

Talks – Luke 18

Persist in Prayer. From Luke 18

Luke 18.1-8 (Message version) – Story of the Persistent Widow...

Jesus told them a story showing that it was necessary for them to pray consistently and never quit. He said, "There was once a judge in some city who never gave God a thought and cared nothing for people. A widow in that city kept after him: 'My rights are being violated. Protect me!'

"He never gave her the time of day. But after this went on and on he said to himself, 'I care nothing what God thinks, even less what people think. But because this widow won't quit badgering me, I'd better do something and see that she gets justice—otherwise I'm going to end up beaten black-and-blue by her pounding.'"

Then the Master said, "Do you hear what that judge, corrupt as he is, is saying? So what makes you think God won't step in and work justice for his chosen people, who continue to cry out for help? Won't he stick up for them? I assure you, he will. He will not drag his feet. But how much of that kind of persistent faith will the Son of Man find on the earth when he returns?"

God Cares For Us and Sometimes Hides For Us

OK so first up, God is not like the judge who didn't care for people! God is quite the opposite. Sometimes God seems to be distant. But he's not! Often I see this like a baby taking their first steps. Gradually the parent moves backwards and the baby has to walk a little further forward until they stand on their feet. So when God seems to step backwards, it could be that he's building your prayer and your faith!

Other times, we know from the Bible that God doesn't hide FROM us. Instead he hides FOR us. God is the revealer of secret, hidden things. We get a clue about this from the parables. Initially, Jesus spoke plainly. But as the religious nuts got on their high horse, Jesus began to speak in parables.

After telling the Parable of the Sower, the disciples asked Jesus about it and why he taught in parables. He told them that effectively a parable needs to be investigated to be understood and that people who didn't know God wouldn't really understand it. The truth, the deeper meaning was hidden for those who would look. God hides himself FOR his people, not from them...

Mark 4.11-12 – Jesus told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" (fulfilling Isaiah 6.9-10)

Matthew 13.11-13 (same incident). Jesus replied, "Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand."

Do You Pray?

Some parables have a hidden meaning. This one doesn't, with the Bible telling us in Verse 1 that it's necessary to pray consistently and never quit.

So the first question is... **Do you pray?**

Jesus speaks to his disciples on the Sermon on the Mount, giving them their orders. He says, "when you pray..." So do you pray?

Ephesians 6.18 – "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people."

So there are different types of prayers and there are different ways of praying!

Philippians 4.4-7 gives a few of these: Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Although God knows what we need before we pray, we still pray! John Wesley once famously said, *"God does nothing but by prayer, and everything with it."*

I've had seasons of all kinds of prayers – from being on my face, to tears for things I don't know about, to deep painful groans like I've got stomach pain; to literally punching and kicking the air as I pray; praying in tongues; rapping in tongues... God is so vast and made us so unique. He loves you the way he's made you – though he's always working on us!

God will also get you to pray uniquely. One way I believe I pray is through the notes on the guitar and my singing. This is very Biblical and powerful eg Revelation God speaking like a trumpet and Is 30.32 the Lord defeating his enemies to the sound of harps and singing and David playing his harp and the evil spirit leaving Saul (1 Sam 16.23). You have a prayer language, a way of praying. Run with it !

Perseverance is good but isn't the end goal !

The Bible is full of perseverance and persistence with God encouraging this. Remember Romans 8.28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

We are to persist and run the race for God (Philippians 3.9-10). But persistence and perseverance aren't the end goal! Romans 5.3-4 talks about perseverance producing character and character producing HOPE!

We find in 1 Thessalonians 5.8 tells us that hope is like a helmet of protection (see also Ephesians 6.17. And let's not forget from 1 Corinthians 13.3 that there is faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love.

Back to prayer... OK so sometimes the question comes: **When do I persevere in prayer and when do I know that it's time to stop.**

E.M. Bounds said, "Our praying, however, needs to be pressed and pursued with an energy that never tires, a persistency which will not be denied, and a courage which never fails."

So when is it good to keep praying and when do you know to stop?

The most obvious way is when the prayer is answered!! But apart from that...

A famous writer called LB Cowman ('Streams in the Desert') wrote that we should pray *"until you believe God – until with wholehearted sincerity you can thank Him for the answer."* (p17). It's really about believing God and trusting Him. Sometimes you pray and know it's done, other times you pray more persistently. You will usually know when to finish praying.

The Bible, talking about Abraham in Romans 4.3 says, *"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

It then goes on to say in Romans 4.20-22, *Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. his is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."*

From this we learn that when we pray, we know we can leave things with God. Sometimes we persevere in prayer, but not when the perseverance becomes desperation as in a sense of panic!

Christmas Evans said, *"Faith is not a sense, nor sight, nor reason, but simply taking God at his Word."* You may also find that over time, as a situation develops, you will pray new prayers in new ways.

Sometimes we can pray because of doubt, unbelief and because of the lies of Satan. Unbelief can tie the hands of God, though God is much bigger than all our neat theologies and ideas!! We know from Romans 4 and the example of Abraham that we can believe God and trust him with our prayers.

Faith in Prayer

True Story of George Mueller (fed 10,000 orphans in Bristol) on board a ship: *"We had George Mueller of Bristol aboard", said the captain. I had been on the bridge for 24 hours and never left it and George Mueller came to me and said, Captain, "I have come to tell you that you must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon". "It is impossible." I said. "Then very well, if your ship cannot take me, God will find some other way. I have never broken an engagement in 57 years; let us go down into the chart room and pray."*

I looked at that man of God and thought to myself, "What lunatic asylum can that man have come from, for I never heard of such a thing as this?" "Mr. Mueller", I said, "do you know how dense this fog is?" "No" he replied, "my eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God who controls every circumstance of my life."

He knelt down and he prayed one of the simplest prayers. When he had finished I was going to pray, but he put his hand on my shoulder and told me not to. "As you do not believe He will answer, and as I believe He has, there is no need whatsoever for you to pray about it." I looked at him and George Mueller said, "Captain, I have known the Lord for 57 years and there has never been a single day when I have failed to get an audience with the King. Get up Captain, open the door and you will find the fog has gone."

I got up and the fog indeed was gone and on that Saturday afternoon George Mueller kept his promised engagement.

Back to Luke 18... It's also worth considering that this was written in the light of injustice, in order to bring justice. God will bring justice for those who cry out to him day and night. The hard part is that we don't often understand or see this happen. It may also not happen in this life. But God sees our hearts and searches the deep things. He will bring justice ultimately.

Persevere in prayer but remember that God hears you as soon as you pray (in fact he knows what you're going to say before you say it). But true faith in prayer is believing and trusting God.