

A Parable on Persistent Prayer (Luke 18:1-8)

The future, by Jesus' own declaration, holds hardships for God's people. Before Jesus returns there will be trials and persecution. However, Jesus will come again and when He does, He'll rescue His people and establish His kingdom on earth. This was the message Jesus shared with His disciples in Luke 17:22-17, the context in which He then presented His parable on persistent prayer in Luke 18:1-8. God's people, even during severe hardship and even in the light of Jesus' seemingly delayed return, must never give up on prayer. This specific message holds a general application to all believers today. We must persist in prayer and resist giving up. We must persevere in prayer until God gives His answer.

The Purpose of the Parable— We should keep on praying and never give up (18:1).

Luke provides Jesus' intention in this parable, making clear its purpose. We must never lose heart in praying for God's help.

Jesus exhorted His followers always to persist in prayer (18:1a).

Jesus had been speaking directly to His disciples about His future return (Luke 17:22), and He continued to speak to "them," that is, His disciples by presenting a parable. Jesus often spoke in parables, presenting word pictures illustrating spiritual truths. The purpose of this parable was twofold. First, the parable was intended to encourage the disciples to keep on praying. They had both the opportunity and the obligation, captured by the word "ought" or "should," to pray and to pray "always." Continual prayer is a matter of a heart that's in communion with Jesus Christ. Paul exhorted believers to "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It's not always the length or our prayers that matters as much as the length of time between our prayers. As believers, we have the amazing privilege of praying at any and every moment.

Jesus exhorted His follower never to tire of prayer (18:1b).

The second purpose of this parable, a corollary to the first, was to encourage the disciples never to tire of prayer. Prayer should never become a burdensome discipline, though prayer is intensive spiritual work. When it comes to prayer we tend to wear out over time, especially when God's answer is seemingly slow in coming. We become tired in prayer and tired of prayer. But Jesus, through this parable, reminds us not to grow tired of prayer. We must keep praying.

**The Presentation of the Parable—
Even unjust people respond to persistent requests (18:2-5).**

This parable presents a simple story, one that has doubtless occurred too often over time. It involves an unjust judge and a victimized widow.

A widow requested justice from an irreligious and uncaring judge (18:2-3).

Jesus didn't attribute injustice to all judges but described a "certain" judge who lived in a "certain" city. This particular judge had two major character flaws. First, he did not fear God. He was irreligious. His failure to fear God would necessarily guide his judgments to be based on his own whims since he failed to regard any external authority. His second character flaw involved his attitude toward people. He didn't respect people. He didn't respect their needs, their dignity, their rights. He simply didn't care.

The second character in this parable is a widow who lived in the same city. Widows in ancient times were often destitute and hopeless, in need of protection and in this case justice. This widow had been cheated in some way and took her case to the uncaring judge. She pleaded for justice. "Vindicate me against my adversary," she cried. Her request was fair and desperate. Only the judge could grant her justice.

After putting off the widow's request the uncaring judge granted justice due to the widow's persistence (18:4-5).

The uncaring judge, having heard the widow's plea, did nothing for her. Time passed. Apparently, the widow kept going to the judge and begging for justice. After an extended period of pleading on the part of the widow, the judge arrived at a conclusion in his heart. He acknowledged that he didn't fear God or respect people. His settlement of the case would be only a selfish decision. He was tired of hearing this widow's constant pleas! In the judge's opinion this widow was a nuisance. She kept troubling him with her need. Therefore, the judge would grant her justice. He would vindicate her with the expressed goal of keeping her from constantly coming to him and wearing him out. The word that Jesus chose to describe the judge's sense of frustration literally means to strike someone under the eye or to give someone a black eye. This judge felt that the widow's persistent request was beating on him so severely that he simply wanted her to go away. Therefore, this irreligious and uncaring judge granted the widow justice.

**The Point of the Parable—
Because God is just, He will answer our persistent prayers (18:6-8).**

Having presented His parable, Jesus explained to His disciples the point He was driving home in their lives. They were to persist in their prayers.

In contrast to the unjust judge, God will willingly administer justice to His persistently praying people (18:6-8a).

Jesus instructed His disciples to pay attention to the unjust judge's words in the parable. This judge responded to the widow's requests because she didn't stop asking. Of course, God is no unjust judge. This parable offers a contrast. The unjust judge responded to the widow's request out of selfish motives, to get her off his back. However, God is loving and just. He willingly administers justice in response to His people's prayers. Jesus assured His disciples that God would vindicate them in their times of trial. He will do so for all His chosen ones who cry out to Him day and night. In other words, God does answer our prayers. Often our prayers, for reasons known to God alone, must be repeated over and over again. God knows the best way and the best time for answering our prayers, so we must keep praying.

Verse 7 ends with a phrase that's difficult to interpret. Literally it asks whether God "will be patient toward them," toward His chosen ones. It may imply that God will not delay His answers as did the unjust judge. However, the parable and the context seem to imply that God does in fact delay His answers at times but does so patiently as He listens to our repeated prayers. Furthermore, God will eventually vindicate His people. He will answer our prayers. Jesus said that God will respond "quickly." In the broader context of Jesus' second coming this word might best be taken as "imminently." Jesus can return at any moment and bring justice to this world. Therefore, God's people must persist in prayer.

In contrast to an unbelieving world, God's people must continue to pray in faith (18:8b).

Curiously, Jesus concluded this parable and its explanation with a question: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Jesus often referred to Himself as the Son of Man, a messianic title. When He comes to establish His earthly kingdom will there still be people of faith? There are indications that the world will increasingly reject God as the end approaches. However, this question may be directed toward God's own people. Will God's people maintain their faith until Jesus returns? Will we be faithful in prayer? Taken in this sense, Jesus' question poses a challenge to all believer to remain faithful in prayer until the very end. In other words, we must persist in prayer and resist giving up.