyrs' death, it is likely there were again many people praying for him at that time, but instead, God chose to take him home. Scripture says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." After having received the answer, we must trust God. Up until the answer comes, we follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit and continue to ask and seek earnestly.

Of course, one wonders concerning James. Is it possible that God did not act on his behalf because the church did not mobilize in time to pray for him? Like we talked about in our last study, the only thing that inhibits God from acting on our behalf is our not praying and believing that God would do the very thing we ask for, or us not being active with our praying. Again, we must rest in the fact that God is sovereign over the affairs of men. In any case, the Holy Spirit stirred up the church to begin to pray against the persecution at the time. Fervent prayer can change situations:

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual **fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much** (James 5:16. King James Version).

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16 NIV).

What is it about fervor, passion, and earnestness? For your faith to grow and be effective, you must mix earnestness and enthusiasm with heartfelt prayer. Here are a few quotes of some strong saints of God over the years about earnest faith-filled prayer:

Philip Henry said, "God seldom hears prayers not felt by us."

Adam Clarke: "Prayer requires more of the heart than of the tongue."

Hannah More: "Prayer is not eloquence, but earnestness; not the definition of helplessness, but the feeling of it."

Thomas Brooks: "God hears no more than the heart speaks, and if the heart is dumb, God will certainly be deaf."

The imprisonment of Peter was not the only time we read of the early church praying together passionately and earnestly during trials. We learn of an earlier time when the apostles John and Peter were hauled before the religious leaders after God healed the lame beggar at the Gate Beautiful. They were threatened and warned not to speak about Jesus. Their response was bold and courageous. They told the Jewish religious leaders that they couldn't help talking about what they had seen and heard (Acts 4:20). When they returned to where the believers were gathered, they called a prayer meeting:

²³On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them... (Acts 4:23-24).

This prayer meeting seems as if all the people are praying at once. For the most part, the West has adopted a one at a time type of prayer. But in this instance, they all raised their voices together at the same time, lifting their voices loudly to God in a passionate, earnest cry to Him. As the din of prayer subsided, one person expressed for our sakes the substance of their prayer. This form of prayer is widespread in the largest church in the world, the church of Paul Yonggi Cho in Seoul, South Korea. They have a time during their celebration where prayer requests are read to the congregation, and then they set them free to raise their voices all at the same time in a powerful time of passionate, energetic, earnest prayer. After so many minutes, whoever is leading the meeting rings a bell, and the time of prayer closes. Could this be one of the reasons that they have over 700,000 in the church and started many new churches? More than a third of the population of South Korea are born-again Christians.

Jesus Himself prayed with fervency and tears. We don't know how often he prayed with tears and fervent cries, but perhaps this was his method when he was alone. We do know that He engaged in times of prolonged prayer with the Father. The passage below could refer to His heartfelt time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission (Hebrews 5:7).

The Desperate and Earnest Cries of a Blind Beggar

⁴⁶Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." ⁵⁰Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. ⁵¹"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." ⁵²"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road (Mark 10:46-52).

As Jesus approached the city of Jericho, a blind man was sitting beside the road in a place that was strategic for begging. With the popularity of Jesus being what it was, great crowds of people were traveling with Him. William Barclay says: "One of the commonest ways for a Rabbi to teach was to discourse as he walked. That was what Jesus was doing, and the rest of the pilgrim band were crowding close around him so as not to miss anything that he might say."⁴It is likely that because of the crowd, Jesus did not even see the blind beggar; his focus was on what he was teaching as He was walking. It is also possible that Christ did see the blind beggar but chose to wait until there was an expression of faith. I wonder how many times it is that Jesus has passed me by because I have not cried out to Him in my need.

When Bartimaeus heard the commotion of a large band of people passing by, he inquired who it was. He must have heard testimony about Jesus at some time because when he heard it was Jesus of Nazareth, his response was to call out, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:48). Notice that he did not call him Jesus of Nazareth. Son of David was a title for the Messiah. Mark, in his narrative, tells us that all he had in his possession was a cloak. He also adds that his name was Bartimaeus and that when Jesus called him, he threw his cloak aside, jumped to his feet, and came to Jesus.

The cloak likely covered him in the evening. He was possibly homeless, unshaven, dirty, and smelly. Faith and desperation rose within him as he shouted out to Jesus. Some on the outskirts of the crowd could not hear the Master teach over the beggar's shouting. They rebuked him and told him to be quiet, possibly because they thought he wanted money from Jesus. Some must have wondered why Jesus bothered with this man, but the Lord valued him and waited for him to express his faith before healing him. We must overcome every obstacle that hinders us from getting close to Christ. If we truly hunger for God's presence, we should pursue Him with earnestness. A half-hearted faith will not gain His power.

⁴William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible, Book of Luke*, Page 232.

In the past, what restrictions have kept you from living or coming wholeheartedly to the Master? Has it been a person, or has it been things?

Those around Christ could not keep Bartimaeus quiet. A different Greek word is used the second time. In verse 39, it is translated: “he *shouted* all the more.” The Greek word used is *krazō*, which means to scream or shriek.⁵ The tense of the Greek brings out the fact that he kept on shouting and screaming. He would not shut up. We get a picture of a man going crazy with emotion (I wonder if we get the word crazy from this Greek word). There is desperation behind Bartimaeus' voice. If ever there was a picture of one who sought Christ with all of his heart, this was it. Bartimaeus had this one opportunity, and he was not going to let Jesus go by without doing all in his power to get his need met.

If you saw Jesus walking by today, would you scream your need? If not, what would hold you back?

Leonard Ravenhill, the Bible teacher, has said that “God doesn't answer prayer; He answers desperate prayer!” I’m not sure if I agree with that statement, but there is a truth worth extracting from the quote. Desperate prayer touches the compassionate heart of God. We see example after example in the Gospels of desperate people getting their needs met by the Lord.

Mark, in his Gospel, indicates that this healing happened as Jesus and the crowds were leaving the city (Mark 10:46). It is a beautiful thought that even though Christ is on the way to Jerusalem to be crucified, with all that was on his mind concerning what was going to happen there, he had time to stop and call Bartimaeus, asking him what he wanted. Don't ever think that Jesus does not have time for you in your need. He cares and will hear your cry if you seek Him with all your heart. He threw the cloak aside and did not have another concern for it. Perhaps it represented his old tattered life; Christ was now his only concern.

As people led him to Jesus, it was apparent what his need was, so why did Jesus ask him what he wanted?

Bartimaeus had become so dependent on others, but that would change if the Lord healed him. Often Christ waits for us to put into words exactly what we want. He looks to see how much of our heart is in what we desire Him to do for us. How about you? How much of yourself goes into your prayer life?

Bartimaeus had a fervency of heart that is so needed today. The Greek word translated fervent in the James 5:16 passage is *energeō*. We get the English word “energy” from this Greek word. Due to the beggar's desperation, He approached Christ with energy and fervency. The ability to call and not be put off by distractions, people, and things is the essence of an effective prayer life. Jesus found a man in great need, and He would not pass by. When the man voiced his need to the Lord, Jesus' immediate words were: “**Receive your sight; your faith has healed you**” (v. 42).

⁵ e.Sword.com

What would you say it was that Christ saw and affirmed as an expression of Bartimaeus' faith?

- 1) Bartimaeus had never seen Christ; all that he had learned about Christ was due to the testimony of others. When people told him, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you" (Mark 10:49), he believed their testimony about Christ. If you have not yet considered and trusted the evidence of those who speak to you about Christ, why not today? Give Him your life and abandon yourself into His care. You will never regret it!
- 2) He would not be put off by anyone and desperate enough not to worry about what people thought of his shouts and screams or his appearance. His earnestness and desperation were evidence of his faith in Christ for healing.

It was not faith in faith that healed Bartimaeus; it was faith in Christ. He expressed his faith by coming to Christ and not being put off without getting his need met. There was a mixture of faith in his words, his acts, and his passion or fervency. No wonder he followed Jesus, praising God. Who wouldn't?

Can you see Christ with the eyes of faith today? Jesus is very much alive and close to all who are hurting and in need of a Savior. All He waits for is your heartfelt call, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Would you tell Him your need today? He hasn't changed. **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"** (Hebrews 13:8). What He did for Bartimaeus, He can do for you. When Jesus had finished saying the words, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you," the Lord opened the blind man's eyes to see...The Savior of the World, Jesus, God in the flesh. Wouldn't that be awesome! One day each of us will have eyes opened and will stand before Him and see Him in all His loveliness, and He will see and behold a beautiful bride, you and me. We will gaze on His Majesty, and all the pain of this life will be gone. What an incredible day that will be!

If this is true, what difference does it make for you/us right now? What one thing do you need to ask God to do in your life due to what you have just discovered?

Prayer: Father, I pray that you would enable me to pray with energy, earnestness, and passion. I know you are near and long for me to cry to you and be healed, saved, or delivered.

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