

Sermon: The Importance of Persistence

Text: Luke 18:1-8

Gary L. Wackler

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Introduction: We must continually keep in mind that Luke is allowing us to travel with Jesus and listen to conversations on the way to the cross. Jesus is talking about the end of his life and the coming of the kingdom both now and later. In this in-between period how should the disciples and the soon-to-be established church live and witness? They needed to know. We need to know!

One of the crucial disciplines to spiritual survival during any time is prayer. Luke tells us about Jesus' prayer life to serve as a model for us. Luke tells us about eight different occasions Jesus prayed that the other gospels do not even share with us. Luke also gives us unique insights into Jesus' teaching on prayer. Here in [chapter 18](#), Jesus returns to parable as a means of instruction.

One of the very unusual things Jesus does here is: he tells his listeners the purpose of his story right from the beginning.

Jesus makes it clear:

I. The Church Is Obligated to Pray (v. 1).

[Luke 18:1 \(NIV\)](#) ¹Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

A. Always

Of all the things Jesus asks us to do, prayer may be one of the hardest. Early in the Church's history there became a distortion of the practice of prayer. It was called monasticism. Monks thought it was God's plan for them to live secluded, contemplative lives, but God never intended his people to live in isolation as a daily practice. He even warns us about putting our lights under baskets and being hidden from sight.

What does it mean to “*always* pray?” Is it something like what the Apostle Paul told the Thessalonica church: [I Thessalonians 5:17 \(NIV\)](#) ¹⁷pray continually; or the “pray without ceasing” of the KJV? I think both are trying to impress on us that prayer needs to be a vital and frequent activity in our lives.

Frankly we cannot go too far wrong if we do our best to follow Jesus' example. Jesus always had time for people and many of their common everyday experiences: weddings, funerals, religious services, eating, drinking, teaching and sharing his life with sinners. Yet virtually everything Jesus did started or ended with prayer:

Jesus prayed at his baptism
all night before he chose the apostles from his disciples
on the Mount of Transfiguration
after the feeding of the 5000

The Last Supper had its benedictions

Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane
even on the cross ("Father, forgive them...")

We talk of Jesus' crucifixion as a critical event for our salvation, but it was the consistency of prayer that got him there. Prayer may not get us out of trouble, but it will get us through it.

Another reason we should always pray is to strengthen our relationship with God. The idea of prayer is always coupled with action. It is clear from Scriptures that work is involved with prayer. It is because prayer is a relationship. Like having a friend. "We do not make friends by nodding our head to a man across the street once a month." - Buttrick, *Prayer*, p. 33

Since the 4th chapter of Genesis we hear of people praying to God. [Genesis 4:26 \(NIV\)](#) ²⁶Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.

It seems to me *The Church Is Obligated to Pray*

B. Courageously (εγκρακεω)

I remember a few years ago in a Sunday School class we were trying to come up with more contemporary definitions for faith - and "trust" was mentioned. I think that is right, but I have another for you this morning. The word is "courage."

Abraham, Noah and Lot were more than men who would not give up. That may mean no more than being stubborn. We all know people who even when they know they are wrong or beaten just will not give up. Just like biblical heroes of the past we need to continue praying courageously and following God's will even when we do not "get it." As Jesus comes to the cross, courageously he says:

Luke 22:42-44 (NIV) ⁴²“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” ⁴³An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. // Later Jesus, himself, would feel deserted, alone, forsaken, without an answer. Helmut Thielicke stated the problem well when he said: “The silence of God is the greatest test of our faith.”

Let’s introduce the first character in this parable. Luke 18:2 (NIV) ²He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men.

II. The Church Is Obligated to Be Persistent (vv. 3-5)

The second character: Luke 18:3-5 (NIV) 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!’”

Persistence is an important factor in prayer. But persistence is a valuable commodity for every area of your Christian life, not just prayer. God blesses those who persist. So whatever you may be facing right now, don’t give up! If you’re ever tempted to give up, just remember the composer Brahms. It took him seven long years to write his famous lullaby - Some say because he kept falling asleep at the piano.

A. To see results

Most people want results now or yesterday. Our culture has very little patience with long-term solutions. Diets, financial portfolios, promotions, relationships of all kinds take time to do well. Prayer needs to be tenacious, never giving up until there is a clear answer from God. Patience needs to be learned over time. Part of the problem with our current culture is that many do not ever hear the word “no” or “wait.” I ran across this approach to prayer and our expectations of God:

“If what you pray for is not right and you’re not right and the time is not right, God answers your prayer by saying, NO. If what you pray for is right and the time is right, but you’re not right, God answers your prayer by saying GROW. If what you pray for is right and you’re right, but the time is not right, God answers your prayer by saying SLOW. If what you pray for is right and the time is right and you’re right, God answers your prayer by saying GO. Does God answer prayer? Yes, always, because he wants a relationship with all of us. This all happens in God’s perfect timing, in God’s perfect way, and when God sees you are ready!”

What God is not interested in, is seeing us just go through the motions in prayer.
The Church Is Obligated to Be Persistent

B. To show we are serious

Some people come to God initially to get some trouble in their lives fixed, but then drift away. God is interested in a long-term relationship with us. All of us need to show God we are serious about prayer and about wanting a deep relationship with him. God will not be coerced, manipulated or fooled by our approaches to him. In this parable the widow kept coming to see the wicked judge to the point that she was a bother to him - figuratively beating him up. She might have been actually making him look bad.

We need to understand our times and live a life accordingly in light of Jesus' second coming. **I Peter 4:7 (NIV)** ⁷The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

If we are serious about our commitment to God, if we love him, we will obey him. This is a clear biblical principle. God has asked (commanded) his people to pray always and not lose heart. There is a real sense in which prayerlessness is disobedience. The Hebrew writer tells us:

Hebrews 5:7-9 (NIV) ⁷During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

Prayer not only changes things; it changes us!

Luke 18:6 (NIV) ⁶And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says.

III. The Church Will See Justice (vv. 7-8a).

Luke 18:7-8a (NIV) 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? ^{8a}I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.

What does it mean to get justice and to be vindicated? I suppose in a way it is like the legal expression "to be made whole." Everything is put right; no one loses anything in the transaction.

Paul says: **Philippians 3:7-8 (NIV)** ⁷But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

The Church will see justice:

A. Quickly

Here is where we need patience. There continues to be a delay in Jesus' return for his Church. Like children on a trip in the car with their parents, you will hear: "are we there yet?" It may seem like a long time to some, but the destination will be worth it. Jesus died at just the right time (**Romans 5:6**), and he will come back for his Bride at the appropriate time as well.

God's timing is different than ours. He has a different concept of "quickly."

II Peter 3:8-9 (NIV) ⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

The Church will see justice, too

B. Because we are God's Chosen Ones

The Church is very much like this widow in the parable. She has lost her husband, and now is being taken advantage of and she feels unprotected. It is important to remember that we as a part of God's elect are not promised trouble-free lives. In fact at one level we should expect the opposite. Many of the saints from the past were poorly treated and did not receive the answer to their prayers or God's promises while here, but our day is coming and it will last through eternity.

Hebrews 11:39-40 (NIV) ³⁹These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. ⁴⁰God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Unlike the wicked judge our loving heavenly father does care about us. God loves us. We are not a bother to him. He wants to hear from us everyday and throughout the day. We are family, not just an occupational acquaintance.

Psalms 103:13 (NIV) ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;

Isaiah 49:14-16 (NIV) ¹⁴ But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.” ¹⁵ “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! ¹⁶ See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.

Conclusion: Luke 18:8b (NIV) ^{8b} “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

One of God’s biggest concerns is that you will not be found faithful when Jesus comes. It is not enough to have once confessed, repented, and been baptized. He will want to know how his relationship with us is at that time - at the end of time. He wants the Church to be faithful to the End!

I hope we can say at the end of our days what Paul said to Timothy.

II Timothy 4:7 (NIV) ⁷ “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Jesus warns in the gospels of a falling away toward the end of time. God will never fail *us*, but how about you? Where do you stand with the heavenly Father?

In First Things First, A. Roger Merrill tells of a business consultant who decided to landscape his grounds. He hired a woman with a doctorate in horticulture who was extremely knowledgeable.

Because the business consultant travelled a lot, he kept emphasizing to her the need to create his garden in a way that would require little or no maintenance on his part. He insisted on automatic sprinklers and other labor-saving devices.

Finally she stopped and said, “There’s one thing you need to deal with before we go any further. If there’s no gardener, there’s no garden!”

There are no labor-saving devices for growing a garden of spiritual virtue, either. Becoming a person who is persistent in prayer takes time, attention, and care.