

Persistence is Not Futile!

Luke 18:1-8; 11:5-13

Central Idea: Praying with persistence does not show a lack of faith, but obedience and trust!

Introduction

We have been talking about the end times in the month of January, and today I want to talk about prayer in the end times. One of our goals at New Life Assembly this year is to become a praying church. We have some people who know how to grab God's attention, who have learned the importance of prayer and know how to do it well. But there are others who need guidance in prayer, who would like to become prayer warriors, but are not sure how to get there. Each of us has learned prayer both from examples in Scripture and in life. But the very best way to learn how to pray is to do it.

The first installment of our teaching on prayer speaks of persistence in prayer, and focuses on two parables that Jesus taught for the express purpose of encouraging us to not give up in our praying. It has been 2,000 years since the promises were given, and here we are waiting in the blessed hope of Christ's return with faith, living as though the promises are reality. But it is easy to get tired in our prayers, no matter what the matter is. It is easy for us to give up or to think that there is no answer. While there are several criteria to effective prayer, persistent prayer is something actually encouraged and demonstrated by Jesus! Let us look at how He taught us to pray!

Text – Luke 18:1-8

¹ And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' " ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Text – Luke 11:5-13

⁵ And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷ and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'?" ⁸ I tell you,

though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent;¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

I. Persisting in prayer recognizes the God we serve.

A. We find a God who wants to answer our prayers.

- i. In both of these parables, Jesus makes the same point about God in response to our prayers. Some people see God as withholding things from them or take a time of testing as God reveling in their failure, but that is not the picture Jesus presents.
- ii. In both parables, Jesus shows us a character who is opposite of God’s own character in that the judge does not care about people and the friend does not want to help the neighbor.
- iii. Each time, Jesus stresses that if those two characters would go against their own character to help the widow and the neighbor, even more so God will help us when we pray, for it is part of His character to be merciful and good.
- iv. So the characters that represent God in these parables are opposites of God in character, not the same. Instead, God wants to answer our prayers. He knows what we need and when we need it. He can do anything we ask. And He is always with us.
- v. Sometimes we lose faith or begin to doubt what God can do. Perhaps the reason may be that we’ve never personally seen God do what we need before, such as a resurrection from the dead. Maybe we’ve been praying for something for a while and begin to believe that because it hasn’t been done God will not do it.
- vi. This is the very crux of the matter, that as we continue to pray for something, we begin to grow weary in our discipline of praying for that thing or that we begin to lose heart or even doubt that God will answer that prayer.
- vii. There is a grave danger of beginning to doubt these three basic truths about God in one way or another as we discipline ourselves to continue to pray through. Some will lose faith that God is with them and hearing their cries. Others might lose faith that God has the power to do what they ask.

Still others might begin to think that God doesn't understand their situation or know what is best for them.

- viii. **Application:** We must continue to pray and seek God, knowing that He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and always present with us. He will hear our prayers. He will answer our cries for help. He will do what's best in our situation. This must be the foundation of our prayers, for if we come to Him doubting in any area, we will not receive from Him!

B. We find a God who is just and good.

- i. Especially in the parable of the widow, justice is a key factor. The judge refuses to give her justice. We don't know what the dispute entailed. Some suggest a financial burden.
- ii. Jesus really compounds the character of the widow and the judge. First, the judge is supposed to be sensitive to widows, orphans and foreigners in matters of justice because God's Law provides for them and they are part of the disadvantaged.
- iii. But the widow is also by character an interesting choice for the disadvantaged. In Jesus' day, women were not listened to in a court. They were at a disadvantage because of their society. Luke pays special attention to women and their status as Christianity comes on the scene.
- iv. Beyond her gender, the woman is a widow, and therefore, has no one to provide for or protect her. She is alone and has no other recourse. She must get justice because there is no other avenue for her to pursue. She is at her wits end, the end of her rope. She has no other resources.
- v. So on one side you have a judge who doesn't care about anyone, who doesn't follow the laws laid out for him, and who does not have any compassion, and on the other side, you have one of the most disadvantaged people in Jesus' day seeking justice.
- vi. But God is completely other than the judge. He is a God of vindication and justice. Jesus promises that He will act swiftly. There are two ways to understand this. It can mean that He will act as soon as one seeks justice in the here and now, or it can mean that He will act swiftly when He finally brings justice.
- vii. God is going to bring His justice. That promise in itself is wonderful. There are people who will receive at least some justice here and now. But all of us will receive justice on the Day of the Lord. Either way, we must follow the command of Scripture to let God avenge. We must not take matters into our own hands. Even as we ask God to judge justly, we are putting it in His hands alone.

- viii. The other parable teaches us about the goodness of our God when we ask Him for something. God is unlike even the most generous earthly father. He will give us every good gift.
 - ix. James teaches us that God is the one from whom every good gifts comes. He is greater than those who have even the best intentions to be good to us. And He is perfectly good, seeing the beginning and the end, and blessing us beyond what we can imagine, protecting us in our weaknesses and taking care of our every need. He is not waiting for us to mess up. He is walking through things with us!
- II. Persisting in prayer recognizes the gravity of our needs.
- A. We find our troubles are worth the prayers.
 - i. There is a key to both of the disadvantaged characters in these two parables. Both of these people were determined and desperate. Their need outweighed anything else in their lives.
 - ii. The widow continued to come to the judge even though he ignored her. The neighbor continued to knock on the door even though the friend told him no.
 - iii. These people were bold in their need, bold enough to ignore the social conventions of bothering a neighbor in the middle of the night while everyone's asleep and bold enough to demand justice from an unjust judge repeatedly.
 - iv. When we come to God with our needs there are times when, for whatever reason, we do not wait on Him for the answer and the action of our request. We come to Him but we don't wait. We just ask and move on.
 - v. This shows the amount of importance that matter is to us, doesn't it? If we are willing to go to God for it, but not willing to wait for His answer, then why did we go in the first place?
 - vi. Some people will fight for a while, but then they will give up. They lack the faith to keep on going despite their situation. It's like they have their breaking limit and don't know how to get past it.
 - vii. **Illustration:** I like to run. I used to be much faster than I am today, and one of the hardest things for a runner to get past is that point at which their body is screaming for them to stop. For me, that's at about half a mile. This is when my shins are killing me, my lungs are on fire, and my muscles begin to ache. But in those times, I know that in just a little bit, my body will settle into the routine of continuing. But I have to fight that mental barrier to succeed.
 - viii. Others will turn to other ways of answering their needs. When they wait on God and reach their ceiling, instead of pushing through and trusting in God, they'll look for anything else that will do what they need.

ix. **Application:** God's people need to have a desperation to hear from Him and Him alone, to see Him act instead of something or someone else. I believe this is expressly why Jesus asks "When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?" We need to PUSH through. PUSH stands for Pray Until Something Happens. Don't lose heart. Don't let weariness take you away from God's answer. Press through! It's always darkest before the dawn!

B. We find our inability to solve the problems.

- i. Our typical nature is to look for solutions to our problems on our own or with our own resources. We look for ways to fix the problem that we can manage.
- ii. One of the cries of Scripture is for us to seek the Lord when we have problems, trials, and tests. God wants to be part of our lives and He wants to speak to us and help us through these things.
- iii. Some tend to only come to God after they have exhausted all other options. Especially in America, where we believe in individual ability and pulling yourself up by your bootstraps, we tend to take this approach.
- iv. So we come to God and we ask Him when we have already tried everything else. But why don't we come to God first? Perhaps God will give us wisdom at the very least, and perhaps He will do whatever we need!
- v. There is no disadvantage to seeking God first for our needs. These characters in these parables are desperate for God to move. They are crying out to their last resort, their only hope.
- vi. This is ground zero for them. If the judge does not come through, the widow has no other option. If the friend does not give bread, the neighbor will not be able to be hospitable to his friend, an absolute must according to their culture.
- vii. When we go to God, we go to Him because we have no other recourse, because we are desperate for Him to move in our situation. Without God acting, we are done. We cannot just go on to another avenue. He is our only plan of salvation!
- viii. **Application:** So if we must cry out over and over, we will because He is the only one who can change the situation. We can't fix it. Others can't fix it. So we get desperate for a move of God. We become determined to wait on Him, to listen to Him when He speaks and to do what He tells us to do. We persist in prayer because we are desperate for God to move in our lives!

III. Persisting in prayer recognizes the hunger of our hearts.

A. We find our need to connect with God.

- i. Why do we have to persist in prayer? Why do we have to wait on God? If He is ready and willing to answer our prayers, and He wants to give us good gifts, why doesn't He answer the very first time we ask?
- ii. While I don't suggest I know everything about these times in prayer, the very fact that Jesus gave us at least two examples of people being persistent in their requests suggests that persistence is a key to faith in action.
- iii. Prayer on its most basic level is seeking God, communing with Him. It is not about asking for things, but about spending time with a generous God. Included in prayer is worship, petition, confession, thanksgiving, and a host of other types of communication with God.
- iv. There are a few reasons Scripture gives for why we must persist in prayer at times. I am reminded of Daniel continuing to pray through on a matter in Daniel 10, and receiving communication from an angel that God had answered the prayer already, but the angel was detained in a battle with the enemy on his way to deliver the answer to prayer (Dan 10:12-14).
- v. Let us not discount the possibility of heavenly battle and spiritual warfare for our answers to arrive. Also, God works through time, and sometimes our timing does not match His timing. He has a bigger picture in mind than we often consider in our prayers.
- vi. Another possibility is that we are not listening to God's voice. I have found that it takes me a while to be quiet long enough to be open to God's responses. We have thought that prayer is just about us speaking to God, but prayer is a dialogue, and until you hear from Him, the prayer is not over. We ask, and then we leave, before He can answer. We must learn to wait and know His voice!
- vii. The Bible in other areas lays out qualifications for effective prayer. One of them is to have faith that God will answer the prayer (James 1:5-8). Another is to pray that God's will will be done in a matter. Many times I have found that praying leads me to line up with God's will rather than my own.
- viii. There is also prayer in Jesus' name. This does not mean that we have to stamp every quest with "in Jesus' name." A name in ancient times was equivalent to a person's reputation, so when we pray in Jesus' name, it is in keeping with His character and expectations.
- ix. For instance, we would not pray for God to let Satan have the world or His throne, for this goes against God's reputation. It goes against God's character and justice to allow Satan to have His place. He is not worthy. Only God is worthy. We must pray things that agree with God's character!

- x. Surely there are other reasons for persistent prayer. I believe that sometimes God wants to see our desperation and build our faith in Him to do what we need.
 - xi. In praying over time, the need grows deeper and becomes more important to us, and we begin to give it the representation before God that it deserves in our lives. We will find ourselves going to God for important needs rather than frivolous ventures.
- B. We find our peace in giving it to God.
- i. Scripture seems to point to God's honoring our persistence in prayer. Some pastors and religious leaders would suggest that if we don't receive an immediate answer we must not have faith
 - ii. But persisting in our prayers and requests requires more faith to continue asking and seeking God. Despite the situation, we continue to press in to God's presence and ask for Him to act in our favor.
 - iii. These parables each have a special place in Luke's Gospel. The parable of the persistent widow comes on the heels of talking about the last things and the coming of God's judgment in the Day of the Lord.
 - iv. The parable of the friend at night comes right after the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray and He responds by laying out the Model Prayer.
 - v. It is understood that persistence is part of our prayer life. The judge responds about the widow that she might wear him down with her persistence. But God does not have to be convinced of our needs. He wants us to seek Him to fulfill them!
 - vi. The friend at night acts shamelessly, going against cultural rules about banging on someone's door at midnight. He persists because of his need, and it is no different for those who persist in prayer.
 - vii. Our persistence shows the depth our need. Our persistence shows the desperation of our need. It shows our determination to hear from God and not look to other possibilities.
 - viii. Most of all, persistence boosts our faith in God because we go to Him to fulfill our need. He is the only one who can do what we ask. Our faith is reinforced when He acts, and we learn more about God and His character in the process.
 - ix. Sometimes when we give a need to God, and lay it down at His feet, we pick it up again when we leave His throne room. We must not do that! We must put things in God's hands and trust Him to take care of them! God wants us to fully give our needs over to Him and to trust that He will fulfill them only!

- x. **Application:** Let us never give up in our prayers and never grow weary to seek God's face in a matter. Let prayer be our go-to nature when a need arises. Let faith increase as we seek God and grow deeper in our walk with Him. May we all learn how to persist in our prayers and see God move in a special way like never before! May we put in the time and effort to see His hand move in our lives!

Conclusion

God is always waiting to hear from us. He wants to connect with us on a deep level and on a regular basis. When we persist in prayer, we show our determination to seek God on a matter rather than other possibilities. We long for His action in our lives. We are dissatisfied with any other solution than His. We become desperate and the weight of our needs is before us. We lay them at God's feet and let Him do His magnificent works in our lives. Persistent prayer is another method that God can use to deepen our character and trust in Him!

Action Points

- Is there a need that you have that you stopped praying for? Why did you stop? God is able to do all things, and we must continue to commune with Him in these matters.
- What is your breaking point? Many of us can only go so long as we seek God in prayer. Press through to receive your answer and grow closer to God in the process!
- Seeking God must become a discipline in our lives. We go to God first and often. Faith means coming back over and over because only God can answer our request.