

## Pray and Don't Give Up

Luke 18:1-8

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, Get justice for me from my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

**This is a parable of contrast.** The Bible is simply saying that God is **not like that judge who would not give in, who would not answer until the persistence came through.** He told this parable and tells in the very first verse of Luke 18 why He tells it, "Then Jesus told the disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." That is what Jesus wants to say to us: **Pray and don't give up.**

There are two different characters here: a **powerful judge** and a **powerless widow.**

In verse 2 we have the description of the judge, "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men." **This guy did not give a hoot about people.** He was **hard-boiled, un-sympathetic,** and **callus.**

Along comes a widow in distress in verse 3, "There was a widow in the town who kept coming to him with a plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'" **We really don't know what her problem was.** In

those days, widows had absolutely no rights. If you were a woman you did not have any rights, if you were a widow you definitely did not have any rights. You were the bottom of the social ladder, no resources. The word "widow" in Greek literally means, "forsaken" or "left empty."

But this woman was no pushover. She had a problem and she goes to this hard-boiled judge. Obviously, he would not give her what she wanted and we have a battle of wills in verse 4 and 5, "For some time he refused, but finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me I will see that she gets justice.'"

I imagine the disciples are getting a little humor out of this, seeing this unimportant widow intimidating this prestigious judge. She had no weapon but her persistence. She kept going back. She becomes a nuisance badgering him. Finally he meets his match and, exhausted, he gives in, and the Greek reads like this, "Because she keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming." The word "wear me out" in the Greek literally means, "to give a black eye, to bruise." In other words, he is saying, "I'm afraid this lady is going to hit me. She is so aggressive. She keeps asking and asking and finally just for peace and quiet I will give in."

Is that what God is saying? Do we have to threaten God to get Him to answer our prayers? Do we have to wear Him down with your prayers. That is exactly what Jesus is not teaching.

This is a comparison by contrast. Jesus is saying, "If a heartless judge will help out, how much more can we count on God who loves us to help us out?" Look at verse 7, "Will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? I tell you He will see that they get their justice and quickly."

**The point of the story is that God is eager to answer your prayers.** You do not have to *beg, borrow, gripe, complain, or pester.* God is saying to us, "I am not like that judge, I am eager to answer your prayers."

The question then comes up, "Why be persistent? Why aren't my answers answered immediately? Why should I keep on praying when the answer does not come in my time table?" I want to give you four reasons to keep on praying when there is no answer, four things that persistent praying does:

1. **Persistent praying helps me focus on God.** My prayer life is not to remind God but to remind me where the source is. God wants me to remember that He alone is the source of my answers to prayer, as seen in Philippians 4:19, "And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

**God wants us to see Him alone as the source of our needs, to look to Him.** When we have to pray about something over and over, whom do we look to? We look to the Lord. **Persistent prayer is not spiritual blackmail.** Persistent prayer focuses our attention. Have you discovered that we like to look to everybody else to solve our problem except the Lord? We look to our friends, we look to our family, we look to counselors, we look to the government, and we look to anybody, except the Lord.

Psalm 105:4 says, "Look to the Lord. Go to Him for help." **That is exactly what persistent praying does.** God often delays an answer to force you to focus on Him.

2. **Persistent praying clarifies my requests.** A delayed answer, many times gives me the opportunity to clarify what do I really want. Most of our prayers are too vague, too general, "God, give me some 'things'." **How are you going to know if He did it or not?** "God, bless my life." Sometimes a blessing is a problem. Is that what you are praying for? "God, give me lots of problems." **Be specific.** Don't be

general. Don't be vague. Time gives you the opportunity to clarify what you want. Waiting helps you refine the prayer. Do I really want it? It is a test. How badly do I really want it? If I don't want something more than just to pray for it one time I don't want it very badly. It is a test.

Zechariah 13:9 says, "I will test them as gold is tested and then they will pray and I will answer them." Time separates deep longings from mire whims. Is this an earnest desire or is it just a passing fad? In my own life, I have prayed for things and sometimes during the delay decided I really did not want them after all. It really was not what I needed. A delay is not a denial it is just a test. Christians are a lot like tea bags: you do not know what they are like until they get in hot water. Then what comes out tells you what is inside.

God delays the answer to test your spiritual desires. Do you really want it? It is not that God does not want to give it to you, He wants to know if you really want it. Do you want it enough to keep praying? Many times during a delay you will find that you modify your prayer, you change it, you clarify it, it becomes crystal clear.

Jeremiah 29:13 says this, "You will seek me and find me when you seek for me with all your heart." Nothing worthwhile is accomplished with half-hearted prayers. "Oh, God, please give me this. I am absolutely, somewhat, pretty sure, that it is something that I need." Half-hearted prayers. God says, "Seek for me with all your heart." He wants you to know if you really, really want it.

Persistent praying helps me focus on God. And it helps me clarify my requests.

3. Persistent praying prepares me for the answer. God always wants to do more than you are praying for. That should not come as a surprise! You are praying for something. God wants to do it bigger. He wants to do it greater. He wants to do more! Ephesians 3:20 says, "Now glory be to God, who by his mighty power at work within us, is

able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes." **God wants to do it bigger.**

**Sometimes we ask for a *small blessing*.** And God denies it. **Why? Because He wants to give a *bigger one*.** He wants to do it greater and He needs time to get you ready for it. I am thankful that some of my prayers have not been answered in my time schedule because when they were answered I would not have been ready for them at that particular time. God had to prepare *me*.

**There are changes God wants to make in me.** People say, "Prayer changes things." **It is true that prayer changes *things*.** But prayer changes *you*. And God is much more interested in *you* than He is in *circumstances*. **And He wants to make some changes in your life.** And often times, that is why there is the delay. Often as soon as you have made the change in your life the answer comes.

**Answered prayer is not a matter that we are waiting on God, it is a matter that God is waiting on us.** When we are ready, the doors of heaven open up and the answers come. Prayer is not some tug-of-war with God, where you are trying to convince Him. Our struggle primarily is with *ourselves*.

**God delays to help me focus on Him.** He delays to allow me to *clarify my request*. He delays so that He can *prepare me* for the answer.

**4. Persistent praying *strengthens my faith*.** Prayer goes hand in hand with faith. And faith is like a muscle and it grows by being stretched. **You have never stretched your faith until you have had to wait.** Praying persistently is a faith building exercise. Waiting tests your faith. A mark of maturity is how long you are willing to wait.

Galatians 6:9 says this, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." He is

saying, "Hang on! Be patient! The harvest is coming. Keep praying and do not give up!"

**God's delays are not God's denials.** They are there to focus you on God. They are there to clarify your vision. **They are there to prepare you for a greater blessing.** The longer you wait, the greater the miracle. They are there to strengthen and test and challenge and develop your faith.

Jesus concludes this parable this way in verse 8, "I tell you quickly he'll see justice. However when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" **Wasn't he talking about prayer in this story?** Why is He now talking about faith? Because *faith* and *prayer* go together.

At the end of that parable that Jesus tells in Luke 11:9 He says this, "So I say to you, Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks, receives. He who seeks, finds. And to him who knocks the door will be open. Which of you fathers if your son asks for fish will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you're evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him."

**Don't get discouraged – stand in faith!**