

Trusting God even when it hurts, Part 3: Pray until Something Happens.

Luke 18:1-8 Adapted from "P.U.S.H. – Pray Until Something Happens!" By Dr. David O. Dykes @ Sermon Central.Com

A young man went into a drugstore to buy 3 boxes of chocolate: small, medium, and large. When the pharmacist asked him about the three boxes, he said, "Well, I'm going over to a new girlfriend's house for supper. Then we're going out. If she only lets me hold her hand, then I'll give her the small box. If she lets me kiss her on the cheek, then I'll give her the medium box. But if she really lets me smooch seriously, I'll give her the big box." He made his purchase and left.

That evening as he sat down at dinner with his girlfriend's family, he asked if he could say the prayer before the meal. He began to pray, and he prayed an earnest, intense prayer that lasted for almost five minutes. When he finished his girlfriend said, "You never told me you were such a religious person." He said, "And you never told me your dad was a pharmacist!"

It's a good thing to pray – whatever the circumstances. According to a 2007 Pew Research Survey 58% of all Americans still pray daily. And Jesus had much to say about prayer.

After his disciples watched Jesus for some time, they asked, "**Lord, teach us how to pray.**" They never asked, "Teach us how to do miracles, or to teach us how to love people."

Jesus' prayer life was so compelling that they wanted to imitate him. So he first he taught them what we now know as "The Lord's Prayer." And he also taught how our Heavenly Father wants to give us good things in response to our prayers (Luke 11: 1-15). Then a little later on Jesus told his disciples a parable *to show them they should always pray and not give up*. You don't have to wonder about the meaning of this parable because the interpretation is given in the first verse (Luke 18:1-8)

The story begins with a widow who had an adversary trying to take advantage of her. It's likely someone was trying to cheat her out of the money or land her husband left her. This was prevalent in Bible times, because women had few legal rights. But this widow not only had the hurdle of being a female, she also faced a corrupt judge.

He didn't have any fear of God, nor did he care what other people thought about him. He was probably a Gentile judge designated by the Roman authorities. Judgeships were sold and bought, and a judge could make a good living from the bribes that were part of the system.

Our widow had no money to bribe this wicked judge, so her only recourse was to come before him repeatedly crying, "*Grant me justice against my adversary! Grant me justice against my adversary!*" He dismissed her claim, but she kept coming back, constantly begging him for justice. He must have thought, "Oh, no, not HER again!" But this

constant begging and nagging finally paid off – he ruled in her favor not for justice sake but just to get her off his back. In contrast, Jesus said that God is not only very just but He also believes in speedy justice. If we will ask, he will quickly respond.

So what did Jesus want us to learn from this parable on prayer?

1. DON'T WORRY–PRAY!

In the parable, the widow didn't sit at home wringing her hands about her problem. Instead of worrying, she got up and approached the only person who could help her—the judge. In verse one Jesus said we ought to *pray always and not to lose heart*. The Greek word translated "lose heart" literally means to "be filled with bad thoughts."

Worry is filling your mind with bad thoughts of the worst that could happen. Worry is like water. It begins as a trickle of doubt that creeps into your mind. If it isn't stopped, soon it becomes a stream of fear which overflows into a flood of worry that carves a Grand Canyon of anxiety in your mind!

William Ward wrote: *"Worry is faith in the negative, trust in the unpleasant, assurance of disaster, and belief in defeat... Worry is wasting today's time to clutter up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's troubles."*

The Apostle Paul was languishing in a Roman dungeon facing the possibility of having his head chopped off. Instead of worrying about dying, he prayed and in addition to praying, he wrote letters to encourage other Christians to pray instead of worrying.

Paul wrote to the Philippians (4:6-7), ***Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*** . Remember, these words were penned by a man sitting in a damp, dark, depressing dungeon.

When you face a challenging circumstance you have two choices. You can lose heart and let worrisome thoughts control your mind; or you can pray about it. You should pray and not worry because the God of the Bible loves you and cares for you and, according to His will, to give you the best.

There was a Christian man who owned a construction company. He was losing sleep worrying about financial problems that his company was facing. One morning, after another night filled with worry, he opened his Bible to the portion in Matthew 6 where Jesus commanded his followers not to worry. Jesus said, *"Consider the sparrows, they don't plant or harvest, or store in barns, but your heavenly Father takes care of them—and you are much more valuable to him than the sparrows!"*

A few days earlier they had been removing trees on his construction site when he had noticed that one of the trees had a nest with baby birds in it. He marked the tree and left word not to cut it down. But on this day, he realized the tree would have to come down because they couldn't delay the project any longer.

So using a bucket truck to lift him up to the nest, he looked in to find that the birds were gone – in the bit more time given to them, they had learned to fly.

Since he was up there anyway, he removed the nest. As he examined the nest, he discovered that the birds had used straw, twigs, and even little bits of paper to make the nest. He pulled out one piece of paper and what he read almost caused him to fall out to the bucket. Written on the fragment were these words, "**God cares for you.**"

He realized God was using that bird nest to reinforce his message. Today, the man's business is doing well, he is prays more and worries less – and he keeps that bird's nest in his office!

So if you're facing a problem, don't worry ... start praying.

You can do more than just pray after you have prayed about the matter. But you can't do more than pray until you have prayed about it.

2. DON'T QUIT–PRAY PERSISTENTLY!

In the parable, the poor widow kept on begging the judge to grant her justice. She didn't just ask once and say, "Let me know what you decide." She was on his doorstep daily with persistent petitions. Have you ever asked God for something, and when He didn't answer your prayer immediately, you quit praying? That's a big mistake.

The most effective prayers in the Bible are those that were prayed persistently. In Psalm 55:16-17, David wrote: "*I call to God, and the Lord saves me. Evening, morning, and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.*" David wasn't a once-a-day pray-er. He was an all-day pray-er!

There is the Old Testament story of a devout woman named Hannah who desperately wanted a child. For many years she prayed and prayed to have a child. Though her prayer went unanswered for years she didn't say, "Well, it must not be God's will for me to have a child." She just kept on praying, and eventually God gave her a son – Samuel, the last Judge of Israel.

Even Jesus prayed persistently. On the night before the crucifixion, He was in the Garden of Gethsemane pouring out His heart to His Father. His prayer burden was so intense there were drops of blood, like sweat on His forehead. He prayed, "**Father, if possible take this cup from me – yet not my will but yours be done!**" He prayed it again and again. Three times He cried out to God –and God His Father heard

Him. But He didn't take away the cross instead God gave Jesus the strength and resolve to face the cross.

Late in his life, the Apostle Paul had some form of painful affliction that he called "a *thorn in my flesh*." Paul felt that this thorn was hindering his ministry so again several times he begged the Lord to remove it. And when God answered, it wasn't the answer Paul was wanting. God didn't take away the thorn; instead He gave him the strength to cope with the pain. God said *my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in [your] weakness* (2 Cor. 12:9). So Paul chose to give God glory in the midst of his suffering.

Persistence is an important factor in prayer. But persistence is a valuable commodity for every area of your Christian life, not just prayer. God blesses those who persist. So whatever you may be facing right now, don't give up!

If you're ever tempted to give up, just remember that according to legend, it took the composer Brahms seven long years to write his famous Lullaby – I guess because he kept falling asleep at the piano! God always honors persistence.

Do you know who Emmitt Smith is? Even though he has been retired from football since 2005, Emmitt still holds the NFL record in career rushing yards. He wasn't as flashy as Walter Payton or Barry Sanders, and he never possessed true break-away speed. But his strength was in his ability to persist – he just kept on running.

During his 15 year career Smith ran with the football for 21,564 yards; or approximately 12.25 miles. What's the big deal about that? A good runner can cover 12 miles in about two hours. The big difference is, that this runner doesn't have 11 huge defensive players trying to take his head off while he runs!

Emmitt's average run over those 12.25 miles was 4.3 yards at a time. That means he has been tackled and knocked down over 5,000 times. And do you know what he did after every tackle? He got back up and ran the ball again. Sure, he was injured a few times, but he always returned. Here is someone who was knocked down over 5,000 times and still he got up and ran again.

Even the best of people get knocked down in life, but what sets them apart from the quitters is that they get right back up.

- Life is full of adversarial people who will tackle you.
- You will face difficult circumstances that trip your feet out from under you.

The poor widow in Jesus' parable had been knocked flat – but she refused to stay down. She got up and persistently made her request to the judge. So instead of worrying, we should pray and pray persistently

3. DON'T DOUBT–PRAY POSITIVELY!

In this parable, we are represented by the widow – she didn't worry and she was persistent in her requests. But is God like that crooked judge? Does He have to be pestered and coerced before He will answer your prayers? Not at all!

In this parable Jesus used the corrupt judge as the antithesis of our loving Heavenly Father. He said, *"God will grant justice to his chosen ones ... he will not delay long in helping them."*

If you believe in praying, you should also expect God to answer your prayers. If you doubt that you'll receive an answer, chances are you won't.

In James 1, we are told that if we pray for wisdom God will give it to us generously. Then James adds a powerful warning about letting doubt creep into your prayers. He writes: *"But when we ask, we must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord."* (James 1:6-7)

Compare that to the positive promise we find in I John 5:14-15: *"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him."*

The difference is learning to pray positively. If you're not getting any answers, there might be something wrong.

If I walk into a room and flip the light switch, I expect the light to come on. If it doesn't, I don't curse Thomas Edison and say electricity is a lie. I start looking for the problem. Maybe the light bulb is burned out, or a breaker has been thrown, or the power is out.

If it seems your prayers aren't answered, don't quit praying, start looking for the reason. It may be the wrong request, or you may have un-confessed sin in your life, or the timing may not be right. God always answers prayer, but He answers prayer in different ways.

1. God may answer your prayer QUICKLY

Jesus used the word "quickly" in verse 8 to describe how God answers prayer. The word "quickly" is a relative term. If someone was injured, I would say, "Call 911 quickly!" But if a couple gets married only four months after they first met, I might say, "They sure got married quickly!" The word Jesus used means "suddenly." Your prayers may seem to be unanswered for months, and then BOOM! God gives the answer.

This lady was rushing to the mall to buy something. It was pouring rain and she didn't have an umbrella. As she drove into the parking lot she said, "Please,

please, Lord let me find a good parking place near the front door." Just as she said those words she saw the back-up lights of a car as it backed out the best parking space in the entire lot. She said, "Never mind, Lord, I've found one myself!" What a joke! God answered her prayer so quickly she didn't even have time to understand it was God at work.

2. God may answer your prayer LATER

This next statement may confuse you so hear it carefully. **God always answers prayer immediately, but sometimes it is later.** When your prayer is heard in heaven, God acts on the request immediately, but it may take awhile before you get His answer. God's delays are not God's denials. Our sense of timing is rather short-sighted, but God's timing is impeccable. So pray persistently, and then wait patiently for His answer.

3. God may answer your prayer BETTER

Sometimes we don't get what we ask for because God has something better in store for us. Ruth Bell Graham, the wife of Billy Graham once said, "If God answered every prayer of mine, I would have married the wrong man seven times!" Sometimes when you ask God for something, He has something better in store for you!

But maybe you've been praying a long time, and you haven't gotten anything better yet – in fact things seem to be getting worse: just wait. God always answers prayer in the way and at the time that it will give Him the greatest glory.

Ron Dunn wrote in his book Don't Just Stand There, Pray Something: "**God answers prayer along the route that brings Him the most glory. And on the way to better, it may pass by worse for awhile.**" So don't stop praying, even if things seem to be worse right now.

4. God may answer your prayer NO

Sometimes you ask God for something and His answer is simply, "NO." But that's still an answer to prayer. Don't ever stop praying until you hear God say, "No." At that point, stop making that request and start praying in a different way.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "*Prayer is request. The essence of a request, as distinct from a demand, is that it may or may not be granted. And if an infinitely wise Being listens to the requests of finite and foolish creatures, of course He will sometimes grant them and sometimes refuse them...If God had granted all the silly prayers I've made in my life, where should I be now?*"

CONCLUSION

In October, 2002, the Washington snipers had millions of people paralyzed with fear. They were caught by a truck driver named Ron Lanz who spotted the sniper's car at a rest stop. He called 911 and then used his rig to block the exit ramp in case the suspects woke up before the authorities arrived.

Ron Lanz claims finding the snipers was an answer to prayer. A few nights earlier, Ron joined over 50 truckers at a prayer meeting where they asked God to help them find the snipers. Ron was nearing retirement and didn't even live in that area, but he felt compelled to attend the prayer meeting. After the prayer time, Ron told several of his friends he felt God was going to use him to catch the snipers. The rest is history. Ron has refused to be called a hero, he insists that he is just a simple man of prayer.

Our praying should be like the story of Jacob wrestling the angel in Genesis 32. They had wrestled all night and toward morning, Jacob had the angel in a full Nelson grip. The angel said, "Jacob, let me go." Now I am sure that had he wanted to, this mighty angel could have tossed Jacob off in a heartbeat, but God was teaching Jacob (and us) a valuable lesson about the power of persistent, tenacious praying.

So Jacob hanging onto that angel, says, "*I won't let you go until you bless me.*" And the angel replies, "*Okay, your name has been Jacob* (which means "grabber"). *From now on you will be named Israel* (which means both "Prince of God" & "he who strives with God"). What a great prayer lesson! Maybe we all should try grabbing onto God in prayer and begging Him saying, "I'm not going to quit praying until you answer me"

Are you consumed with worry and anxiety? Pray instead.

Have you stopped praying about a need in your life? Are you considering quitting in some area where God has placed you? Don't quit – keep on praying persistently!

Are you filled with doubt about prayer?
Start praying positively, expecting God to answer.

So enough with the talking,
let's practice what we preach.
Let's pray.