

Learn To Pray  
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Allen Power

Luke 18:1-14

Opening question: I have often said of our kids (especially Matt): “That kid would make a GREAT SALESPERSON!” Based on your own experience with kids, can you imagine WHY I would say that? Have you ever given in just to get them to quit asking?

- In Luke 18, Jesus used two PARABLES to teach us about PRAYER.
- In the first He taught his disciples, and us, how to pray with PERSISTENCE and FAITH
- In the second, He had a strong word about HUMILITY in PRAYER for those who had become ARROGANT.
- Our GOAL? How can you and I learn to PRAY with PERSISTENCE, with FAITH, and in HUMILITY?
- Let’s start in verses 1-5

#### The Parable of the Persistent Widow

1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And 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, 5 yet 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!’”

- Verse 1: What does Jesus do in this verse? He summarizes the lesson before He begins to share the parable.
- He says: "I'm about to SHOW you that you SHOULD ALWAYS PRAY and NOT GIVE UP."
- Verse 2: What do we know about the judge? This judge "neither feared God nor cared about men." Basically, he was an APOSTATE and a CURMUDGEON.
- Question: What do you imagine this judge's personality was like?
- Verse 3: There was a widow. We don't know much about the widow but let's speculate.
- Question: Think about Biblical times and culture. What kind of obstacles probably faced this widow?

Warren Wiersbe tells us:

*The widow had three obstacles to overcome. First, being a woman she, therefore, had little standing before the law. In the Palestinian society of our Lord's day, women did not go to court. Since she was a widow, she had no husband to stand with her in court. Finally, she was poor and could not pay a bribe even if she wanted to. No wonder poor widows did not always get the protection the law was supposed to afford them!* — The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

- With all those odds stacked against her, **STILL** this woman **REPEATEDLY** comes to court to face this judge.
- Verses 4 and 5: The judge said, "This widow is drivin' me NUTS!" She's gonna "wear me out"!
- "Wear me out" literally translates "hit under the eye" in other words, she was going to give the judge a "black eye".
- I doubt the widow would have popped the judge with a left hook!
- When we use the expression "That really gave him a black eye!" what does it mean? Ruin his reputation.
- The judge just wanted her out of his courtroom...good riddance! But, she **GETS JUSTICE**.
- Now, Jesus told us the "moral of the parable" in the first verse. Always pray and don't give up.
- Let's look at the parable itself.
- Question: When we come to God in prayer, how are **WE LIKE THE WIDOW?**

Bill Hybels wrote:

*We humans are the widow. Impoverished, powerless, with no connections and no status, we are unable to handle our problems alone and feel that we have nowhere to turn.* — Bill Hybels. Too Busy Not to Pray (p. 27).

Question: What state of mind would the widow have to be in to **REPEATEDLY** SUBJECT herself to this mean, nasty judge? **DETERMINED**, for sure. **PERSISTENT**, yes. How about, **DESPERATE?**

In his book *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, Jim Cymbala of the Brooklyn Tabernacle described a **BREAKTHROUGH** in prayer in the early, dark days of that great church. He writes: *"I discovered an astonishing truth: God is attracted to weakness. He can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need him."*

This woman was not just **PERSISTENT**...she was **DESPERATE!** We need to ask ourselves: "When is the last time I've been **DESPERATE** in prayer?" "When I come to God with a **MAJOR BURDEN**, am I **BEARING** my soul...or just **BARELY** praying?"

What if the widow had just come to the judge one time and then never came back? When we train sales people in business we teach them that most sales are made after the fourth or fifth appointment. Unfortunately, about 80% of sales people don't go back after call number two. They don't **PERSIST**.

To be clear, God doesn't make us "jump through hoops" to get answers to prayer! But... Question: Why do you think he sometimes allows us to **PERSIST** for a while in prayer before He answers?

Ray Pritchard gives a good illustration:

*"Picture a father watching his four-year-old daughter trying to put together a puzzle. She tries and tries but she just can't get the pieces in the right place. Her father watches with great interest but he doesn't interfere. Finally, she comes over and crawls in his lap and says, "Daddy,*

*would you help me put my puzzle together?” He smiles and bends down and together they begin to pick up each piece. One by one they put the puzzle together.*

*Now why didn't the father help his daughter earlier? For one thing, she didn't ask for his help. For another, he wanted her to try on her own. And most of all, he wanted her to ask him for his help. When she did, he was honored and gladly helped her finish the puzzle.*

*Is this not a picture of how our Heavenly Father deals with his children? Although he longs to come to our aid, often he waits until we specifically ask him. Sometimes he wants us to come to the end of our own pitiful resources before he intervenes. When we cry out in despair, he is honored as we express our complete dependence upon him.” (<http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1998-01-04-If-God-is-Sovereign-Why-Pray/>)*

Personal Sharing: Have any of you ever had an experience where you PERSISTED in prayer? Maybe you're there RIGHT NOW PERSISTING? Anyone have something to share?

- Question: Why would Jesus choose an UNCARING, GODLESS judge like this one to make his point about prayer? If sheer persistence would wear down such an unjust judge...imagine the response we'll get from a LOVING FATHER!
- Jesus explains this in verses 6-8 by asking some RHETORICAL QUESTIONS:

6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.

- Verses 7 makes it clear, God will “bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out day and night.” He will “see that they get justice.” But, the definition of “quickly” is in His SOVEREIGN timing NOT OURS.
- Remember the “black eye” discussion? How could it apply to God? God has a reputation to uphold too! If God didn't take care of His children as he promised His reputation as a LOVING FATHER would be ruined.
- Then Jesus asks one more question to make another point in the last part of verse 8: However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”
- When Jesus returns to this earth, will He find his people FAITHFUL in praying PERSISTENTLY, CONTINUALLY, and DESPERATELY...BELIEVING that God will respond in LOVE according to His will?
- In another parable, Jesus teaches about our ATTITUDE in prayer.
- Verses 9-12: (IF TIME IS SHORT DUE TO SHARING, MOVE QUICKLY w/out questions)

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood up and prayed about[a] himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

- Verse 9: To whom did Jesus specifically TELL this parable? Jesus aimed it DIRECTLY at self righteous and sanctimonious snobs!

- Verse 11: Based on what we know about prayer in the temple and the fact that the Pharisee "stood up" it's pretty safe to assume he was praying ALOUD. In reality, this wasn't a prayer...WHAT was he really doing? Testifying about himself and how GOOD he was.
- Question: Is it wrong to compare your spiritual life to others? Why? What two outcomes might happen? PRIDE or DISCOURAGEMENT. Neither one is healthy...but, human nature being what it is, are we more likely to look at people who appear MORE HOLY than us and be discouraged or who appear LESS HOLY and be prideful?
- It's unlikely that anyone in this room would stand and say or pray what the Pharisee did OUT LOUD. But, have I ever THOUGHT IT? (pause)
- I'd like to think I'm not that "puffed up"...but comparing ourselves to others can lead to SUBTLE SANCTIMONY
- Then, Jesus introduces us to another man...a tax collector

13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

- Tax collectors in Jesus' time on earth were not IRS agents. What were they typically? Crooks, thieves.
- In contrast to a respected "church man" people would have seen a "crook, and robber" loyal to the Romans.
- He wouldn't even come near the other people in the temple...he wouldn't even look up.
- He was so GRIEVED about his sins he "beat his breast" and uttered the CONFESSION that should be on the lips of EVERY ONE OF US: "God, have MERCY on me, a SINNER."

Bill and Gloria Gaither wrote a song that could be the THEME SONG of the tax collector:

*If you could see what I once was  
 If you could go with me  
 Back to where I started from  
 Then I know you would see  
 A miracle of love that took me in its sweet embrace  
 And made me what I am today  
 A sinner saved by grace.*

[The second verse we could dedicate to the Pharisee]

*How could I boast of anything I've ever seen or done?  
 How could I dare to claim as mine the vict'ries God has won?  
 Where would I be had God not brought me gently to this place?  
 I'm here to say I'm nothing but a sinner saved by grace*

- The first man was all about ARROGANCE, and this man is all about HUMILITY.
- In verse 14: Jesus gave them the lesson:

14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

In Pastor Johnny's devotional book for this year, this past Thursday's devotional was written by Ronnie Floyd. Based on 1 Thessalonians 5:17 - "Pray without ceasing." - "Fight All Your Battles on Your Knees." He writes:

*"Battles are real in the Christian life. As long as our flesh is our home, we will be in battles. None are easy. Some are draining. Most are discouraging. All are exhausting. When I think of battles, I am reminded of a small figurine I have of a soldier returning to his home from the Civil War. Still in the saddle, but hanging over the horse in complete exhaustion, the figurine is entitled NOTHING LEFT. I have been in battles like that in my Christian life; I have come to God with nothing left."*

*"Are you in a battle today? ...Pray about the that battle and do not give up. Continue to do this daily. In time, God will prevail. And in the meantime, remember that the battle is not yours but God's."*

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Jesus made it very easy for both those He taught then and you and me today!
- He "book-ended" these two parables with the lessons he was teaching:
- Verse 1 says we should "...always pray, and never give up." PERSIST in PRAYER
- Verse 14 says if we want to be JUSTIFIED in God's sight we should pray like the tax collector not the Pharisee, because "...everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
- How about you? Is there a BATTLE or BURDEN looming over your head and you JUST CAN'T SHAKE IT? As the old hymn says "take it to the Lord in prayer." PERSISTENTLY, WITH HUMILITY, and WITH FAITH that God will answer IN HIS PERFECT WILL.