

Practicing Prayer | WEEK FIVE Video Manuscript

Praying with Persistence and Longevity

“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not lose heart.” These words are from Luke 18 verse 1. We have learned and hopefully experienced in the last few weeks that God hears us, speaks to us and that we can go to Him with confidence. However, a reality of prayer is that sometimes the timeline for answered prayer is not quick or apparent. God can feel silent or things don’t seem to change at all. Jesus knows, and in Luke He is acknowledging and encouraging the disciples to not lose heart in prayer when answers don’t seem to be coming. He reminds us, in all things, in all situations, in all circumstances, pray and don’t lose heart. Don’t give up hope. There are things in life that require prayer for the long term, they require us to pray with determination and stubbornness. To pray the same prayer over and over and over and over again. So for this week and weeks to come, we are going to practice praying with persistence and longevity.

So what is the parable that Jesus told His disciples to show them “that at all times they ought to pray and not lose heart?” The parable is known as the persistent widow. There was a judge who did not fear God and didn’t care about the people or what they thought about him. Over and over a widow would come to him and beg for justice against her adversary, and over and over he would say no. Finally, annoyed enough the judge relented and granted her request so that she would stop coming to him. He gives her what she wants so that she will leave him alone. We learn that we are to be this stubborn, to be this persistent in bringing our requests to God. This is the example that our prayer lives should remain focused on a request until we receive a response from our Lord. We come to him flippantly with the fleeting cares of the day, that once spoken are immediately forgotten. Rather we come to Him with expectation and the longevity to plead and beg Him for a response until He grants a response. Pray and do not lose hope.

But Jesus has more to say, because unlike the unjust judge, God does not get annoyed with our stubborn repetitive requests. He does not grow weary, nor do we bother Him. In Verse 6, Jesus is clear to point out the contrast between this evil judge, and our Holy Father. Will God delay? Will He put off His very people whom He has chosen and loves? Will he not respond? Of course not. He will see to it that they have justice, and they have it in a timely manner. Echoing the sentiment found in Luke 11:1-13, where Jesus upon request, teaches His disciples how to pray, saying; “if you who are evil can do this how more will our Heavenly Father do?” So, if an unjust judge can grant a request out of annoyance at the persistence of the widow, then how much more will our Heavenly Father respond to our petitions and pleading with compassion, mercy and love? So. Much. More.

Jesus, like a good teacher, ends with a question that makes His disciples really stop and examine themselves while simultaneously driving home the point. He says all this and ends with “however, when the Son of Man comes will He find faith on the earth?” Will He find disciples who are persistent in prayer and stubborn enough to over and over come before Him? Not disciples that

are discouraged but expectant, and hopeful, full of heart and confident that a good God will in the right time respond to their pleas and petitions? Jesus encourages us and wants us to pray with persistence and longevity. And this is what we will practice week and for the weeks to come.

So we have to ask ourselves the same question, will God find faith in us? Will He find people who believe what He says and does? Do we have persistence in our prayer life? Do you come to the Lord over and over again with the same requests with hope and full heart? Or with bitterness and skepticism? Do you truly believe He will answer your prayers eventually or do go through the motions because you feel like you have to?

Over and over we see stories from the bible of God's people crying out to Him over long periods of time, and in the right timing God responds.

Israel is stuck in slavery for hundreds of years and cries out for rescue and at the right time God calls up Moses to deliver them.

David, who was anointed to be King as a youth, waits and prays for something like 15 years on God's timing. For so long he is asking for deliverance from a crazy king who wants to murder him until he is eventually crowned.

Hannah, who year after year, was provoked and berated for not being able to have children, pleads with the Lord for a child, to the point that she appears drunk praying at the temple. Eventually her request is granted through the baby Samuel which means "because I have asked him of the Lord."

Anna, a prophetess who was married in her youth but too quickly becomes a widow, and spends the next 77 years of her life, serving in the temple with prayer and fasting in dependence upon the Lord. She is among the first to recognize and proclaim Jesus as the messiah.

So many more stories contain this same truth, God's people, who plead and pray over time will eventually receive a response from Him. The common thread in these stories is persistence and longevity in prayer with expectation and hope in the Lord. Faith.

So this is your homework for this week and the weeks to come, or maybe even the months or years to come. What requests do you bring to the Lord over and over again? Are there prayers you have given up on? Do you need the Lord to help you overcome the bitterness of unanswered prayer and teach you to pray with a full heart? Choose something this week that you feel the Lord wants you to pray over but doesn't seem to have a quick or easy resolution. Pick something that might feel impossible. That one family member who is aggressively resistant to Christianity. The coworker who is content to be lost in their sin. A broken relationship that appears to have no way of ever being repaired. Whatever it is that the Lord reveals to you, pray with persistence. Pray daily, frequently over and over again with hope, until He responds to your plea. This is what we will begin this week, and what probably won't be answered until long after this study has ended. But the hope and intention is to begin this practice in community and accountability to be carried on for the rest of your life. Jesus told us we ought to pray at all times and not lose heart.

Practicing Prayer | WEEK EIGHT Video Manuscript

The Lord's Prayer

As I have done ministry over the years there is one theme that I find the need to emphasize over and over as I teach and lead in different spaces and to different groups. It's the idea that God cares about the state of your heart over the actions you perform. I used to tell my high school students, God doesn't care about what you do, He cares about your heart. Now obviously what we do matters, so know that I don't mean to be flippant. What I mean to communicate with this phrase is the heart of the gospel. We don't have to perform for God to accept us or love us. What makes us acceptable is Christ and the posture of our hearts towards Him. Do we believe and have faith in Jesus? Or are we leaning on our merit? Do we bow our hearts in submission to the king and savior? Or do we show off our goodness? God wants our heart's desire to be for Him alone, and nothing else. Our sanctification means we are being made holy. We are being formed into the image of Christ. God will be continually shaping our hearts for the rest of our lives, and prayer is one avenue with which He forms us. We will conclude our time together by talking about how the Lord shapes our hearts through prayer.

Let's think about the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. In Luke 18 Jesus describes two men's prayers. The first a pharisee, who considered himself better than others and prayed with boasts of his religious merits. He wanted to be seen and heard by others, he wanted to exalt himself. His prayer was not about God or really even to God. The text even says, "he prayed to himself." The second man was a tax collector, and was probably hated by most people. He stood out of the way, trying not to be noticed but could not hide the shame his sin caused. Not even able to look up, he simply asks God to be merciful to him, a sinner. Jesus points out the contrast of these two men's prayer and praises the tax collector as the one who went home justified. Jesus says: *"for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."*¹ Prayer that shapes us comes from a place of humility. We must bow our hearts before the Lord.

Remembering our identity should move us to humility because we are fully dependent upon God for everything in our life. As created beings we can do nothing apart from Him. To exalt yourself to any other status is to step away from humility and towards pride. We cannot exalt the Lord while simultaneously trying to also exalt ourselves. It will be one or the other. We must pray like the tax collector.

So how do we pray with this humility?

Jesus' disciples asked Him the same question. In Luke 11:1. They ask "Lord, teach us to pray.." and Jesus responds with a very straight forward answer, "when you pray say.." and He continues on with what is commonly known as the Lord's prayer. Humility does not come naturally to sinful

¹ Luke 18:14

humans. We need the Lord's help even to worship and respond to Him. The Lord's prayer specifically molds our hearts towards humility. I like the way a writer from "DesiringGod" puts it, he says, "*Jesus did not simply provide some words for disciples who had nothing else to say to God. Rather, the Lord's Prayer is meant to have a total, shaping effect on our hearts, helping us to see and yearn for the very things that God himself desires — most centrally, to see and experience more of God himself in our hearts and lives.*"² Jesus gave us the words of the Lord's prayer so that we could learn to orient our hearts towards Him and the things that exalt Him.

Another aspect of the Lord's prayer is that it removes our gaze from ourselves to the big picture of God's Kingdom and His people as a whole. It's interesting to recognize that the Lord's prayer appears to be Jesus' collection of common Jewish prayers³ that focus on asking the Lord to shift His people from the current age to the kingdom to come.⁴ It's a prayer that is future focused toward the time when all is made right again. We should also notice that the Lord's Prayer is a petition and is positioned to ask God for two things. First, that He would act according to His will and purposes. Second, that He would meet the needs of His children, both physically and spiritually.⁵ To pray with humility is to petition our holy God to usher in His perfect Kingdom, and to sustain His people until He does so. We can pray this prayer as it is read from the pages of scripture or we can also use it as a template to model our more specific prayers. Either way, uttering this prayer will glorify God and edify the believer both corporately and individually.

What could it look like to use the Lord's prayer as a road map for our own prayers? Let's break it down:

Our Father, who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

This section is how we begin our prayers, with praise and acknowledgement of who God is in all of his glory. He is our Father, and we are His children. His name is to be hallowed, meaning we are to stand in reverence to His holy name, and we are to make His name Holy.⁶ Prayer begins with reverence.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

² Nick Aufenkamp, "A Simple Way to Pray Everyday", Desiring God.org, Feb 6, 2017

³ The Jewish prayers referenced can be found among these sources: Mishnah Yoma 8:9, Ahaba Rabba, PRayer of Rabbi Eliezer in the Babylonian Talmud Berakot 29b, The Kiddish, Eighteen Benedictions in Babylonian Talmud 29a, Sirach 28:2, Genesis Rabbah 82. Talbert, 1050-1051.

⁴ Charles Talbert, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, "Lord's Prayer", 1050.

⁵ Charles Talbert, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, "Lord's Prayer", 1051.

⁶ David Mathis, "*Pray This First*", DesiringGod.org, January 4, 2023. Mathis explains: "To clear away the Old English word *hallowed* and put it more directly into the modern tongue, "Father, let your name be made holy." It's an odd construction, though more typical in Greek than English: a third-person imperative, and in the passive voice. That is, instead of saying, "Father, make your name holy," Jesus says, "Father, *let* your name *be made* holy." It's a request for God to see to it that *others* take action for the sake of *God's name*. So, this first petition includes two actors: not only the explicit one (God himself) but also implicit ones (the countless humans who will "sanctify him" or "make him holy" in their minds, hearts, mouths, and lives).

This part focuses our heart towards the will of God and the things of God. We should seek God's will in a particular circumstance we are facing. Petition Him to change our hearts towards His will and ways. Ask Him to align His people to His will and purposes. Prayer focuses on God's will and purposes.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Here we petition the Lord for our needs physically. This is an opportunity to recognize our dependence upon Him and humble ourselves to ask Him for what we need. We can do this as the body of Christ or for ourselves.

Prayer seeks the Lord for our physical needs.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

At this point we ask God to forgive us, confessing sin and seeking repentance. We must also ask the Lord to strengthen us to forgive others. This is an opportunity to remove the things that take our hearts away from Him.

Prayer restores brokenness.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Next we ask for spiritual needs and protection. We seek the Lord to hold us and keep us from sin and all that the enemy would do to try to destroy us. Acknowledge that we are dependent upon His help to overcome the evil in the world.

Prayer seeks the Lord for our spiritual needs.

For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen.

Ending with a final acknowledgment that all things are Gods. We finish as we started, standing in awe of the Holy God for all that he is: powerful and glorified.

Prayer ends with reverence.

As you pray the Lord's Prayer it will focus your heart away from yourself and align it towards the things of God. If you include this prayer into your regular prayer rhythms, you will see your heart take a humble posture before the Lord. Pray the words themselves or use them as a road map for your own prayers. God doesn't care about what you do, He cares about your heart. You can trust Him to continue to shape your heart through prayer.

As we end our time together my hope is that you have experienced your prayer life in a new and deeper way. I hope that you have learned some new habits or strengthened old ones. I hope that you can see your dependence upon God a little more clearly than before. I hope that you feel more comfortable approaching God as His child, and that you also feel empowered in prayer through the Holy Spirit living inside you. What you have started here is not supposed to end now but to be carried forward and deepened as you walk with and grow in the Lord. God will be shaping us in prayer for the rest of our lives. My prayer for you is that you will continually grow in the practice of prayer and never stop moving towards authentic conversations with God.