

12. The Parable of the Persistent Widow

Luke 18:1-8

The Parables of Jesus

Warm-up Question: As a child, what did you have to do to get a parent or grandparent to give you something you wanted?

When you are in a tight situation, and you need help, do you pray? Sometimes prayer is our last resort, but often I have found it to be my only hope! After I left a very lucrative job working with my father as a commercial fisherman, I was faced with a challenge. God had spoken to me to leave my nets and come and follow Christ, and He would make me a fisher of men (Matthew 4:19). What would I do now? How would I provide for my family? All I knew was the sea and fishing. After a few years involved in church planting, I realized that I needed to learn how to work in an office situation, a terrifying proposition for me due to not knowing one end of a computer from another. My wife, Sandy, was working at a company called Eurostar that had high-speed trains traveling from London to Paris in France and Brussels in Belgium. Sandy thought that due to my heart for evangelism, I would make an excellent salesperson on the phones selling rail tickets. They must have been desperate to hire me, for I lacked the necessary skills.

When the two weeks of training in sales started I lost heart due to the young people around with advanced computer skills—I was so intimidated and did not think that I would last. They were all so sharp and understood how to sell over the phone and use the complicated booking software on the computer to reserve tickets. When the training was over, I seriously didn't understand what I was doing! Desperately, I turned to my help—the Lord. Every day before I started work I prayed that God would help me to do this. Often in the sales conversation, I would be asking the Father to help me. In my third month of being with that company, among two hundred other salespeople, I broke the all-time sales records by another third on top of the nearest sales record, giving me more money in bonuses than my wages. No one was more amazed than me when they put my photo on the wall as an example to others! The young guy working alongside me asked how I did it. He knew that I was a Christian. I told him the truth, that I was a praying person and that I asked God to help me and give me the right callers. He responded with a deep sigh, saying, “I just gotta become a Christian!”

We underestimate the power of prayer, preferring to rely on our skills, intellect, and energy, rather than rely on the all-knowing, sovereign God. He alone is the One who lives outside of time and can move things around in the time-space continuum to the advantage of the praying person. We live in a culture that praises self-reliance. We have become programmed by our culture to expect things right now, but the things of God are not given at the same speed as our fast food. God is training us in eternal principles that only come to those who are willing to wait before God and see His help in overcoming the things of this world. I encourage you to begin praying for God's help in whatever work you are doing. Nothing is too trivial or unimportant. Jesus told a parable to illustrate the sort of effective praying that would overcome every difficulty we face:

1Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' 4"For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!' " 6And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1-8).

We don't know if this parable was from a real live case that people had heard about or if Jesus made up the story to illustrate the truth that He wanted those listening to learn about prayer. The purpose of the parable is very clear from the beginning verse (v. 1) that we should always pray and not give up. Too many of us give up praying before we get the answer.

We should not think this judge to be an example of our Father in heaven. No, this man is the very opposite of the Father. Instead, this is a study in contrasts.

What does this story tell us about the widow's character? What does it tell us about the integrity of the judge?

Let's take a look first at the judge.

The Unjust Judge

Judges should be impartial and, more than likely, this man had taken an oath before God to judge righteously, but he cared nothing for any vow before God because he had no fear of God. He thought he could do and say what he liked and no one could question him. He was above the law, so he thought. Let all men and women in high office weigh up the thought that all of us will one day stand before the righteous judge, the Lord Himself, and have to give account for what we have said and done (Romans 14:12, Matthew 12:36). On top of that, he cared not about his fellow man. His judicial decisions were not swayed by the howl of protest from the people he served. This man had a conscience so seared that he witnessed against himself, saying, **"Even though I don't fear God or care about men..."** (Luke 18:4). Many people at the end of their days' work will think through their day, and their conscience will tell them what they did right and what they did wrong, but this judge had so hardened his heart that he acknowledged within himself that he didn't care what God or any man thought of him. He freely confessed within himself what he was like and did not seem ashamed of it. The widow was standing up to a monster in human form in front of her. All he cared about was his ease. The only thing that swayed him to do the right thing was that the widow shook him out of his ease and comfort. He just wanted peace!

The Persistent Widow

Women in the time of Jesus did not have equal social status to men and so were regarded as second-class citizens, and to worsen her case in front of an unjust judge, she was a widow and marginalized in society having no man to stand up for her. In Scripture, the widow is the very epitome of a person whose reliance is entirely on God. We don't know her situation, just that it was urgent enough for her to come to the only person in the city who could dispense justice on her behalf—the unjust judge. I notice that she had no lawyer pleading her case. There was no advocate at the bar to call for justice. Thankfully, we that are Christians have an advocate that stands at the bar before the throne of heaven, Jesus Christ the Righteous One (1 John 2:1), and His ministry at this very moment is to make intercession (to mediate or intervene) for us to God (Hebrews 7:25). How did the widow pursue her case? Her only strategy was to keep coming to the one who held the authority to help her. Here is the heart of the lesson that Jesus wants us to learn, that of persisting in prayer. Some would say that we should pray once and leave it with God—that is not the message this parable is teaching. We are to pursue and persist in our prayers to God for the things that lie heavy on our soul.

We should not think for a minute she set up an appointment or that she only came when it was a good time to be listened to, the situation had gone way beyond the first denial of justice. This woman kept confronting him at all times of the day. Perhaps she would show up where he lived. Maybe she would follow him as he went with his wife to the market. Let's put this in today's terms; he would open his email, and there was a message for him from her. He would go to Facebook, and another note was there. He would put his phone to his ear and find a voice message from her. She would get past the guards at the courtroom and slink in saying the same thing every time, **"Grant me justice against my adversary" (Luke 11:3)**. She didn't plead for justice because she was a widow or because of her children. The widow didn't talk to him about God's judgment on wicked judges, nor did she use flowery words or carefully constructed sentences. No, only six words describe the one thing she relied on—her persistence. It became embarrassing for the unjust judge, for when he wanted quiet time with his friends the poor widow would show up at the café and plead her case in front of his friends. He finally gave her justice because she was wearing him out. R. Kent Hughes, in his commentary, mentions that the judge used the phrase, "wear me out" (Luke 18:5) to describe how he felt at the widow's continual pleading. Hughes writes,

"The literal translation of "wear me out" ("blacken my eye") conveys even better his frustration. This phrase was a boxing expression (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27). Her persistence had been "punching him out," probably in the sense of public embarrassment, giving his reputation or prominence a black eye."¹

What is God looking for in prayer for it to be effective?

What is Jesus saying in this lesson on effective prayer? The widow was desperate for her need to be met. In her desire, she used her persistence and perseverance to overcome the apathy of the judge. Again, this judge is the opposite of our heavenly Father. The Lord Jesus is teaching us that prayer isn't heard because of one's eloquence in prayer. It is the *desire*, the *level of need*, and the *perseverance* expressed in the prayer that touches the heart of God. Her request was heard because of her energy, vigor, zeal or passion in delivering her petition. When a person knows the

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word Series*, Luke Volume Two, Published by Crossway Books, Page 186.

promises of God and the character of God, he or she can persevere in prayer because his or her faith rests in a God who is the opposite of the judge in the parable. The judge was the only way the widow could see to get through her situation, and since she saw him as her only hope, she continued to plead and would not give up. Too often the church plays the children's game of knocking on the door and then running away before the answer comes!

E.M. Bounds, a man who has written much on the topic of prayer, comments on this passage:

“God waits patiently as His elect cry to Him day and night. He is moved by their requests a million times more than was this unjust judge. A limit is set to His waiting by the persistent praying of His people, and the answer richly given. God finds in His praying child the faith that stays and cries, and He honors it by permitting its further exercise so that it is strengthened and enriched. Then He rewards it by granting its request in abundance and decisively.”²

Some situations cannot be avoided in your life and mine, and maybe they have been designed by God to train you in overcoming. In eternity, we will not encounter the difficulties that we have on earth. This earth is the Holy Spirit's training school in faithful overcoming. In each of the seven letters to the Asian churches in the Book of Revelation, chapters two and three, each of the churches was told of the Lord's expectation to overcome. We are called to be overcomers. Since there is no way around the mountains to our faith, we must find a way through them. Difficulties in life are allowed by God to teach us dependence on the Lord rather than through our intellect, abilities, and talents. That was the lesson I shared earlier as I began with my story about working in a sales office situation. God wants us to be quick to call out to Him for His help in whatever case we find ourselves. We learn as children how to get our way with our parents, how to cry enough, how to moan and manipulate, how to twist the truth to get what we want. But our childhood stubbornness needs to be left behind at the cross of Christ. We cannot use manipulation with our heavenly Father; His arm cannot be twisted behind His back, for He knows all. Henry Ward Beecher said, “The difference between perseverance and obstinacy is that one often comes from a strong will and the other from a strong won't.” Christian maturity requires us to persevere in prayer to God.

When King David's son, Solomon, came to the throne of Israel, God came close to him and said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you" (1 Kings 3:5). If the Lord did that with you, for what would you ask Him?

In some instances, we find ourselves facing situations that require more than a quick prayer before bed. How much do you desire that for which you are asking? Hannah, a barren woman, praying for a child reminds us of how her heartfelt desire was mixed with faith to cry out to God and answered with the birth of Samuel. When she began to pray before the tent of worship in Shiloh, she was so passionate in her prayer that she was accused by the High Priest Eli to be drunk. She responded to him by saying, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:15). What did Eli see that caused him to suspect that Hannah was drunk? She was passionate in her prayer and did not hold back in expressing herself to God. When there is strong desire behind a need, faith

² E.M. Bounds, *The Classic Collection on Prayer*, Bridge Logos Publishers, Page 44.

expressed in prayer touches God's heart. Has your need touched your heart as it did the widow? How can we expect to touch God's heart with our need if it has not touched our heart? A.W. Tozer once said, "When we become too glib in prayer we are almost certainly talking to ourselves." In Hannah's case, it was her passion and desire for a son that got the answer.

One of the significant mistakes that Christians often make is that we don't ask God for specific things. God delights in giving us precisely what we have asked for by showing us His power and His ability to be Jehovah Jireh, our Great Provider. In one place, Jesus said:

Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask, and you will receive, and your joy will be complete (John 16:24).

A friend of mine who lives in Israel, Christine, told me of a time when she needed bunk beds for her two children. She went to the store and found out the price. Then she went to the Father in prayer and asked him for the specific amount in Israeli Shekels. Not long after her prayer, a check came in the mail with the exact amount of shekels. I can't remember the amount but it wasn't rounded up to the nearest ten, it was the exact amount she needed, the exact amount she was quoted for the beds in shekels. When she later talked to the person to thank them, she asked the person as to why that specific amount. The giver responded that the Holy Spirit had told them to provide that exact amount, not a shekel more or a shekel less. Our faith is built up when God answers specific prayers.

When God wants to lead a person to great faith, He will sometimes test the person's faith by silence. The delay in His answer is orchestrated for our greater good and our training in patience and persistence, which will ultimately build greater confidence in God. In such instances, His answer comes to us in His timing; a way that creates qualities in us more valuable and enduring than the very thing which we are asking.

Prayer: Father, please help us not to give up but to persevere in prayer that we may receive gifts from your hand. Teach us to pray, and not grow weary. Strengthen us through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

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