

Join us in being on mission with God!

OUR VISION

To continually mature and grow as a united body of Jesus-imitators who live out God's greatest commandment to "Love" by exalting God and serving one another, and His greatest commission to "Go" by reaching into and shaping our local, regional, and global communities.

"Persistence in Prayer"

Luke 18:1-8

Getting Started

After an introductory time, discuss the following questions in your group or class.

Two summers ago I watched my wife's niece try to begin to ride a two-wheel bicycle. It was a morning of lots of encouragement, bumps, spills, and multiple crashes into bushes, relatives, asphalt, and anything else nearby. Over and over again Krista cried at the pain of yet another bruise and threatened to quit and never ride a bicycle again. It was only a constant supply of empathy, patience, love, and encouragement that kept her trying to master this task throughout the morning.

When your efforts don't seem to accomplish anything, and the effort is difficult or even painful, it's tempting to stop trying, to quit, and to go back to the way things were. Few people like to quit. Sometimes it seems like the least frustrating option.

Each of us have different skills we wish we were better at. In some cases we've tried to succeed, but failed to the point where we were frustrated or ashamed. You may find it easy to garden, play an instrument, program your cell phone, solve problems with a spreadsheet, or take a great photograph. But for you speaking in front of many people, balancing the checkbook, doing your own income taxes, or cooking an edible meal may be a challenge. Success and failure mark our attempts at learning, engaging in sports, pursuing hobbies, and mastering new requirements at work.

We are drawn to the possibility of growing and becoming more skilled and effective. On the other hand, we can be deterred by the prospect of failing again, looking foolish, progressing too slowly, or wasting our time, money, and energy.

Q: Name one skill or accomplishment you have become somewhat proficient at that was somewhat intimidating for you the first time you tried it. What kept you working at it even though it was a challenge for you?

Persistence in Prayer

Your spiritual enemy will do all he can to convince you to give up on spiritual habits that will strengthen your walk with Christ and make you stronger in the Lord. His goal is to make you feel inadequate if you witness for Jesus and cannot answer every objection. He will make you feel stupid if you start reading through the Bible and find passages that don't seem to make a lot of sense the first time you read them. He will make you feel incapable of learning if you try to memorize a fresh verse of scripture. He will make you feel inadequate if you are in a small group studying the Bible and someone responds to questions more naturally and concisely than you do.



Luke 18:1-8

¹ Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

One of the greatest battlegrounds is prayer. If you can be persuaded that prayer is fruitless, or that your prayers don't count for much, the weaponry of the kingdom of God becomes less effective.

1. What do you learn about the importance of the weapon of prayer in Ephesians 6:18?
"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

 2. Luke begins his account of Jesus teaching by giving us Christ's motive for the teaching of this parable. According to Luke 18:1, why did Jesus share this particular parable with his disciples?

 3. What are some of the reasons why Christians might become sporadic or passive in the area of prayer? (Add to the list of suggestions below.)
 - You suffer a great loss and start to question God's love or protection
 - You read a verse about God's foreknowledge and wonder if prayer is really a waste of time because of all that God knows anyway.
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 4. Describe a time in your life when you became discouraged in prayer and drew back some or gave up entirely. What factors played a role in your struggle in prayer?

- Jesus begins his story in a strange place. The major character in his story is someone who is *not* at all like God. This is someone who hears requests and responds in a way that does not reflect how God responds.
5. What are the two characteristics of the person in the parable who is known as the judge?

 6. How was this person different from the kind of individual the Jews were to appoint to this office according to Deut. 16:18-20?
¹⁸ Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. ¹⁹ Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the

Persistence in Prayer

wise and twists the words of the righteous.²⁰ Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.

7. Even before you get into the details of the story, what might you expect from the kind of person described in Luke 18:2?
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The widow described in the story is at the opposite end of the social order as the judge. Jesus does not go into detail about how she became a widow. He does not say whether she was poor or rich, though many widows in Israel were poor. Jesus does not add any details about her family or her personal circumstances.

8. The widow does not ask for food or shelter or healing. What is it that she wants from the judge?
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9. What does the description of her request in verse 3 imply about the situation of the widow? (See how the word “adversary” is used in 1 Peter 5:8.)
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Some suggest that the widow was a woman with resources, and that some unscrupulous individual saw her as an easy target and was trying to find a ‘legal’ way to swindle her or threaten the resources she had.

10. What did the widow want from the judge? What do you think this might have included?
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11. In verses 4-5 the judge discloses the reason he will finally respond to the widow’s request. What does *not* motivate him, according to his own words? What does make him act?
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12. The widow’s persistence paid off because God used it to overcome the judge’s reluctance. What did the judge *not* want to see happen as a result of the widow’s harassment of him?
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The turning point of the story occurs in verse 6. The judge in the story is someone who is self-centered and unspiritual. He is a fool in the eyes of proverbs, which says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Since he does not fear God, he is foolishly clueless. Yet even for someone like this, the persistence of the widow pays off.

The argument here is from the lesser to the greater. If a dishonorable person like this judge responds to persistence, how much more will our loving, gracious, and compassionate Fa-



Reaching Up and Reaching Out

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ther in heaven respond to our pleas?

- 13. In verse 7 Jesus describes the prayers that his followers are bringing to God. For what are they praying?

- 14. As you picture the situation of Christians in the first century, what might have been the situations believers would face that would cause them to pray to God for justice? What would be occasions when modern day Christians might request justice of God?

- 15. What is the obvious answer to the two questions in verse 7?

- 16. Just to make sure we understand the point of the parable, Jesus answers his own question in the first sentence of verse 8. What does he say about the timing of God's justice?

The original word for *justice* can also be translated as *retaliation, vengeance, punishment, or penalty*

One challenge related to verse 8 is that our definition of *quickly* is not always the same as God's. Like a child who takes a 400-mile drive with parents, we can feel as though "soon" is "forever." When seen from God's perspective, the answer to such prayer is speedy.

The question at the end of verse 8 at first seems to be disconnected from the context. But in fact it is a challenge. Faith in God in the face of adversity will result in prayer. Jesus is asking if those who hear him will be demonstrating faith though persistence in prayer at the time of his return. In asking this question, Jesus is expressing his desire and expectation that we continue to show our faith in our prayers, even in adverse times.

- 17. How is God glorified when we pray to him while facing issues of unfairness or injustice? How is this kind of prayer honoring to God?

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