

The Gospel of Luke / “Always Pray and Don’t Lose Heart”

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If you’re a mom or a dad, or if you’ve just ever spent some time with young kids you’ve probably heard the phrase “look what I can do”

Hey. Hey. Look at me. Look what I can do.
Are you looking at me. Mom. Mom! Watch this!

Normally this is fine. Like totally normal little kid stuff, right?. They just want to share their lives and their hearts with us. But sometimes, let’s be honest, it can be annoying or just happening at a bad time. Maybe you’re working, or trying to entertain company and little Susie says: “Look what I can do. I can make my face red like a tomato.”

Or “Dad, Dad, Dad. Look at this giant TNT block I made in Minecraft. It’s going to shoot red stone everywhere and make withers spawn in the nether.”

And I’m like: “Wow. Ezra. That’s great. How about let’s do that in your room instead of in the middle of a membership interview with these nice new people who are coming to our church.”

This are funny and it’s a relatable experience if you ever spend time with kids and I was thinking about this as I was preparing for today’s sermon because when it comes to our relationship with God, we might see ourselves as a semi-annoying child coming in the room at the wrong time. We might think that our prayers and our needs bug God. And if we believe that about ourselves and about God, we might not pray at all. Sometimes we can even make this sound more spiritual to ourselves and think that out of respect and reverence we shouldn’t bother God because he’s busy with more important things.

But it is not out of reverence and respect that we don’t pray to our Heavenly Father. It is out of a false sense of self-sufficiency. To believe the lie that God does not want to hear from you is to miss out on having a faith that is alive and thriving, a faith in God that looks less like an intellectual ascent to concepts we say are true and more like an actual relationship with a loving Father.

So today, Jesus’s words are going to encourage us to come to him. Often and persistently. With the goal that our hearts would be full so that even as we face a world that is, at times, against us for following him and his way of living we can endure patiently with the knowledge that our Father is with us, for us and will one day make right all of the things that are wrong.

So as we consider our passage this morning we’re going to see that:

God’s faithfulness in mercy and justice produce enduring hope and faithfulness to pray in his redeemed people.

And our takeaways today that we don’t want to miss are:

1. **Get the point of the parable** (V.1)
“Always Pray and Don’t lose heart”
2. **Have a Persistent Pursuit of Justice** (V.2 - V.8a)
 1. When justice seems held back (the unrighteous judge and the widow)
 2. When justice is promised (the savior and his people)
3. **Persevere through Prayer** (V.8b)

Let's read through our passage one more time in full before we dig into it

Luke 18:1-8

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

So this passage is a little unique when it comes to the parables of Jesus. Parables are seemingly simple stories that communicate deeper truths. Jesus is fond of them in his teaching ministry. Sometime they are a difficult to understand. This especially true for their original audiences who are living before the gospel is understood. They were sometimes difficult for Jesus disciples. Sometimes they can be difficult for us.

Now there are some parables Jesus actually explains to the disciples. A good example would be the parable of the sower and the different kinds of soils in Luke 8. But here in Luke 18, the author of this book inserts himself and gives us the lens through which we should consider Jesus' words. Luke tells us what we ought to do with Jesus' words. Like I said this is unique and is the only time Luke does this with any of Jesus' parables.

Luke says in Chapter 18:1

18 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

When scripture tells us what we ought to do, well, we ought to take it seriously.

This is why we shouldn't begin to consider the parable until we consider for a moment Luke's framing of it.

He wants us to :

1. Get the point of the parable (V.1)

"Always Pray and Don't lose heart"

I don't think that it is a stretch of the imagination for us to assume today that most of us would like a more dynamic and vibrant prayer life than we have. Luke wants that for us too. Today Luke is telling us that Jesus' encouragement to us is to always pray. If you have been in church long or know your bible well, this language is not unfamiliar. Your first connection would probably be Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. "Pray without ceasing".

Always praying and praying without ceasing, this can seem daunting or maybe even impossible. How do I find the time? What do I even say? While this encouragement to always pray certainly includes private times of thoughtful prayer, prayer with family or members of your church, and even corporate prayer like we do together here on Sundays, this encouragement to always pray implies both informality and familiarity.

At its simplest definition, prayer is talking to God. I say that informality is implied in the command to always pray because it's would be impossible to do otherwise. Many, in fact, most of our prayers should probably exist in this category. What Luke is encouraging us to do today is to make prayer, communion and communication with our God, an important and normal part of our everyday existence. To always pray is simply to live in the reality of God's nearness, his power and his posture towards us as his

redeemed people and call on him throughout the day to acknowledge his grace and plead for his help. To do this as often as we think of it.

Prayer is one of the most important ways by which we can evaluate the health of our relationship with God. And we should do that. We should evaluate the health of our relationship with God. Are we near enough to him in prayer and through his word that we are familiar with him, his will and his desires for us? The reality is, we will either be near to God or we will be far from him. Many scriptures point to the fact that there isn't really an in-between.

If we're prayerless, this exposes a functional unbelief in God.

In the book of James chapter 4 verse 8 James says:
"Draw near to God and he will draw near to you"

The opposite is also true. Be really far from God, have nothing to do with him, don't talk to him, don't listen to his word and your experience will be that he will feel far from you. In prayer we come face to face with the God who is, acknowledging his rule and dominion in the world and over our own lives, admitting our dependence on him and living in that reality reorders all the other realities we encounter in life.

So when we're prayerless, something else will take the place of God and reorder things under it. Fear, a need for approval, anxiety, or a constant chasing after comfort. But if our relationship with the Lord is prioritized and we live each day in the reality of his love for us, seen supremely in Jesus laying down his life in our place so that our sins might be forgiven and we'd be restored to God, if that reality and relationship is as real as breathing than we can face every trial and difficulty knowing that we're not only not alone, but we're cared for, loved by, and provided for in every situation even if it doesn't feel like it. Because if we're always in prayer, we won't lose heart. That's the implication.

I think that it would be right to characterize prayer as a spiritual discipline and disciplines aren't often seen as cool or desirable. They are seen as chores. And spiritual disciplines can wrongly be seen as chores we do for God. But this is not the case. It couldn't be more wrong. Some spiritual disciplines would be regularly reading the scriptures, coming to church, praying the way we've been talking about. But are we doing these things for God's sake or are you doing them for your sake?

In a works based faith, prayer is something that we have to do for God to earn his favor. With grace based faith, prayer is something that we get to do because we already have God's favor through Christ.

So how do you think about prayer? Is it a chore? Is it purely perfunctory? Or is it the means by which you don't lose heart in a world gone wrong? Prayer is where our heart comes in line with God's and that is something we're in desperate need of. Prayer is where our hearts are changed to desire less of the things of the world and more of Christ's kingdom.

We can come to our Father in prayer because Christ came for us. That's what's encouraging. That's what causes us to take heart. That's what causes us to endure to the end when Christ will return. What Jesus has done at the cross has given us access to the Father, the help of the Holy Spirit, and new hearts that desire to come to God with everything and to submit our lives and our hopes every moment to him.

Are your prayers reflexive or reluctant? Are we coming to God with our prayers reflexively? Is it a reflex to pray and find our hope in him at all times? Or are we praying reluctantly? Sparsely. Are we assuming that we have no need to talk to him because he's going to do whatever he's going to do? If a high view of God's sovereignty has caused you to stop spending time in prayer, you're doing something wrong. If we don't draw near to the Lord, we will be far from him.

Last week in chapter 17 Tyler preached that following Jesus and pursuing his kingdom comes with a cost. For Jesus it came through a cross and his words to us were “Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.” Jesus told his disciples that in order to be found faithful they needed to reject false hopes in the world and seek the kingdom of God in Christ. To be found faithful, we need to stay prayerful.

Today we’re told to always pray and not lose heart in light of this teaching on being ready for Christ’s return. To live and endure and hope and pray in a world stained by sin, full of pain and disappointment. To endure to the end and be found faithful when it seems like so much is wrong and cannot be made right.

Now with this background and the encouragement to always pray let’s look again at the parable for today.

Luke 18:1-8a

18 And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” 6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.

I started this sermon by talking about kids being annoying and I’m going to do it again. Have you ever had a kid ask you for a snack? “I’m hungry. I want a snack. I want a bar. I want yogurt.” And you’re like “you just ate, no, I’m not doing it. You can wait until lunch.”

And they just keep asking and pouting and if they’re really young, they might even be crying, sobbing about apple sauce. And then your resolve breaks down. And you say to yourself “it’s just a snack, Jonny. Just give it to him. This isn’t worth it. I don’t care anymore.” And you give in and give the kid the bar, the puffs, or the pouch. They wore you down, but at least there’s peace for now.

A bad application to today’s message would be “Pray to Jesus until you annoy him enough that he gives into your demands” But that’s not the point and it’s definitely not a good healthy way to think about God and our relationship with him.

What would be more accurate to say would be that this parable illustrates a comparison between an unrighteous judge and the God who saves us. These are very different characters and yet when dealing with either of them Jesus’ words to us reveal to us that in both scenarios we should:

2. Have a Persistent Pursuit of Justice (V.2 - V.8a)

1. When justice seems held back (the unrighteous judge and the widow)
2. When justice is promised (the savior and his people)

Justice is a heavy word that has been tied to heavy things in our culture and politics today. I use it knowing this but also want to be clear that I’m using it in its broadest sense. To pursue justice is to pursue what is right and to desire that what is wrong would be made right.

In the first part of this section, we have the parable and we see the story of widow’s persistent pursuit of justice wearing the unjust judge out. This is our first section in the point.

1. When justice seems held back (the unrighteous judge and the widow)

So who is this Judge in the story? What do we know about him?
Right out of the gate in verse 2 it says

Luke 18:2

2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.

It goes on to say later in verse 4

he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice,

This man is self aware, right? But he's not very aware of God's word.
In light of the rest of scripture, this man is a bad candidate to be a judge.

Proverbs 9:10

*10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*

God's word points out this man is missing an essential quality when it comes to offering sound judgment: wisdom. And he lacks wisdom because he doesn't fear God. And because he doesn't fear God, he treats people poorly and sees them only as tool for his own advancements. How we view and relate to God has a profound impact on how we view and relate to people.

Look at how Jesus describes the character of the judge:

- He doesn't fear God
- He doesn't respect man
- He is annoyed by those who need him
- He feels no shame at being what he is
- He only helps others to help himself
- He is a man without a conscience

He's the worst. How can the widow receive justice through a man like this?
The widow is our other character in the parable and in the story she represents helplessness.

Her entire active part in the parable is confined to verse 3

Luke 18:3

3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'

We don't know who her adversary was. We don't know exactly what her problem was.
All we know about her was that:

* She is a widow

And not just widow, but one who has to seek justice for herself because no one else will. Normally in this day, a woman wouldn't even go to the court about legal matters. Her husband would or a male member of her family would. But in this story this widow is alone. She had no one to advocate for her.

*** She kept coming**

Though she had been refused many times by a man who most likely had a reputation of not helping people in situations like hers, she would not stop coming. Though the situation seemed hopeless she kept returning to the only one who had any power to change her situation.

*** She Sought Justice**

We don't know what happened, but with Jesus telling the story to us the way he is, we know that the widow in this story was seeking the right thing. She was being wronged and needed others to help in ways that she could not help herself.

Luke 18:3-5

3 there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'"

This is an underdog story, right?

We love stories like this. Despite her station and the odds that were against her, she fought the power. She kept showing up.

Luke 18:5

5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming."

The phrase "so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming" literally means in the original language "so that she won't give me a black eye". And in that day it would've been understood to mean - "if she keeps coming, she's going to put me to shame." If the judge couldn't quiet her down, he'd look bad. He needed to handle it.

This woman was fired up. She knew she had no other hope and the only hope she had, as imperfect as it was to keep coming. The adversity of the situation inspired her. And it inspires us. These are stories we love. Because justice was being held back she went after it even harder. Because of the gravity of her situation, the hopelessness of it, the adversity of dealing with the legal process in that day, and the fact that the guy at the top was corrupt - all of these things encouraged her even more to pursue what was right.

Jesus finishes the parable in V. 6

Luke 18:6

6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says

It's like he says to the disciples and to the crowd that's within earshot:

"Did you hear what even the bad guy did?

"Did you hear that the helpless person received justice from the unrighteous judge simply because she kept coming?"

And Jesus, as the master teacher turns it around:

Look at verses 7-8

Luke 18:7-8

7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.

And this is our second sub point here where we're encourage to have a persistent pursuit of justice.

2. When justice is promised (the savior and his people)

In Jesus' relatively few words after his parable it's as though he is saying:

"God hears your prayers and he is nothing like that judge."

God doesn't refuse to hear the cause of the helpless, in fact at the cross Jesus solves our greatest problem and defeats our greatest adversary at the cost of his own life which he willingly lays down.

He knows that on our own we have no one to advocate for us and so he becomes our advocate. Look what it says in **1 John 2:1-2**

2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

While the widow keep hopelessly coming back again and again only to be refused Jesus says

7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.

As was studying the text I had hard time really grasping the meaning of these last verses.

They just read funny in my head. They didn't sound right. Has that ever happened to you?

I was stuck on the phrase "will he delay long over them?". And so I looked at all the translations and original languages and found that this word delay is most often translated as "long-suffering". It's a delay with patience. It is choosing to not give someone what they deserve. God's long-suffering includes in its meaning the idea of God patiently withholding his wrath against sin.

At first, knowing this made me more confused and I had to work it out like a child.

Will God delay long over them?

Will God long suffer over them?

Will he delay, will he long suffer injustice over his elect?

This is an interesting way to say this because God's elect, those whose faith for salvation is in Christ, are the people that he does long-suffer. He has a special, choosing relationship with his people where he does withhold and delay wrath for the sake of their salvation. If you're a believer today, before you knew Christ, God long-suffered you.

He withholds his wrath and extends his grace. As sinners, we could not know God or his salvation without his long-suffering. Without God's long-suffering we could never hope to approach him in prayer effectively.

But when it comes to giving God's people justice, the making right of things that are wrong, things that have been done wrong against his elect, his people, his children - will God long-suffer that? Will he patiently delay? The answer is no.

And not only is there not a delay, Jesus says: "He will give justice to them speedily"

Now you may hear that and say "I don't see it yet. Where is God's justice?" Maybe this story hits so close to home that you actually have an accuser or an abuser, or an adversary in your life who because of Christ's work in you and your obedience to him is antagonizing you, and sinning against you. All I can say to you is that justice is promised. Pray and do not lose heart.

The widow returned over and over and over again to a judge who didn't want to hear from her. But we have a God who hears our prayers day and night and who invites us to come to him with even the little things. To come to him with everything. This is where faith is required and in this parable Prayerfulness = Faithfulness.

How long will God's justice take? It will take as long as God wills but it will come. And when Christ returns for his people vindication will be coming suddenly and swiftly and certainly, but until it does are you going to be faithful?

Justice and vindication means nothing unless right now there is faith on earth. There is no hope in heaven for those who don't have faith on earth and what should that cause us to do? To pray and to not lose heart. Will you pursue it now and pour out your heart to God as fervently as the widow did? Justice is promised for us. Jesus' encouragement is how much more should we pray when we know that God wants to hear from us? We're not the annoying kid bothering him. We are beloved.

The continual returning of the widow to the judge brings him shame, but God encourages us to always come. And this brings us to our last point

3. Persevere through Prayer (V.8b)

For context I'll back up a little.

Luke 18:7-8

7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

That last sentence hits hard. In v7 Jesus asks and answers a question about the character of God. In v8 he asks a question about us. I said earlier that in this passage prayerfulness=faithfulness. In Jesus' own words God's elect cry to him day and night. Brothers and sisters, if you want to be found faithful when Christ returns we ought to be prayerful. You are not a person of faith if you are not a person of prayer.

When the son of man comes, will he find faith on earth? Or when the son of man comes will he find that we have stopped praying and lost heart?

The Pastor and Author John Piper said:

Faith is the furnace of our lives. Its fuel is the grace of God. And the divinely appointed shovel for feeding the burner is prayer. If you lose heart and lay down the shovel, the fire will go out, you will grow cold and hard.

Today we are encouraged to feed the fire of our faith with prayer. Here are some closing thoughts.

If the fires of your faith are growing cold or have already grown cold - the solution is to come back and to come back in prayer. Don't give up. Come back. It's the most natural thing to do. This is what Christians do. We repent and believe.

If you think spiritual disciplines like prayer are a chore and you don't like that you feel that way, you want things to change I want to invite you to do 2 things. First, consider the gospel and what it's done for you. It has restored you to God through Jesus. Pray with thankfulness for the gospel. Remind yourself of it throughout the day. God has proven his faithfulness to us there. When we struggle to see his faithfulness in our daily lives, remembering when he changed the outcome of our eternal lives will bring peace that we can access and orient our thoughts and actions around.

And then, though I said earlier that the simplest definition of prayer is talking to God, a more complex definition would include that prayer is also listening to God. That's the second thing I want to encourage: We need to develop the habit of quieting our hearts and listening to God. Maybe prayer feels like a chore to you because you are simply tired of hearing yourself talk and you haven't taken the time to listen and meditate on what you already know about God through his word. If you don't know how to begin doing that, the best way that I have found to do this is kind of listening is right after reading scripture. Give yourself a few minutes to be quiet in light of scripture and God's Spirit at work in your heart will reveal ways you need to grow, people who need prayer, and a multitude of ways that God is worthy of our praise for his unique and specific kindness in our lives.

If you're here and you're not a believer today. We are so glad that you are here. Like all of who are believers I'm sure you have seen the perversion of justice in this world. You have seen unrighteous judges take advantage of the marginalized and the oppressed. You have rightly seen that things in this world are wrong and you have felt in your heart that it is hard to hope.

Without Jesus, the best we can hope for is the justice of the unrighteous judge. That sometimes we can receive a surprising win from a begrudging source after exhausting ourselves. But Jesus' words to those who love justice and seek mercy are "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Jesus words are "will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily."

God has promised justice, but first we need mercy. First we have to deal with our own injustice against God because this is the greatest injustice. We sinned against him and we could not make it right and the punishment for our sin was death. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, he desires to make us alive in Christ, to forgive us of our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If today you want to know more about how to take those first steps to follow Jesus and be forgiven of your sins so you can live a life that is pleasing to God, talk to me or any of the other Pastors and elders here. We would love to help you.

If God can make right the greatest wrong, we can trust him to, in his perfect timing, make everything else right. It's through communion with God in prayer that our hearts access enduring hope. God's faithfulness in mercy and justice produce enduring hope and faithfulness to pray in his redeemed people.

For all of us, in the days now between Christ's first coming and his second coming may we be people of faith by being people of prayer. Because God wants to hear from us may we keep coming back to him and not lose heart. The door has been opened to us. He will not refuse us and those who endure to the end with a persistent and prayerful faith will be saved.