

MORE TO THE STORY: The Persistent Widowⁱ Luke 18:1-8

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, church family. Welcome to those of you that are guests today. Thank you for entrusting us with your Sunday. It is our prayer that our church already feels like home to you.

We love to connect with our guests. We would ask you to text the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. Just follow the instructions from there.

Or you can stop by Guest Connect located in the lobby. We have a team that would like to meet you and give you a gift as a way of saying thank you for being with us this morning. We have purchased new gifts that I think is pretty cool. And I will make my way there as well and I look forward to shaking your hand this morning.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

We have been in a teaching series called, "More to the Story," where we are studying some of the parables of Jesus. So far this summer, we have looked at the Parables of the Sower, The Mustard Seed, The Hidden Treasure, Pearl of Great Value, The Unmerciful Servant, and last Sunday, Pastor Jeff taught on The Good Samaritan. Aren't you grateful for Pastor Jeff?

Today we are looking at the parable of the Persistent Widow. So, I want to invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Luke chapter 18. We are going to be in verses 1-8 this morning.

Just to keep you in the loop, we will wrap up our teaching series next Sunday. And then after that, we are going to launch a new series called Blueprints: Building Families by God's Design. Whether you are preparing to start your family, in the middle of trying to figure out parenting, navigating brokenness in your family, or empty nesters, God works, if we allow Him, and He leverages the family to make an impact. You don't want to miss out on this study. I'm excited about it. That's where we are headed.

But in our study of Jesus' parables, we defined a parable as a teaching aid that teaches something unknown (spiritual) by relating it to something that is known

(tangible). It is to cast a spiritual truth alongside something that people would know. It's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus is the master storyteller and these stories are powerful and challenging to us today.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Kids begging for a dog

There's a question that our kids started asking us since they could speak. They asked it on repeat like a broken record. And they kept getting the answer, no. The question they bombarded us with was, "Can we get a dog?" To which I said, "We can barely feed the mouths we have now, much less another mouth, a dog."

But they kept asking and asking. So, we finally said, "When Reece (who was our youngest at the time) turns 5, we will get a dog." Well, then Eden came along, and they were all like, "Oh man! The clock starts over." So, we said when Eden turns 5 we will get a dog. I don't know why we said 5. I think we were hoping they'd forget about it, I guess.

Well, when Eden turned 5, they didn't forget. They were all like, "Eden is 5! You said we could get a dog when she turned 5!" Well, we moved to Longview shortly after Eden turned 5. We were in a rent house, so we didn't want to get a dog in case it messed up the house. But the kids kept asking and asking.

Finally, just before Eden turned 6, we got Jax. Guess what? Fast forward now 8 years and the kids are asking for another dog. It never ends!

Just like our kids, we all have situations that have gone to God and asked on repeat.ⁱⁱ God, my job. God, my diagnosis. God, my marriage. God, my kids. God, my finances. And we ask God over and over and over to show up in those situations, yet He seems unmoved. We even turn to God's Word and say things like, "But God, You said. I've brought this to You for years." Maybe even decades. Yet, you're not getting an answer. You're left wondering, "What am I to do?" What do you do when it seems like God is not answering your prayers? Maybe you're at a crossroads and you feel like giving up. Well, today, Jesus gives us an incredible answer. He tells a parable, illustrating how we are to navigate one of the sources of great frustration in our faith journey.

So, like the other parables we've studied, we are going to look at the parable, the point of the parable, and then the practice, the application we can take and apply to our lives today.

MESSAGE:

So, let's look, first, at...

1) The Parable.

Before we dive into reading the parable, let's look at the context for just a moment. Remember, when the Bible was written it was not written with chapter and verses. Those came later to help with studying the Bible and locating passages. The reason that is important here is because the first word of Luke 18 is, "And." This ties what Jesus is about to teach with what was just taught.

At the close of Luke 17, Jesus was answering a question posed by the Pharisees about when the Kingdom of God would come. Jesus taught that The Kingdom is already and not yet. Already in that people are coming to faith in Jesus and becoming citizens of Heaven. But not yet as the Kingdom of God will ultimately be established with Christ's return and the New Heaven and New Earth. But there are principles for navigating the already not yet aspects to God's Kingdom. One of those aspects is dealing with the brokenness of our world and seeking The Lord to work in the midst of that brokenness.

So, with that background, Jesus comes to Luke 18, verses 1-8. Let's read the parable in its entirety. ***1And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' 4For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' 6And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"*** Several things that I want to point out about this parable.

This is one of the rare parables where Jesus shares the purpose of the parable. He says He is telling this story so that His disciples would always pray to God and never give up. That's His answer to what we are supposed to do when we feel like God isn't answering our prayers. When we wrestle with the brokenness of the world. Keep praying. Don't give up.

What's interesting about this is that this is the second parable Jesus talks about with the same subject matter.ⁱⁱⁱ In Luke 11, Jesus uses the illustration of a friend banging on your door at midnight asking for bread. He says you would get up and go to the door because you realize that your friend is not going to stop knocking. It is the same teaching as the persistent widow in Luke 18.

Apparently, this is such a common problem. People for millennia have wondered what we are supposed to do when we pray, and nothing happens. We are to knock and knock and knock. To persist and persist and persist. And Jesus knows us so well. He knows our tendency to lose heart in praying. After all, Jesus experienced that with his disciples who couldn't even pray for one hour in the Garden of Gethsemane as He was preparing to go to the cross.

We struggle to pray, don't we? That is especially the case when it seems like nothing is happening. We think, well, I guess my own strength and ingenuity is going to come up with the answer to what I am facing, and we abandon seeking God. Maybe we struggle to really believe that prayer works.

But Jesus said, "I want to repeat a story. I've told this to you already. It is so vitally important. And I want to tell you up front. Always pray and don't give up praying, even when you're not getting an answer." More on that in a moment.

We also see in this parable two characters, an unrighteous judge and a widow. This is most likely a judge appointed by a Roman official. He is unjust because he is evil and has no care for what God or anyone else thinks of him. The word translated as "respect" toward man is literally translated, "put to shame." In other words, this judge had no shame and nothing anyone said or did would put him to shame. He had zero concern for people and their thoughts.

And then there is a widow. And right away we encounter the brokenness of the world in which we live in this already and not yet aspect of God's Kingdom. This widow has experienced the loss of her husband. She was helpless. She obviously had no one to defend her and she's having to go to the judge herself. She's begging for justice to be done in response to some wrong committed against her. She has an adversary, meaning someone seeking official damage.

Now, this is speculation, but it seems to fit this situation. The religious leaders of Jesus' day, called the Pharisees, were known to take advantage of widows.^{iv} We learn that from Matthew 23:14. Instead of caring for widows, like they were

urged in the Old Testament, they would bring frivolous lawsuits against them. They would then pay off a judge and the judge would issue a judgment against the widow. And without a means to pay it, widows would be forced to hand their homes over to the Pharisees in a settlement. That's probably what Jesus is alluding to in our parable of study. This poor woman has been wronged and she is relentless in asking the judge for justice. Again, that is speculation, but it seems to fit the narrative of Luke 18.

After a while of refusing to address her, the judge finally gives her justice. But I love his reasoning for it. Remember, he has no shame. But he is a narcissist. He says, "Oh my goodness! This woman keeps bothering me!" Literally translated it reads, "this widow causes me trouble, she wears me out."^v And he goes on to say, "I'm giving her justice so that she won't beat me down anymore." That phrase, "beat me down," literally translated means, "strikes me under the eye."^{vi} It's a boxing term.^{vii} Have you ever seen a boxer keep punching a cut around the eye. That's because it is annoying and hurts. The persistent widow is described as being so relentless in her request that she wears the judge out. So, he responds in her favor just to get her to stop.

Jesus then says, will God not give justice to His children? He will do so speedily. Jesus is saying that God is not like this unjust judge.

Now, at first glance, we have a tendency to say in response to this parable, "Is God like the unrighteous judge? Are we to pester God in order to get Him to respond? No, that is not what is going on here. This is a parable of contrast, not a parable of correspondence."^{viii} In other words, Jesus is contrasting God with the judge, not relating God to the judge. Do you see the difference?

God is not a cold-hearted adjudicator. He's a tenderhearted father. He is the contrast to the judge in this story! If an unjust judge would listen to a widow, how much more will God listen to His children? God, The Father, loves to hear our petitions. We don't ever bug God. That's what Jesus is saying here. This is a parable of contrast, not correspondence. We will come back to that here in a minute as well.

So, that's the parable. Now, let's look at...

2) The Point.

Jesus already gave His thesis sentence in verse 1. ***1And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart***. But I want to build on that and say it a little differently. **God invites us to persistently approach Him in prayer.** Let me say that again. God invites us to persistently approach Him in prayer. God welcomes our coming to Him. In fact, 1 Peter 5:7 tells us to, *"**[cast] all your anxieties on him** [meaning on God. Why?], **because he cares for you.**"* What do you do when you pray and pray and pray and nothing is happening? Well, you keep praying! God invites you to persistently approach Him in prayer.

I want to address another line of faulty thinking when it comes to the point of this parable. There are those that would take this parable and say, "All you have to do is keep bothering God and He will eventually give you what you want." Do you want that job? Well, keep pestering God and He will eventually give it to you. But that's not the point. Remember, this is a parable of contrast.^{ix}

Yes, we are to keep petitioning God in prayer. But if we are praying for something that is outside of His will, He is not going to grant it to us just because of our persistence. God is not a genie in a bottle. And sometimes God will answer, and sometimes His answer will be no. And there are times in my life that I have mistaken a no for an unanswered prayer. But even then, God invites us to persistently approach Him in prayer. But we have to realize that God will only move in accordance with His will and purpose.

I want to also further expound Jesus' point in contrasting the characters in this story with God and us. There are so many differences between the unjust judge and God and there are a ton of differences between us and the widow. But even the contrasts teach us something about the point of the parable. Consider the comparisons.

First, between God and the unrighteous judge. The judge had no concern for others. But God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. The judge doesn't want to be bothered. God invites us to come to Him. The judge was distant and removed. God is near the broken-hearted. Do you see the difference?

What about the comparison between us and the widow?^x The widow is a stranger to the judge. We are God's elect, in other words, His children. The widow was held at a distance. We are told to boldly approach the throne of

grace. The widow is forced to plea her own case. We have an advocate in the Holy Spirit. The widow's access to the judge was limited. Romans 5 says we have unlimited access to the creator of the universe by way of prayer. The widow's asking provoked the judge. Our asking God delights Him.

So, we have seen the parable itself and the point of the parable. That we are invited by God to persistently seek Him in prayer. Now, let's look at...

3) The Practice.

What are the takeaways from this parable for us today? How can we live out this parable? I know time is short, but I want to make mention of two things.

1) Recognize our desperation.

I think one of the reasons that we do not pray persistently, myself included, is that we fail to realize how desperate we truly are. If we were honest, I think most of us would say that we are pretty smart people. We work hard and find ways to overcome obstacles on our own. We are a self-reliant people.

But in reality, we are a very desperate people. In that way, we are like the widow in our parable this morning. Have you ever taken the time to think about the times that God worked on your behalf? How you would not be where you are or have what you have if it were not for The Lord's work in your life? I have been reminded just this week how dependent I am on God. When we see our need we are more apt to take God up on His offer.

One commentator I read this week said that, "Prayer at its core is a desperate conversation with your Heavenly Father where you tell Him all that you need, all that you're afraid of, all you are worried about, all you can't handle because you know how much you need Him."^{xi} Isn't that true?

Here's an honest perspective; Jesus was dependent on God The Father. He expressed that in prayer. His whole life was saturated with prayer. Just consider the occurrences in the Gospel of Luke^{xii}.

- Jesus prayed at his baptism, Luke 3:21.
- Jesus prayed through His temptation, Luke chapter 4.
- Jesus often got alone to pray, Luke 5:15 and 16.
- Before He chose His disciples He prayed, Luke 6:12.

- When the disciples put their lives at risk, Jesus took them up the mountain to spend time in prayer. That's Luke chapter 9.
- In chapter 11, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray.
- Jesus promises Peter that He would pray for him during his hour of trial, Luke 22:32
- Jesus commands the disciples to pray so they would fall into temptation, Luke 22:40
- And in Luke 23:46, Jesus' last breath was a prayer, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit."

If Jesus, God in flesh, was dependent on God and expressed that in prayer, how much more do we need to recognize our desperation and express it in prayer?

We could go on. The early church was dependent on God and that translated in prayer. Did you know that in the book of Acts, prayer is mentioned in every single chapter?^{xiii} If the early Church was dependent on God, then how much more are we today? Where would the Church be if it were not for the prayers of the saints that toiled in the work of the Gospel? Where would we be if it were not for the prayers voiced in the Church throughout the ages?

The point is very simple. What was so indispensable for the early church has become inconsequential in today's church. We look at prayer as something we do when everything else fails. But the early church looked at it as something they must do to see God work. They were faithful in prayer.

And the question Jesus asks at the end of this parable weighs heavy on us today. "*Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes [when He returns], will he find faith on earth?*" Why would Jesus include that statement in a story about persistence in prayer? Well, prayer is a measurement of our faith. The degree to which we believe in prayer is the degree to which we believe God and take Him at His Word. And that is correlated to the desperation we see in ourselves.

The second point of practice I want to mentioned today is to...

2) Prioritize prayer.

What happens when we lose heart in praying? We give up. We stop praying.

But Jesus said the point of sharing this parable was that His disciples should always pray and not lose heart. Why do we lose heart?

Well, if we are honest, we lose heart because of the amount of time it takes God to answer. We feel like we pray and pray and nothing. So, what's the point? But consider what Jesus says in this parable. Verse 7 and 8. *Will he delay long over them? ⁸I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.* Some of you are like, "Speedily?! I've been praying for decades!"

2 Peter 3:9 says, *"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness."* Listen, God's timing is always perfect. We may not understand it. But who can understand the timing of a God that is not bound by time?

If you are growing weary of praying for something, keep praying. God will answer in His perfect timing. And what if you and I stop praying right before God moves? God will not delay, and He will bring justice speedily.

Maybe another reason we lose heart in praying is because if we're honest, we compartmentalize our lives. We have our relationship with Jesus over here in the church compartment. We have our work lives in another compartment. Then we have our social lives in yet another compartment. We have our family in a 4th compartment. We think, prayer belongs in the church compartment, so we don't bring prayer into those other things.

God urges us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray without ceasing. That means prayer has to play a major role in all aspects of our lives. The truth is that we need Jesus as work. We need The Lord in our social lives. We need prayer in all aspects of our lives. Don't compartmentalize prayer.

Maybe another reason you are losing heart in persisting in prayer is because of unconfessed sin in your life. Unconfessed sin breaks fellowship with God. I'm not saying it reverses your salvation. But sin hinders our nearness to God. And perhaps you are carrying something that is hindering your ability to sense the nearness of The Lord in your life.

1 John 1:9, one of my favorite verses, says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Maybe you need to confess sin to God and remove the barrier that you've allowed to cause you to lose heart.

I love this parable. I know we are not supposed to have favorites, but this has to be my favorite parable we've studied so far. It seems so relevant, doesn't it? If you are here today and you feel like you are not hearing from God, don't stop praying. Recognize your desperation and prioritize prayer. Don't lose heart. God is working all things according to His perfect timing. Keep praying.

CONCLUSION:

Maybe you're here today and God has been speaking to your heart. What is it that He is revealing to you? Maybe you are realizing you've never been born again unto a relationship with Jesus. A nearness to God begins with a personal relationship with Christ.

The Bible says that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But God demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. And we experience salvation by trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior. Has there been a moment in your life that you have trusted Jesus as Lord? If not, or if you have questions about what that means, our elders will be here to visit with you about that at the end of our service today.

Maybe you are here today, and this parable has struck a chord. There's something you've been praying about for what seems like forever. You are beginning to lose heart because you just don't seem to be getting an answer. Maybe your response this morning is to allow our elders to join you in praying.

When the Israelites were battling the Amalekites, they were victorious so long as Moses' arms were raised. But when he grew tired of holding his arms up, he needed friends to come to his side and hold them up for him. Maybe you are getting tired of praying and you need someone to hold up your arms. You come this morning and our elders would love the opportunity to pray with you and over you.

I'm going to voice a prayer this morning. We will stand and sing. I'm asking you, during this song of reflection to listen to God's voice and be obedient to His prompting in your heart. Let's pray. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ *Works consulted in preparation for this message:* Thabiti Anyabwile, “Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke,” Holman: Nashville, 2017; John MacArthur, “*Persistent Prayer for the Lord’s Return*,” sermon published by Grace to You, December 3, 2006, accessed online: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/42-227/persistent-prayer-for-the-lords-return>; David Guzik, “*Enduring Word Commentary: Luke 18 – Prayer, Humility and Discipleship*,” published by Enduring Word Ministries, accessed online: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/luke-18/>; Mark A. Copeland, “*The Parables of Jesus: The Persistent Widow*,” published by Executable Outlines, accessed online: https://executableoutlines.com/topical_series/parables-of-jesus/pa_32.html; Skip Heitzig, “*Expound: Luke Chapter 18*,” message taught at Calvary Albuquerque, March 11, 2015, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/186/sermon/2507>; J.D. Greear, “*How to Deal with Unanswered Prayer*,” sermon preached at Summit Church, January 7, 2018, accessed online: <https://summitchurch.com/message/how-to-deal-with-unanswered-prayer/>; Robert Jeffress, “*Persistent Praying*” published by Pathway to Victory, June 27, 2022, accessed online: <https://ptv.org/broadcast-audio/persistent-praying-part-1/>; John Elmore, “*Pray Through to God’s Breakthrough*,” sermon preached at Watermark Church, 2023, accessed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQMuRH8qS2A>.

ⁱⁱ Adapted from John Elmore’s illustration.

ⁱⁱⁱ Copeland.

^{iv} Pointed out by Robert Jeffress.

^v Strong’s Concordance, 2873, kopos.

^{vi} Strong’s Concordance, 5299, hupópiázó.

^{vii} MacArthur.

^{viii} Taken from Skip Heitzig.

^{ix} Pointed out by Robert Jeffress.

^x Comparisons adapted from Copeland.

^{xi} J.D. Greear.

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} Ibid.