

Teach Us to Pray, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Persistence, Faith, and the Will of God

Luke 18:1–8; 1 John 5:14–15

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This is the most doctrinally sensitive lesson in the study, because it sits directly on top of two great pastoral wounds: the pain of unanswered prayer and the damage done by prosperity and “name it and claim it” teaching. The doctrine at stake is the relationship between persistence, faith, and the will of God. Luke 18 calls us to persistent, never-quitting prayer; 1 John 5 grounds our confidence in asking “according to his will.” Held together, they teach confident, bold, persistent prayer that is at the same time humbly submitted to a wise and good God. The teacher must refuse to collapse either truth: prayer is not passive resignation that never asks boldly, and it is not a technique that compels God to deliver our demands.

Be ready to address the errors directly and tenderly. The “name it and claim it” or word-of-faith teaching says that faith is a force, that praying with enough belief obligates God to grant health, wealth, and success, and that unanswered prayer is proof of insufficient faith. This is false to Scripture and cruel to sufferers, heaping guilt on the grieving and the sick. Counter it from the text and from the clear witness of Scripture: Jesus prayed “not my will, but yours” (Luke 22:42); Paul prayed three times for his thorn to be removed and God said no, giving sufficient grace instead (2 Corinthians 12:8-9); and John explicitly conditions answered prayer on God’s will (1 John 5:14). God answers in his wisdom, sometimes yes, sometimes no, sometimes wait. Differently-answered prayer is not a sign of weak faith, and prayer is never a means of guaranteeing comfort, health, or wealth. Teach this so clearly that no one leaves believing their unanswered prayer is evidence that God has failed them or that they have failed God.

The formational aim is to keep weary people praying. Jesus told this parable precisely so that we would “not lose heart.” Many in your class are quietly discouraged about some long, unanswered prayer, and some may be carrying false guilt from bad teaching. The goal is to free them: to assure them that God hears, that persistence pleases him, that submission to his will is not defeat but trust, and that they can keep praying with confidence in his character even when the answer tarries or differs from their hope. Aim to send them home both praying again and resting in God, holding boldness and surrender together the way Jesus did in the garden.

Question 1

Student Question:

Luke tells us Jesus spoke this parable “to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1), and contrasts a corrupt judge with God, who “will give justice to his elect,

who cry to him day and night” (vv. 7-8). How does the contrast between the unjust judge and God work, and what does the parable actually teach about persistence in prayer?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start by securing the parable’s stated purpose, which Luke hands us in verse 1: Jesus told it “to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” Everything in the parable serves that aim. The danger Jesus is targeting is not under-asking but giving up, the slow quitting that overtakes us when prayers seem to go unanswered.

Get the logic right, because it is easy to misread. The unjust judge is a contrast to God, not a portrait of him. Jesus reasons from lesser to greater: if even a godless, uncaring judge will finally grant a powerless widow’s plea simply because she persists, how much more will God, who is righteous and who loves his elect, give them justice? The point is not that we must wear God down as the widow wore down the judge. The point is that God is utterly unlike the judge, so we have every reason to keep praying.

Underline verse 7-8: God “will give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night. ... he will give justice to them speedily.” God is not reluctant. The delay we experience is not divine indifference; it is the outworking of his wisdom and timing in a fallen world that still groans for the justice he will surely bring. Persistence, then, is not nagging a reluctant deity but the natural, trusting cry of people who know their Father will act.

Apply it gently. For the discouraged, this parable is pure encouragement: keep praying, do not lose heart, your God is good and he hears. For everyone, it reframes persistence not as a technique to force an answer but as faithfulness that refuses to give up on a God worth trusting.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The parable’s stated purpose: always to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1)
- The unjust judge as a contrast to God, not a picture of him
- Lesser-to-greater reasoning: how much more will a good and just God answer his children
- God’s eagerness to give justice to his elect, not divine reluctance (vv. 7-8)
- Persistence as trusting faithfulness, not the wearing down of a reluctant God

Discussion Prompts

- What does Luke tell us is the whole point of this parable?
- How is the unjust judge a contrast to God rather than a comparison?
- If God is not reluctant, why does Jesus still call us to persistent prayer?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus' great concern in this parable is that we not "lose heart" and stop praying. Where have you lost heart, growing quiet or giving up on a prayer that once mattered to you? What has caused you to stop, and what would it look like to begin praying again?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question goes straight to the wound Jesus is addressing: losing heart. Many in the class have a prayer they once prayed fervently and have slowly abandoned, not by a decision but by a quiet draining away of hope. Create a safe, unhurried space for them to recognize where that has happened, without pressure to share details.

Treat discouragement with compassion, not rebuke. Losing heart in prayer is not a mark of wickedness; it is the natural fatigue of the human heart under prolonged silence. Jesus does not scold the discouraged; he tells them a story to strengthen them. Let the class feel his tenderness toward the weary pray-er.

Then call them gently back to prayer. Invite each student to identify one abandoned prayer and to begin praying it again, in light of the God this parable reveals: not the reluctant judge but the just and loving Father. Reassure them that returning to a long-silent prayer is not foolishness but faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Losing heart as the quiet draining away of hope in prayer
- Compassion rather than rebuke toward the discouraged pray-er
- Jesus strengthening the weary with a story rather than scolding them
- Returning to abandoned prayers as an act of faith

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you quietly given up on a prayer that once mattered?
- What caused you to stop, and how did it affect your view of God?
- What abandoned prayer might you begin praying again this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

John writes, "This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us" (1 John 5:14). Why does John tie our confidence in prayer to asking "according to his will," and how does this condition give us more assurance rather than less?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring in 1 John 5:14 as the anchor that keeps persistent prayer from drifting into wishful thinking: "if we ask anything according to his will he hears us." At first the condition "according

to his will” can sound like a limitation that weakens the promise. Help the class see it is the opposite, the very thing that makes the promise trustworthy.

Explain why. A promise that God would grant whatever we ask, regardless of his will, would be terrifying, because we often ask for things that are foolish, harmful, or contradictory. We do not actually want a God who rubber-stamps our every request; we want a God wise enough to give what is truly good. By tying answered prayer to his will, John assures us that God hears and acts, but always in line with his perfect wisdom and goodness. That is far better than a blank check.

Clarify what “according to his will” does not mean. It does not mean we may only pray for things we are already certain God wills, which would silence most prayer. We are invited to ask boldly for anything, then to entrust it to his will, as Jesus did in Gethsemane: honest desire (“let this cup pass”) inside deeper submission (“yet not my will, but yours”). We pray our real desires and we surrender the outcome, both at once.

Land on the confidence John intends. The word he uses is “confidence,” boldness. Praying according to God’s will is not a timid, hand-wringing prayer; it is bold prayer that rests in the assurance that God hears and will do what is best. Far from weakening prayer, submission to God’s will gives it backbone, because it leans on the wisdom of God rather than the cleverness of our requests.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Answered prayer grounded in asking “according to his will” (1 John 5:14)
- God’s will as what makes the promise trustworthy, not a weakening limitation
- The danger of a God who would grant our every foolish request
- Bold asking held with surrender, as in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42)
- Submission to God’s will giving prayer confidence and backbone

Discussion Prompts

- Why does John tie our confidence in prayer to God’s will?
- How is a God who answers according to his wisdom better than one who grants our every wish?
- How did Jesus model asking boldly while submitting to the Father’s will?

Question 4

Student Question:

Our response to a delayed or different answer reveals what we really believe about God. When it seems God has said no or not yet, how do you tend to react, with anger, withdrawal, quiet despair, or trust? What would it look like to keep trusting God’s goodness in the waiting?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns to the heart's reaction when the answer is no or not yet. Our response to delay and denial exposes what we truly believe about God. Help the class honestly identify their pattern: some grow angry and accusing, some withdraw and stop praying, some sink into quiet despair, some grit their teeth in resignation that masquerades as trust.

Normalize the struggle without excusing unbelief. Even faithful saints wrestled; the psalms of lament cry "how long, O Lord?" Honest wrestling is not the enemy of faith. What matters is the direction we wrestle, toward God or away from him. The lament psalms model bringing our confusion and pain to God rather than abandoning him over it.

Point toward trust as a deliberate act. Trusting God's goodness in the waiting is not a feeling that arrives automatically; it is a choice to keep believing his character when his ways are hidden. Encourage students, in their unanswered area, to voice both their honest disappointment and their deliberate trust to God, the way Psalm 13 moves from "how long?" to "I will trust in your steadfast love."

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our reaction to delay and denial as a revealer of what we believe about God
- Common reactions: anger, withdrawal, despair, resignation
- Honest lament as faith wrestling toward God, not away (Psalm 13)
- Trust in the waiting as a deliberate choice, not an automatic feeling

Discussion Prompts

- How do you typically react when God seems to say no or not yet?
- What is the difference between honest lament and walking away from God?
- What would it look like to choose trust in your current unanswered prayer?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus ends the parable with a piercing question: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). What kind of faith is Jesus looking for, and how is faith that keeps praying and trusts God's character different from a "faith" that treats believing hard enough as a way to guarantee the outcome we want?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Take up Jesus' closing question: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8). Notice that Jesus links persistent prayer with faith. The faith he is looking for is the faith that keeps praying and does not lose heart, the faith that trusts God enough to keep crying out even through long delay. This is crucial for defining what biblical faith actually is.

Define that faith carefully, because the word is so often abused. The faith Jesus commends is trust in God himself, in his character, goodness, and promises. It expresses itself in persistent prayer and in continued confidence that God hears and will act rightly. It is relational and God-centered.

Contrast it sharply with the counterfeit. A popular but false notion treats “faith” as a force or a technique: if you believe hard enough, picture it vividly enough, and refuse all doubt, you can guarantee the outcome you want. On that view, faith is aimed at the result, and God becomes the mechanism for delivering it. Scripture knows nothing of such faith. Faith is not confidence that we will get what we want; it is confidence in who God is. The first makes a god of our desire and a servant of the Almighty; the second bows to God as God.

Apply it. Real faith and the will of God belong together. The believer with strong faith is not the one who has talked himself into certainty that God will do a specific thing, but the one who keeps trusting and praying to a good God even when the outcome is uncertain or disappointing. That faith is what Jesus longs to find, and it is the faith this lesson aims to build.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus linking persistent prayer with the faith he seeks (Luke 18:8)
- Biblical faith as trust in God’s character, goodness, and promises
- Faith expressed in continued prayer and confidence that God hears
- A clear rejection of “faith” as a force or technique that guarantees outcomes
- Faith centered on who God is, not on securing what we want

Discussion Prompts

- What kind of faith is Jesus looking for at the end of this parable?
- How is trusting God’s character different from believing hard enough to get a result?
- Why is faith aimed at God himself sturdier than faith aimed at an outcome?

Question 6

Student Question:

It is possible to have great confidence in prayer that is really confidence in getting what we want, rather than trust in God himself. Be honest: when you pray, is your faith more in God’s character and goodness, or in securing a particular result? How might this passage reshape where your faith is actually resting?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites painful but freeing honesty: is my faith really in God, or in getting what I want? Many sincere believers discover that their “confidence in prayer” has quietly become

confidence in a desired outcome, with God reduced to the means. When the outcome fails, their faith collapses, not because God failed, but because their faith was misplaced all along.

Help them test it gently. A faith resting in God's character remains steady even when the answer is no, because God is still good. A faith resting in the outcome shatters when the outcome does not come. The unanswered prayers in our lives are often the very places where God exposes where our faith has actually been resting, and invites us to move it onto firmer ground.

Call for a relocation of trust. Encourage students to take a current request and consciously shift their confidence from the result to the Person: "Father, I want this, but my faith rests in you, not in getting it." This is not lowering our expectations of God; it is raising our trust above our circumstances.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Distinguishing faith in God from faith in a desired outcome
- Misplaced faith collapsing when the outcome fails
- Unanswered prayer exposing where our faith truly rests
- Relocating confidence from the result to the Person of God

Discussion Prompts

- When you pray, is your faith more in God or in getting a particular result?
- How do unanswered prayers reveal where your faith has been resting?
- What would it look like to move your trust from the outcome to God himself?

Question 7

Student Question:

Scripture teaches that God answers the prayers of his people in his wisdom, sometimes with yes, sometimes no, sometimes wait, always for our good and his glory. Using these passages, how can we hold together persistent, confident prayer and humble submission to God's will, so that delay is not read as denial and a different answer is not read as rejection?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question asks the class to hold together the two truths the whole lesson balances: persistent, confident prayer and humble submission to God's will. Many people assume these are in tension, that to submit to God's will is to stop praying boldly, or that to pray boldly is to refuse God's will. Scripture holds both at once, and the mature pray-er learns to as well.

Teach the framework of God's answers: he responds to the prayers of his children in his wisdom, sometimes yes, sometimes no, sometimes wait. All three are real answers, not failures of prayer. A no can be as loving as a yes (as with Paul's thorn), and a wait can be God's kindness,

preparing us or others for what we cannot yet receive. This framework rescues believers from reading every delay as denial and every denial as rejection.

Show how this keeps persistence and submission together. We keep praying (persistence) because God invites it and because we trust him to act; we hold the outcome open-handed (submission) because we trust his wisdom more than our own. Jesus in Gethsemane is the perfect model: he asked earnestly and repeatedly for the cup to pass, and he surrendered fully to the Father's will. He did not stop asking, and he did not demand. That is the shape of mature prayer.

Apply it pastorally. When God says no or wait, it is not because our faith failed or our prayer was defective. It is because our Father, who sees what we cannot, is answering in the way that is truly best. This frees us to pray boldly without fear and to accept God's answers without despair. Persistence and trust are not rivals; together they form the faithful, unsinkable prayer life Jesus is after.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holding persistent prayer and submission to God's will together, not as rivals
- God's answers as yes, no, or wait, all of them real answers (2 Corinthians 12:8-9)
- Delay not equated with denial; a different answer not equated with rejection
- Gethsemane as the model: earnest asking joined to full surrender (Luke 22:42)
- Trusting that God's no or wait flows from his wisdom and love, not our failure

Discussion Prompts

- How can we pray persistently and still submit to God's will at the same time?
- Why are no and wait real answers and not failures of prayer?
- How does Jesus in Gethsemane show us to hold boldness and surrender together?

Question 8

Student Question:

Take one specific prayer that God has not answered the way you hoped. What would it look like to bring that honestly to God, to keep praying about it, and yet to entrust it to his wisdom, trusting that he hears you and will answer in the way that is truly best?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question brings the lesson home to one specific, unanswered prayer in the student's own life. Invite each person to hold that prayer before God honestly. The aim is to model a way of praying that is neither denial of the pain nor abandonment of the request, but honest persistence wrapped in trust.

Walk them through what this looks like in practice: name the desire plainly to God (he is not offended by our honesty), keep bringing it to him rather than burying it, and entrust the outcome to his wisdom, asking him to do what is truly best even if it differs from the request. This is the Gethsemane pattern applied to their own situation.

Reassure the wounded. Some carry guilt that their unanswered prayer means they lacked faith. Gently dismantle that lie one more time: God hears, the delay is not their failure, and continuing to trust him in the unanswered place is itself an act of strong faith. Encourage them to keep praying this prayer without losing heart, resting in the God who hears.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Bringing a specific unanswered prayer honestly before God
- Honest persistence wrapped in trust, neither denial nor abandonment
- Applying the Gethsemane pattern to our own unanswered prayers
- Releasing false guilt that unanswered prayer proves a lack of faith

Discussion Prompts

- What is one prayer God has not answered the way you hoped?
- What would it look like to keep praying it while entrusting it to God?
- How does it free you to know that an unanswered prayer is not proof of weak faith?

Question 9

Student Question:

Some teach that if we pray with enough faith and claim it boldly enough, God is obligated to give us health, wealth, or whatever we name, and that unanswered prayer simply proves we did not believe hard enough. Using Luke 18:1-8 and 1 John 5:14-15, explain why this “name it and claim it” teaching is false and harmful, and how Scripture instead presents confident, persistent prayer that is submitted to the will of God, never a means of compelling God or guaranteeing the outcomes we desire.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point not only of the lesson but arguably of the whole study’s treatment of difficult prayer, and it must be taught with clarity and great pastoral tenderness. State the error plainly: the “name it and claim it” or word-of-faith teaching holds that faith is a force, that if we believe strongly enough and speak our request boldly enough, God is obligated to grant it, and that unanswered prayer is proof we did not believe hard enough. This teaching commonly promises health, wealth, and success to those with sufficient faith.

Refute it from the two texts and the wider witness of Scripture. Luke 18 grounds answered prayer in the goodness and justice of God, who gives to his elect what is right, not in the

intensity of the petitioner's belief as a force that compels him. And 1 John 5:14 explicitly conditions confident prayer on asking "according to his will," not according to our will however fervently expressed. Beyond these, Scripture is decisive: Jesus himself prayed "not my will, but yours" (Luke 22:42); Paul, a man of great faith, prayed three times for relief and received God's no, with the answer "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). If faith were a force that guaranteed outcomes, none of this would make sense. The doctrine is simply false to the Bible.

Name the harm, because this is not merely an academic error. "Name it and claim it" teaching is cruel to the suffering. It tells the grieving parent, the chronically ill, and the poor that their unrelieved pain is their own fault for lacking faith. It makes God a vending machine and the believer a manipulator, and it sets people up for a crushing crisis when the promised results do not come. Many have abandoned the faith over the false promises of prosperity teaching. Handle the wounded in your class with care; some may have been told their loved one died because they did not believe enough. Tell them plainly that this is a lie, and that God's no to a faithful prayer is never a verdict on the strength of their faith.

Then set the true picture firmly in its place. Scripture presents confident, bold, persistent prayer that is submitted to the will of God. We ask freely and keep asking; we trust God to answer in his wisdom, whether yes, no, or wait; and we rest in the truth that he is good and that he hears. Prayer is never a means of compelling God or of guaranteeing health, wealth, or comfort; it is the trusting communion of children with a wise Father. This is not a smaller hope than the prosperity gospel offers; it is an infinitely greater and sturdier one, because it rests on the unchanging character of God rather than on the fragile strength of our own believing. Send the class away free of false guilt and confident in a God who can be trusted with every prayer, answered or not.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- A clear, direct rejection of "name it and claim it" and word-of-faith teaching
- Faith as trust in God, not a force that obligates him to grant our requests
- Answered prayer grounded in God's goodness and will (Luke 18:7-8; 1 John 5:14)
- Jesus' "not my will, but yours" and Paul's unhealed thorn as decisive evidence (Luke 22:42; 2 Corinthians 12:8-9)
- The cruelty and harm of blaming unanswered prayer on insufficient faith
- Prayer never a means of compelling God or guaranteeing health, wealth, or comfort
- Confident, persistent prayer submitted to God's will as the true and sturdier hope

Discussion Prompts

- How do Luke 18 and 1 John 5 together refute the idea that strong faith forces God's hand?
- Why is it both false and harmful to say unanswered prayer proves a lack of faith?

- What does truly confident, persistent, submitted prayer look like in place of “name it and claim it”?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Luke 18:1-8 and 1 John 5:14-15, with their call to persistent prayer, their confidence grounded in God’s will, and their warning against losing heart. Name one prayer you will keep bringing to God without losing heart, and one way this study is teaching you to pray with both bold persistence and restful trust in God’s wise and good will.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the lesson into a resolve to keep praying without losing heart. Trace the path once more: persistent prayer that does not give up (Luke 18:1-8), confidence grounded in asking according to God’s will (1 John 5:14-15), and the steady refusal to read delay as denial or to measure faith by results. This is prayer that can survive in the real world of unanswered and differently-answered prayers.

Press for both halves of the lesson’s balance. Ask each student to name one prayer they will keep bringing to God without losing heart (persistence), and one way they are learning to rest in God’s wise and good will (trust). The healthy goal is a believer who prays boldly and surrenders restfully, like Jesus in the garden.

Close by praying together over the room’s unanswered prayers, modeling honest asking joined to trust in God’s will. Where there are wounds from past teaching, speak the gospel comfort plainly: God hears, God is good, and no faithful prayer is ever wasted. Let the class leave encouraged to keep praying and freed from the lie that their unanswered prayers condemn them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Synthesis: persistent prayer that does not lose heart, submitted to God’s will
- Refusing to read delay as denial or to measure faith by results
- Spiritual formation: praying boldly and resting restfully at once
- Gospel comfort for those wounded by prosperity or word-of-faith teaching

Discussion Prompts

- What prayer will you keep bringing to God without losing heart?
- How are you learning to rest in God’s wise and good will?
- How can this class encourage one another to keep praying through long delays?