

In standardized math tests, **Japanese children consistently score higher** than their American counterparts. While some assume that a natural proclivity toward mathematics is the primary difference, researchers have discovered that it may have more to do with **EFFORT** than **ABILITY**.

In one study involving first-graders, students were given a crazy puzzle to solve. The researchers weren't interested in whether or not the children could solve the puzzle; they simply wanted to see **how long they would try before giving up**. The American children lasted, on average, **9.47 minutes**. The Japanese children lasted **13.93 minutes**. In other words, the Japanese children tried 47 percent longer.

Is it any wonder why they score higher on math exams?

Researchers concluded that the difference in math scores might have less to do with **intelligence quotient** and more to do with **persistence quotient**. The Japanese first-graders simply tried harder.

That study not only explains the difference in standardized math scores, the implications are true no matter where you turn. It doesn't matter whether it's athletics or academics, music or math. **There are no shortcuts**. There are no substitutes. **Success is a derivative of persistence.**

Is prayer any different?

It is a habit to be cultivated. It is a discipline to be developed. It is a skill to be practiced. And while I don't want to reduce praying hard to time logged, if you want to achieve mastery it might take ten thousand hours.

This I know for sure: the bigger the dream, the harder you will have to pray.

Luke 18:1-5

One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. 2 "There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who neither feared God nor cared about people. 3 A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, 'Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.' 4 The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, 'I don't fear God or care about people, 5 but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!'"

The parable of the persistent widow shows us what **praying hard** looks like: **knocking** until your knuckles are raw, **crying out** until your voice is lost, **pleading** until your tears run dry.

Here's where a lot of us get this prayer thing wrong... Because we view 'prayer' as a bit of a passive thing. Or something that's just done in the quiet. We might think our only responsibility is to PRAY... But it's not. That's missing half the equation.

Praying hard is two-dimensional: (If you're taking notes, I want you to write this down:)

- **PRAY** like it depends on God and **WORK** like it depends on you.

Praying: It's praying until God answers, no matter how long it takes.

Working: It's doing whatever it takes to show God you're serious.

We need to **PRAY** like it depends on God (**because it does**) and **WORK** like it depends on us (**because it does**).

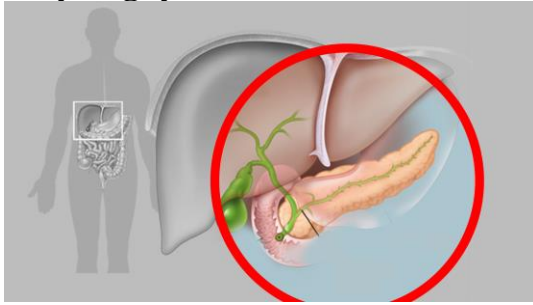
Desperate times call for desperate measures, and there is no more desperate act than praying hard. There comes a moment when you need to throw caution to the wind and put your stake in the ground; when you need to defy protocol, (even if your friends will think you're weird) drop to your knees, and pray for the impossible. There comes a moment when you need to muster every ounce of faith you have and **call rain down from heaven. For the persistent widow, this was that moment.**

For this widow, we don't know what injustice took place, but we do know that the persistent widow wouldn't take "NO" for an answer. Maybe her son was falsely imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit. Maybe the man who molested her daughter was still on the streets. **Whatever it was, the judge knew she would never give up.** The judge knew she would circle his house until the day she died if she didn't get justice. The judge knew there was no quit in the persistent widow.

Does our Good Judge know that about you?

- How desperate are you for the miracle?
- Desperate enough to pray through the night?
- Are you willing to pray for it until the day you die?
- How long and loud will you knock on that door?

Do you guys know what this is?



This is a pancreas. 5 months ago, I had no idea what this was... And now, my wife and I have essentially **become** our daughter's Pancreas. We monitor blood glucose levels, we give her the insulin her body needs to get the energy she needs from her food... I don't know how many of you have friends or family that have Type 1 Diabetes, but the first 3 days following diagnosis are **INTENSE**. It's a bootcamp for the parents. It's like when you have a baby and they're teaching you all these things before you go home...

Except with Diabetes, it involves math. **MATH!** I'm a pastor and musician. My wife is an artist. We were more worried about the **numbers** than we were the **diabetes**.

This was definitely a time that we had to pray like it depended on God; and work like it depended on us. We were praying for **Lily's health**; that she wouldn't be afraid of needles; that we'd be able to take good care of her... But at the same time, we were learning how to calculate insulin doses based on blood glucose and correction factors and carb ratios... **We were knee deep in prayer and neck deep in numbers.**

Have you ever had to **pray** like it depended on God and **work** like it depended on you?

I want to say something about "desperate measures."

It might go without saying, but if you aren't desperate, you won't take desperate measures. And if you don't pray like it depends on God, the biggest miracles and best promises will remain out of your reach. But if you learn how to pray hard, like the persistent widow, God will honor your bold prayers because your bold prayers honor God.

Let me say that again: **God honors bold prayers because bold prayers honor God.** If we spend the rest of our lives praying timid, easily answered prayers, we're almost insulting God's ability. If we just pray, *"God, I pray that the sun rises today, and that I don't hate my job too much, and please help my kids barely scrape by in school."*

Needless to say, the persistent widow's methodology was unorthodox. She could have, and probably should have, waited for her court date. Going to the personal residence of a judge is not advisable. I'm almost surprised the judge didn't get a restraining order against her.

But this reveals something about the nature of God. **God could care less about protocol.** If He did, Jesus would have chosen the Pharisees as his disciples. But that isn't who Jesus honored.

Jesus honored the prostitute who crashed a party at a Pharisee's home to anoint His feet.

Jesus honored the tax collector who climbed a tree in his three-piece suit just to get a glimpse of Jesus.

Jesus honored the four friends who cut a hole in someone's ceiling to help their friend.

And in this parable, **Jesus honored the woman** who drove a judge crazy because she wouldn't stop knocking.

The common denominator in each of these stories is **HOLY DESPERATION**. People took desperate measures to get to God and God honored them for it. Nothing has changed. God is still honoring the spiritual crazies who crash parties and climb trees. God is still honoring those who **defy protocol** with their bold prayers. God is still honoring those who pray with **audacity** and **tenacity**.

And the persistent widow is sets the standard in this. Her **persistence** was the only difference between **justice** and **injustice**.

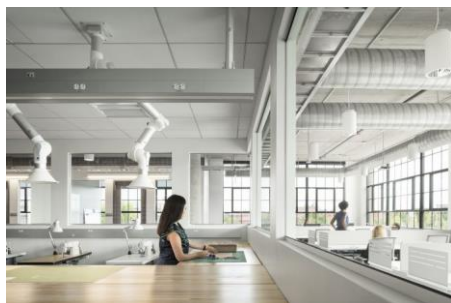
Now, this isn't witchcraft. We're not looking for a **magic spell** or some **hocus-pocus** set of words that will twist God's arm. God knows our hearts. He already knows what we're going to pray! He knows the last word before we pronounce the first syllable. **The viability of our prayers has more to do with intensity than vocabulary.** And that's modeled by the Holy Spirit Himself, who has been intensely and unceasingly interceding for us for our entire lives.

Long before we woke up this morning and long after we go to sleep tonight, the Spirit of God has been circling us with songs of deliverance. **He has been circling you since the day you were conceived and He'll circle you till the day you die.** He is praying hard for you with ultrasonic groans that cannot be formulated into words and those intercessions should fill you with an unspeakable confidence. God isn't just

FOR YOU in some passive sense. God is **FOR YOU** in the most active sense imaginable. The Holy Spirit is praying hard for you. And supernatural things happen when we partner with God and do the same.

Back in 2011, we read a book by Mark Batterson called the **Circle Maker**, which is where most of this sermon has come from. In his book, he talks about praying circles around his city and laying hands on buildings and asking God to do miraculous things... **So we started doing the same**. And one of the buildings we prayed for was 110 Canal St. in downtown Lowell.

It was this run-down, hollowed out building, visible from Dutton St. right in the middle of everything. And one afternoon, I remember spending hours at that building, praying for God to do amazing things there... Asking God to open a church there or bring that place back alive. We had no idea what we were doing, but we were letting ourselves dream and pray hard. **It was just Elyse and I praying and dreaming.**



This building is now the UMass Lowell Innovation Hub, which is a co-working space for startups. There are medical breakthroughs happening here. I actually drove over there on Wednesday and took a tour of the space. It's amazing.

Did God answer our prayers? I'd say so.

We've spent this series looking at this moment when Jesus teaches us how to pray in Luke 11, breaking down each verse... And last week we wrapped the Lord's Prayer in verse 4, with Kelly talking about forgiveness. Today, following the Lord's Prayer, Jesus continues in verse 5...

LUKE 11:5-8 NLT

5 Then, teaching them more about prayer, [Jesus] used this story: “Suppose you went to a friend’s house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, 6 ‘A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.’ 7 And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can’t help you.’ 8 But I tell you this—though he won’t do it for friendship’s sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.

Shameless persistence. I love that. Just like the persistent widow, going again and again to the Judge to receive justice... The only reason this ‘friend’ gives him any bread, is because of his “shameless persistence.”

I think that Jesus might be using hyperbole here. With the Judge (in chapter 18) and this friend that doesn’t want to be bothered... Jesus describes the Judge as a man *“who neither feared God nor cared about people.”* That’s not a great way to describe someone. And here in Luke 11, Jesus describes this friend as anything but gracious and hospitable. *‘Don’t bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can’t help you.’* Yet these are the people Jesus uses to prove that persistence works.

He’s basically choosing two people that aren’t “people people.” He’s using your jerky neighbor as an example... Almost saying, “If persistence works with these people, how much more will Your loving Father respond to us with gracious favor?”

Jesus continues in Luke 11:

9 “And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

It’s so easy to give up on dreams, give up on miracles, give up on promises. We lose heart, lose patience, lose faith. And like a slow leak, it often happens without us even knowing it until our prayer life gets a flat.

- Is there some dream that God wants to resurrect?
- Is there some promise you need to reclaim?
- Is there some miracle you need to start believing in again?

I’ve failed in this.

I've given up on prayers. **For 4 years, from 2011 until 2015, I prayed incessantly for the city of Lowell.** I believed God would do incredible things there. I was ready to be on the front lines. We were championing the call from Harbor about launching our second campus there... But the past two years have sort of snuffed the flame a bit. Our lead pastor at the time transitioned out in the middle of the Multiply campaign (not very strategic timing for a capital campaign), and it all sort of lost steam. **We all gave towards it.** We raised \$138,000 and now it's sitting in a bank account.

Don't hear me wrong, I think we're being very wise as a leadership with all of this, because it would've been foolish to race into Lowell with all the transition the church was experiencing... It could've been catastrophic. We needed to "right the ship" and settle the waters, and that's sort of where we are today. **We're like Noah peeking out of the ship's window, to see the sunlight breaking through the clouds and the floodwaters receding.**

I think we're almost ready. But to be honest, I've lost a bit of my passion in it. **I need to ask God to resurrect that dream within me.**

And the reason I know I shouldn't just shrug it off is because I believe it's a dream that God gave me, 7 or 8 years ago. When I read scripture, I saw all these signs pointing to the Church expanding and reaching people far from God with a message of hope... I felt like opening a second location in Lowell was a **PROMISE**.

One thing is certain: our prayers that are linked to the promises of God **end up being the most powerful.** When you know you are praying the promises of God, you can pray with holy confidence. God wants His church to continue to grow. He wants more communities of faith in the city of Lowell. The Way of Jesus will continue to advance... That's a promise. So praying for a new community of faith in Lowell is praying in line with God's promises about the Church.

We can be tempted by so many silly things to pray for... To pray for wealth or success or someone to win or lose an election... But if those things aren't lining up with the promises of God, they're just us bringing our own ideas to God. It's just like our kids coming to us and asking for a pony or a race car.. Sorry, kid... not going to happen.

Praying in line with God's promises is the difference between praying on thin ice and praying on solid ground. It's the difference between praying timidly and praying tenaciously.

That new song we sang today is incredible... No matter how many promises God has made in Scripture, they are "Yes" in Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:20 NLT

For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding "Yes!" And through Christ, our "Amen" (which means "Yes") ascends to God for his glory.

All of the promises that we see in Scripture are ours because of Jesus Christ.

By the most conservative estimates, there are more than 3,000 promises in Scripture. By virtue of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross, **every one of them belongs to you.** Every one of them has your name on it. The question is: **how many of them have we begun to pray for?**

So looking at your life, and looking at our church, what do you need to begin praying for like it depends on God; and working at like it depends on you?

What dream needs to be either resuscitated (or completely resurrected!) today?

Have you already become discouraged over these 40 Days that your prayer life isn't what you want it to be? That you haven't logged your 10,000 hours to become a prayer expert or Jesus Jedi? **Join the crowd.**

The beauty of a community like this is fellowship in our brokenness. **We're not alone.** We're yoked together. If we're dragging and losing steam, we have someone alongside us to help carry the load.

We often forget that following Christ is a spiritual **PRACTICE**... Not something to conquer or achieve. A lot of other religions understand this, but for some reason Christianity misses it. **We all feel like we should all be experts automatically.** Like Neo in the Matrix when he get this upload of information and he wakes up and says, "*I know Kung-Fu.*"

It's one of the things that is so confusing about following a spiritual practice in 2017: a day and age of instant downloads and instant gratification. We forget that following Jesus is a daily spiritual practice. And it takes dedication. **Just like practicing anything else.**

But don't lose heart. **Don't give up.** Just because you're not where you want to be; or you're not where you wished you'd be by now... As Jesus reminds us in Luke 11: *Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.*

Keep on **ASKING**.
Keep on **SEEKING**.
Keep on **KNOCKING**.

To close, I want to have a moment of quiet, where we can ask God to maybe revive a promise that you've stopped believing... Or a dream that you've flat-out forgot about.

I want to ask God to fill this church with **audacious faith**; to **begin praying for miracles in our lives**; and to be crazy enough to pray **consistently** for them, with persistence; knowing that our Father is far more gracious than any Judge or sleeping friend.

Let's come before God in silence, and ask Him to stir something alive inside of us...