

Teach Us to Pray

Lesson 9: Persistence, Faith, and the Will of God -- Luke 18:1–8; 1 John 5:14–15

She had nothing. No husband to speak for her, no money to grease the wheels, no powerful friends to lean on the judge. In her world, a widow was about as low and as ignorable as a person could be. And the judge she had to face was a hard man who, in Jesus' blunt words, "neither feared God nor respected man." By every earthly calculation, her case was hopeless. But she had one thing left, and she used it relentlessly. She kept coming. Day after day she planted herself in front of that judge and pressed her plea, until finally, worn down, he gave her justice just to be rid of her.

Jesus tells this story, Luke says, "to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." That little phrase, not lose heart, lands on something tender in all of us. Because most of us have prayed for something that mattered deeply, and kept praying, and heard nothing. The bill did not get paid. The marriage did not heal. The diagnosis did not change. The wandering child did not come home. And somewhere in the silence we were tempted to conclude that prayer does not work, or that God is not listening, or that we simply do not have enough faith. We were tempted to lose heart and quit.

This lesson sits right on that tender place, and it must be handled with honesty. Jesus is not promising that persistent prayer is a lever that forces God to deliver whatever we demand. That is a cruel teaching that has shipwrecked many. The widow's judge is the opposite of God, not a picture of him. Jesus' point runs the other way: if even a corrupt judge will finally answer persistent pleading, how much more will a good and just God answer his children who cry to him day and night? And John supplies the anchor that keeps this from drifting into wishful thinking: "This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."

That is where this lesson begins, with a widow who would not quit and a promise that does not depend on twisting God's arm. We are invited to pray boldly, persistently, and confidently, and at the same time to rest in the will of a Father who answers in his wisdom, sometimes yes, sometimes no, sometimes wait. Read these verses slowly, especially if you are tired of praying for something. They are meant to keep you from losing heart.

Group Discussion: Almost everyone has prayed earnestly for something and not received the answer they hoped for, and many quietly conclude that prayer does not really work or that they lack enough faith. Why do you think unanswered prayer shakes people so deeply, and what unhealthy ideas about prayer and faith does it often expose?

Personal Reflection: Think of a prayer you have prayed for a long time without the answer you wanted. How has that affected your praying, and your view of God? Have you been tempted to lose heart, to quit, or to wonder whether the problem is your lack of faith?

Read Luke 18:1–8; 1 John 5:14–15

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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.

10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, Paul's thorn and God's answer, "My grace is sufficient for you"; Luke 22:39–44, Jesus in Gethsemane praying, "Not my will, but yours, be done"; Romans 8:26–28, the Spirit helping us pray, and God working all things for good; James 4:13-15, planning and praying with "if the Lord wills"; Psalm 13, an honest lament that moves from "how long?" to trust in God's steadfast love.