

# Persist in Prayer

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, please do hang on to that insert. The passage is obviously on one side and there's an outline on the other that might help you to reflect during the week. But as Christians, we all know we ought to pray, don't we?

But sometimes it's hard to keep praying, whether it's because we haven't got the answer we wanted or just having to wait for it. It hasn't come either way. Like young Joyce, I think I've shown you this before, but I still like it.

Joyce says, Dear God, thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy. Joyce, I think Simon and Kat's kids, Dorothy, can relate to that, although baby brother still.

But the point is when we've been praying and praying and praying, but are waiting and waiting and waiting, it's easy to lose heart and give up. And so Jesus tells this parable to help us persist in prayer, which, as I mentioned before, is what I want to particularly encourage for us this year.

So point one, verse one. And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. We don't always get a clear purpose statement in the parables, but here it is.

[ 1 : 12 ] Here is the parable's purpose. To encourage us disciples, that's who he's talking to here, to pray regularly and not lose heart such that we give up.

Especially when we're left waiting for what we prayed for. Because waiting is the wider context of this parable. You see, the parable ends with a comment about the son of man coming to the earth. You see that right at the end there. And actually before the parable is also a discussion of the son of man or Jesus returning to the earth. So just a few verses before, Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come.

And Jesus went on to give them the reply to kind of point out they've misunderstood. But then he turns to his disciples and actually says to them, In that context, it's not talking about him dying at a cross.

It's about them longing to see him and the kingdom. And the one day in particular, the return of Christ, where he establishes God's kingdom throughout the whole earth. Where there'll be no more injustice nor suffering.

[ 2 : 22 ] Only life in joyful perfection. And while they may long to see this day now, you know, when the kingdom of God is fully established on earth.

That was the question the Pharisees started with. They won't in their lifetime. We might not see it in our lifetime either. No one knows when Jesus will return, do they?

But what we do know is that we all have to wait for it, won't we? And waiting is hard. Especially when you're suffering and praying for relief, but it hasn't come.

I don't think I've shown you this one before, like little Sarah. Dear God, please change the taste of asparagus. It's grass. Thanks, Sarah. My guess is God will answer that prayer when she grows up and her taste buds change.

But at the moment, she has to wait, doesn't she? Of course, it's much harder to wait when we're facing much harder things in life.

[ 3 : 26 ] Like health issues or financial struggles or injustice towards God's people. Like those Christians I mentioned to some of you, if you were here at Doncaster last week in the Congo, where 53 of them were killed in one day, 128 since last Christmas.

Or like the Christian in Nigeria who continue to suffer at the hands of Boko Haram. Last October, Boko Haram released a video showing them decapitating the heads of Christians.

And one of them was actually their own niece of a fighter. Can you believe that? For Christians in these places, they're praying for justice, but they're still waiting.

And so it would be easy for them to lose heart and give up. Or how long have we been praying for peace in Ukraine and still waiting? When we wait, it's easy to lose heart and give up praying, isn't it? And so Jesus tells this parable to help us not lose heart, but persist in prayer. How does it do this? Well, let's look at the parable's content at point 2, verse 2.

[ 4 : 39 ] He said, In verse 2, we meet an unjust judge, don't we?

And he's unjust because he neither fears God nor respects people, which means he doesn't do his job. A judge's job is to give justice, isn't it?

That's his job. And in the Old Testament context, especially for widows, that's the law. The Old Testament law in Deuteronomy, for example, gave strict warnings against those who did not show justice against the foreigner, the farless, or the widow.

But because he doesn't fear God nor respect people, he doesn't do his job and give justice. But he's messed with the wrong widow, hasn't he? Because in verse 3, she is persistent.

She keeps coming to the judge, keeps asking for justice. Actually, she does more than ask. She actually demands. The word give there is actually a command.

[ 5 : 53 ] She commands the judge, give me justice. Which is why Marty read it so brilliantly.

Actually, she picked that up. It was great. In our society, we might call her a tiger mum.

You know, one you don't mess with. Of course, this widow had no centrelink nor any other family to help, it seems. So this is all she could do.

And she keeps doing it. To the point that the judge gives in, doesn't he? And not because verse 4, he suddenly fears God or respects people.

But verse 5, so he doesn't get beaten up by the widow. The word for beat is a word used in Greek boxing and means to give a black eye.

Though I doubt it means that she might end up socking him one in the eye physically. Rather, as the text suggests, her persistent demands will likely knock him out mentally with exhaustion.

[ 6 : 53 ] Either way, it's for his own selfish sake. He eventually gives in and gives her justice. That's the content of the parable.

So what's the point? Well, it's point 3, verse 6 to 8. And the Lord said, hear what the unjust judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, his chosen people, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. At the point here is not that God is an unloving or unjust judge.

It's not kind of equal comparison. Nor that we even have to be tiger prayers and pester God until he gives us what we want. Rather, the comparison is from less to greater.

However, if even an unloving and unjust judge gives justice to a random widow, how much more so will a loving and just God give it to his chosen people?

[ 8 : 06 ] That's the point. If a bad judge gives it to a random person, then a good God will definitely give it to his chosen people. And so here's the encouragement.

God will certainly bring about justice for his people. He will certainly one day answer their prayers for it. And so here's another reason to persist in prayer.

And not only is prayer a privilege, which we saw in our first reading, what other nation is so great to have the gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?

And that was Israel. Well, for us in the New Testament, through blood of Christ, we can come before God's very throne room in heaven in prayer. We're entering into his presence in prayer.

That's how close we can get. Prayer is a privilege. But the reason here to pray is that God will certainly one day give us what we pray for.

[ 9 : 02 ] Though, to be clear, this refers to those things he's promised us, like justice. That's the prayer point of this parable, isn't it?

I mean, the word justice comes up four times in eight verses. That's quite a bit. It's not that he'll definitely give us all things that we ask for, like a billion dollars.

It would be nice to have a billion dollars. Have you ever prayed for a billion dollars? I originally put down a million, and then I saw the house prices in Baldwin. But when it comes to the things he has promised us, he will one day give them to us.

And some of those things he's promised us, he will give us straight away, like forgiveness. But other promises we sometimes have to wait for, like healing or justice.

But the encouragement to persist in prayer for them is knowing that one day he will give them.

We're not wasting our time. He will answer them. I mean, if God told you that you would definitely

win, you know, a billion dollars in Tatts Lotto one day, and the tickets were free, he said, look, you're definitely going to win.

[10:18] Tickets are free. Would you not get a ticket every day? Knowing that you definitely win one day? Again, for the record, God has not told us to go and get a ticket, and it's unlikely that we will win.

But he has told us that by the blood of Christ, we can freely come to him in prayer. And by the character of God, he'll certainly one day answer that prayer according to his promises. He will bring justice to his people. He will end suffering. In fact, it says that he won't delay, but give justice speedily or quickly, it says, verse 8.

Which could mean that the event will be quick. That is the moment it's time for Jesus to return and bring justice. It will happen quickly. God won't delay even one second longer than planned. Jesus won't get stuck in some heavenly traffic jam on the way back down. When the time comes, it will happen quickly. Or it could mean the time between now and Christ's return will be quick from God's perspective.

[11:29] As Peter says, and I'm sure you've heard this before, he says, Do not forget this one thing, dear friends. With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. Not equals to.

Someone tried to do the sums and try and work out how long it would be for God. But it's just saying that God views time differently to us. And so what seems forever to us is quick to God.

It's like with kids, right? I mean, school just went back this week on, for most people, I think. And for kids, the school day can seem like it takes forever, can't it? But for us parents, it just goes like that. It's like, is that the time already? I've got to pick it up now. That's not long enough. I've got still things to do. Kids and adults feel time differently, and so too us and God. Either way, it will happen, certainly.

And so we're to persist in prayer for things that God has promised us, like justice in our world. Justice for ourselves or God's people in the Congo or Nigeria or China or wherever.

[12:32] Of course, you may be thinking, well, if God will definitely bring justice one day, then why not just pray once and wait? Why keep praying for it?

Well, first, because you never know which prayer God will use to answer it. Like which ticket will win the lotto. We only know it will happen. And so we're to persist in prayer in case today is the day that God will use our prayer to bring it.

A second, though, because God may well answer our prayers partially now, like the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. I mean, isn't that what we've been praying for?

Isn't that an answer to our prayers? Oh, sure, there's not complete peace in the Middle East, but God has answered our prayer for justice partially now. And third, because prayer is actually an expression of our faith.

Prayers show that we believe in God's character such that we pray for God's help and then trust in God's timing to answer. If we stop praying, then it suggests we have stopped believing.

[13:47] That's the parables challenge, point four and the last line. See the last line in sheets? Jesus kind of adds a bit of a challenge at the end.

He says, nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? When Jesus says this, given that the parable is all about prayer, we could say when Jesus returns, will he find us praying persistently on earth?

For that's what faith does. For that's what faith does. It expresses itself in prayer. And this is true when it comes to praying for the things that God has promised us or for all things that concern us. Whether it's good results or a godly spouse for our kids or grandkids or nieces or nephews or things for us that God hasn't necessarily promised us, but they're concerning to us.

We're worried about them. Faith will express itself in prayer for all things that concern us. For faith believes in God's character. So praise for God's help and trust in God's timing and answer.

[15:00] And so in this parable, faith believes in God's character of justice. So praise for God to bring justice in the world and trust in God's timing to answer, to bring it.

But faith also believes in God's character of goodness, too, doesn't it? And so faith prays for God's help in all things and trust that God's answer will be for our good.

I mean, is that what Jesus said elsewhere? In fact, he said the same thing earlier in Luke. But this is from Matthew. He says, if you, he's talking to fathers, if you earthly fathers, then, though you are

evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so will your perfect father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

And so here's more encouragement to pray for all things this year, knowing God only gives good gifts. I mean, kids are great at asking for, I mean, Christmas not long ago, kids around the world, we're asking Santa, who is not real, who believes he's real, and they think they give good gifts, and they didn't hold back from asking, did they?

Well, how much more so for us who have evidence that our God is real and really does give good gifts? Why don't we keep asking then? Of course, by good, Jesus means good as God defines it.

[16:26] Again, we may think a billion dollars is good for us, but God knows that it will likely entice us away from him, which is actually not for our good, is it?

And so if we pray for a billion dollars, God's good gift to us is likely to be no, just like parents say no to kids for their good. But faith believes in God's character of goodness, which encourages us to pray.

Faith also believes in God's character of sovereignty, that he sees the bigger picture, which encourages us to trust his timing and answer, even when it doesn't make sense to us.

I still remember a young guy, I can't remember if I've told you this before, but I can still remember a young guy at uni, when I went to Wollongong Uni up in New South Wales, a young guy at uni becoming a Christian, he started sharing the gospel, and people were becoming Christians.

It's a bit depressing for me, I tried to share the gospel and nothing happened. But, you know, people were becoming Christians as he was sharing the gospel. It was fantastic. He was a gifted evangelist.

[17:35] But a year later, he went swimming at a beach and drowned. And I remember thinking, God, surely you've got this wrong, haven't you? You want people to become Christians, don't you?

So why would you allow this evangelist to drown? But we don't know the bigger picture. Years later, I heard through the grapevine that his autopsy showed markers for a degenerative disease.

That his death saved him from. And so maybe that's why God allowed him to dry. We just don't know. But God does. We know that he knows he's sovereign and that he is good and only gives good gifts.

And so faith will express itself in persistent prayer. Not only for the things he's promised us, but for all things that concern us. And then trust in his timing and answer.

If we stop praying, then it shows we've stopped believing, I think. In fact, the act of persistent prayer itself is for our good. Because it helps us to grow our faith.

[18:43] In fact, you could kind of represent it like this diagram on the screen. Faith shows itself in prayer, which I think is what the last line of the parable is really getting about. But it also, persistent prayer helps grow us in faith.

For example, one of our church members last year needed work to help provide for his family. And their faith in God showed itself in prayer to God. In fact, it showed itself in persistent prayer to God. Because it took almost a year to get the job. Which was not easy for him and his wife. At this stage, they didn't have any kids or don't yet have kids.

But as their savings went down, their stress went up. Which was hard. But after they got the job, they looked back and could see how persistent prayer taught them to keep handing over their stress to God and help them to trust God more and more.

The whole process you see, helped them grow in faith too. And so here's another reason to persist in prayer. Not just for the things God has promised us, like justice, but for all things that concern us.

[20:01] And so this year, I want to encourage you as individuals and us as a church to persist in prayer for all things. And in light of Hope 25, especially for non-Christians.

For as we've heard today, that in the end, it's God who makes things grow. And so our first prayer night is this Wednesday night, 7.30.

This room, our mission partners, Chris and Julie Dean, will be sharing for us and a chance to pray for non-Christians in Timor. And for those who've been praying for years and years, I keep remembering a lady called Jean Winter, who prayed for her non-Christian husband for some 60 years.

And when Ted was, I've forgotten whether it was, I think it was around 96, one of our church members, I'd been visiting him and another church member went. And, you know, I think in two weeks, I can't remember what it was, Ted became a Christian months before he passed.

Jean had been faithfully persisting in prayer for over 60 years. I know someone else who's here today who has a similar story for his dad, whose dad became a Christian just weeks before he passed.

[ 21 : 20 ] So you just never know. And so here's the encouragement as we begin this year. Persist in prayer for promised things, since God will certainly give them, if not now, then certainly later.

Persist in prayer for all things, since faith believes in God's good and sovereign character. And so prays for all things that concerns us and trusts in God's timing and answer.

And in light of Hope 25 this year, pray for those non-Christians, so that when Jesus does return, he might find even more faith on earth. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word to us today. And although we all know it already, and it is so familiar to us, the hard part is to put it into practice.

And so by your spirit, please convict us. Please encourage us. Please continue to help us to pray persistently this year. We ask it in Jesus' name.

[ 22 : 25 ] Amen. Amen.