

# Every day is a school day - Persevering in Prayer

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, we're going to read together from God's Word in Luke chapter 18 and verses 1 to 8. We're doing a series called Every Day is a School Day, which today is not, thankfully. It's the Lord's day today, so a day of rest.

But every day is a learning day, that's the point, and we're wanting to learn how to pray. Today, it's just a short series we started with thinking about how the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, and then we did something on the possibilities of prayer, and then the spirit of prayer, and today we're looking at persevering in prayer.

We're going to read Luke chapter 18, a parable of the Lord Jesus, verses 1 to 8. It'll come on the screen. Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

He said, In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men, and there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with a plea, Grant me justice against my adversary, for some time he refused.

But finally he said to himself, Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 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.

[ 1 : 26 ] And the Lord said, Listen to what the unjust judge says, 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? 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?

Now, as a former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, who was once asked why he bothered to pray, Isn't prayer just wishful thinking?

Or a waste of time? To which he memorably responded that he noticed this about his praying. When I pray, he says, coincidences happen.

And when I don't, they don't. And I wonder if you've discovered that about prayer. Prayer is for the Christian like his breathing. It's something absolutely vital and necessary for everyday life.

[ 2 : 32 ] So much so that we notice, don't we, when we don't pray. Surprising, when we have a difficult day and we look back and think, I should have prayed first thing this morning. Because prayer is committing ourselves and our lives and our circumstances to Almighty God.

It's acknowledging that his will needs to be done in my life as it is done in heaven. But prayer, though vital, is not easy.

We have to persevere in it. Because sometimes when we pray, we're not sure what we ought to be praying for. And sometimes when we pray, we don't get what we want.

Which is just as well, sometimes. But very difficult for us to cope with. Especially when we feel we need whatever we're praying about so very desperately. In this parable, Jesus encourages us to pray.

To pray and not to be discouraged when we have to wait for an answer. He teaches a parable. A parable is just a simple story that usually has only one meaning.

[ 3 : 41 ] One main point of application. There's one key message that is coming out here. And it is simply this. Men ought always to pray and not give up.

That's the point of the parable. Don't get discouraged when things go wrong. Just pray and don't give up. So something about the parable then.

There's a few details there if you can see that. Sorry, it's a bit small. The parable is a tool. A tool for giving you a heavenly message. Sorry, an earthly message with a heavenly meaning.

And what Jesus is doing here is teaching this one important aspect about prayer. That you need to persevere in it. You need not to be discouraged about it.

And he gives us a very simple illustration of a widow woman. And a widow woman represents the most vulnerable member of society. One of the most vulnerable members of society at that time.

[ 4 : 45 ] Because unlike today, they didn't get a pension. That was tied to the 4% or rate of inflation. Whatever was lower. That kind of thing. So it wasn't a good pension.

And some of you don't get a good pension. I know that. It's barely enough to live on sometimes for some. But imagine not having anything at all. And this is a woman who had nothing at all.

Who had no means of supporting herself. And was not able to work. And therefore was absolutely dependent upon the giving of others. She represents somebody who is desperate.

And often when we pray, we too represent people who are desperate. We're in great need. But the problem for this poor woman is she brings her great need to a judge.

Who's not a very good one. We're told he doesn't fear God. And he doesn't like people. Not a good sign. If he feared God, at least if he feared God.

[ 5 : 46 ] He might kind of think twice about being unjust. But because he didn't fear God. He didn't believe God would judge him. He didn't believe he would get into trouble. He therefore expected that he could be as corrupt as possible.

And get away with it. He didn't like people. So he didn't care about this woman. He didn't care about justice. And he didn't care about her needs.

This was a heartless judge. And this woman, we're told, comes to this judge and she says, I want justice. And he ignores her. Oh, I haven't got time for this woman. She's not important enough.

She's not going to get me anything. She's not going to be able to add to my wealth. Go away. You're a nuisance. But she kept coming back. Give me justice. She kept coming back.

And in the end, he thought, bye. I've got to get rid of her because she's getting on my nerves. So he decides to answer her request and to grant her justice. Not because he cared, but because he was sick of her disrupting his life.

[ 6 : 47 ] And Jesus says, what a simple message for you here. But it's not this. We must not think that God is like an unjust judge.

This is not a parable of comparison. It's a parable of contrast. Jesus is not saying God is like an unjust judge who gets a bit fed up when you pray.

He is saying, if an unjust judge will grant the prayer of somebody who is persistent, how much more will your heavenly Father answer your prayer?

For he cares for you. He cares about your need. He cares about your issues. He cares about your problems. You can bring them to him. And he is ready and always willing to answer prayer.

Fear not, Jesus says. Fear not, little flock. It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. So Jesus says, here's something you've got to learn.

[ 7 : 52 ] Learn that Heavenly Father will always be listening to your prayers. And especially when you don't get the answer first of all.

And when you think, wow, why is this answer such a long time coming? Remember that he's not forgotten you. You ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Now, a little of the context here. People often forget that what comes before Luke chapter 18, 1 to 8, is Luke chapter 17. And at the end of Luke chapter 17, Jesus is asked a question about the second coming.

When it will happen. What will be a sign of the coming of the kingdom of God? And this is what he says. Verse 22. The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it.

Men will tell you there he is or here he is. Do not go running off after them. For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.

[ 8 : 59 ] But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also it will be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to that day.

Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.

But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will just be like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. On that day no one who is on the roof of his house with his goods inside should go down to get them.

Likewise no one in the field should go back for anything. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life will preserve it.

I tell you on that night two people will be in bed. One will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding to get grain together. One will be taken and the other left.

[ 10 : 03 ] Where Lord? They asked. He replied, where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather. Then Jesus told them this parable. You see the point? Connection.

And the connection is this. People often treat tomorrow lightly. That was the message at the start that those guys knew nothing about.

The message that I was going to deliver. They think that they've got tomorrow. And they forget the now. And in the now they might be grinding grain.

They might be on their rooftops. They might be just going down to the shops and thinking today is going to be like any other day. And then the Son of Man comes. But they were putting off that event for another time.

Thinking they had loads of time. Except Jesus is saying, the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect. And it could be today. Therefore you've got to be ready now.

[ 11 : 04 ] When the Son of Man comes, he adds this parable. Will he find faith on the earth? Well that depends. That depends on you.

And the people who are praying will be ready. And the people who are not will be not. And there's your connection.

Why ought you to persist in prayer? Because you can't get through today without it. To live without prayer is to live in grave danger. You can't manage without it.

Because we live in an unjust world where bad things happen. And only those who cry out to God day and night will be ready for Jesus when he returns. You see the connection?

Very important. Not just a little nice lesson on the importance of praying a lot. But singing prayer as vital to life. Vital to life.

[ 12 : 07 ] God's today. Next slide please. A lovely quote here from John Piper. Faith is the furnace of our lives. Its fuel is the grace of God.

And the divinely appointed shovel for feeding the burner is prayer. I love that. The divinely appointed shovel for feeding the burner is prayer.

If you lose heart and lay down the shovel, the fire will go out. You will grow cold and hard. And when the lightning flashes from sky to sky and the Son of Man appears in glory, he will spew you out of his mouth.

For Jesus has no time for the lukewarm. For the indifferent. In fact, he says it's better if you're cold than to pretend to be godly.

But it's all a game. Prayer keeps us from pretense. It keeps us from religious kind of piety.

[ 13 : 08 ] Because it teaches us to be dependent every day upon almighty God. So this is a parable that we need to take to heart. And there are some important lessons.

Why is it then that God does not answer our prayers? Or at least answer them in the way we would like? Well, let's see the first reason. Because it is not his will for you.

It is not his will for you. God has a perfect will for your life. And sometimes my will and his will are not the same.

Jesus taught us to pray, thy will be done. He didn't teach us to pray, my will be done.

Because we don't actually always know what we need. When Jesus in Matthew 26 went into the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed this, My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will.

He was facing suffering. He was facing death. And he said, Lord, I would love to escape this, but not my will. Yours be done. Sometimes we feel, surely God has no purpose in my suffering.

[ 14 : 21 ] Surely God has no purpose in my suffering in this way, going through these hardships. Oh, yes, he does. Sometimes we can only learn him and know his love and grace for us in times of suffering.

God has never promised that everything will go well and everything will be rosy and all will be wonderful. He has promised to be with us in the fire. So there may be some times when we pray for something that is not according to God's will and he will not answer our prayer.

And we get frustrated and angry with him, but he is saying to us, you've got to trust me in this. If I give you what you want, it would not be good for you. The Bible says, this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

And you know, praying in accordance with God's will is wonderful because you've got a Bible full of promises and you can take the promises of God and say, well, he wills this for me. He wills for me not to be anxious every day, but in everything by prayer and supplication to present my request to God.

So I've got a choice each day. Am I going to be anxious or do I trust God? And when I feel anxious, can I go in prayer and say, God, I don't want to feel anxious. You don't want me to feel anxious. Help me not to feel anxious.

[ 15 : 45 ] Absolutely you can. He has got a promise in the scripture, the very first promise I ever memorized. And call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you and you shall glorify me.

I think I must have quoted that verse more than any other, perhaps not John 3, 16, maybe. There's a promise. When I'm in trouble, what do I do?

I can bring it to God in prayer and he will deliver me. Spurgeon said, it's a bit like going to the bank. You know, when you go to the bank, he says, you don't go into the bank and say it to the clerk at the till.

It's an old-fashioned bank. Now you do it all online. We don't have banks in Whitby. Much to my disgust, but there we go. How we do it, we have one single bank, actually. We have a bank, a hub, and we have a, we're not so bad.

We have a building society as well. But he says, you don't go to the bank and pass the time of day with the bankers and say, you know, what you're doing tomorrow and how's your family and everything else.

[ 16 : 44 ] He says, no, no, no. You write, you write in those days, you write a little check out and you say, please, I'm going to withdraw 100 pounds. Spurgeon says, actually, you ask God according to your faith.

You bring before God his promises and you hand it to the clerk and the clerk says, yes, sir. And then he gives you the answer because you prayed according to God's will. There's loads to pray about in God's will and pray that it will be ours.

This wonderful quote from Stanley Jones, look at it, prayer is surrender, surrender to the will of God and cooperation with that will. If I throw out a boat hook, this is very memorable.

If I throw out a boat hook from a boat, that's a Geordie word for boat, I don't know how you say it. If I throw out a boat hook from a boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me or do I pull myself to the shore?

Prayer is not pulling God to my will but aligning my will to the will of God. It's very memorable, isn't it? Prayer is aligning my will to the will of God.

[ 17 : 56 ] I pull my boat to his shore. Why doesn't God answer prayer? Because it's not his will for you. Secondly, because it's not his timing for you.

You see, this woman had to pray and she had to pray a long time and eventually she got her answer. It didn't happen all at once and Jesus is saying, sometimes you pray and you'll not get your answer.

It might be according to the will of God so you keep praying until you get your answer because if it is in the will of God, it's all then about his timing. He knows when it's best to answer our prayer.

Think of Moses. Moses was called by God to be the deliverer of the people of Egypt. So he went back to Egypt and he decided he was going to sort this himself and so he saw an Egyptian slaveholder and the slaveholder was beating an Israelite and so he intervened.

I don't know what he was expecting. Maybe he was expecting a popular uprising and everybody to follow him but instead he got driven out of Egypt. Where did he spend his time? 40 years in the wilderness.

[ 19 : 02 ] It's a long time to wait for answer prayer. When the apostle Paul was converted, he at once began to preach in the city of Damascus and then he riled everybody up so they let him escape over the wall in a basket and then where was he?

18 months in the desert of Arabia before he began to preach again. God had a purpose for him to preach. It wasn't his time. He had to wait.

And you and I might have been in similar situations. We've prayed about something, we haven't had an answer and we think, what's God doing? Why isn't he answering my prayer? Is it because it's not his will? No, it's because it's not his time.

And so if you know you're praying in God's will, you keep praying until he gives you what you request. There was a great man of prayer called George Muller and Muller used to pray in food every day to keep his hundreds and hundreds of orphans fed.

And sometimes it was very much, even one time when they prayed at breakfast and there was nothing in the house to feed them with and then as they finished their prayer, a knock on the door and the milkman and the baker were there with their milk and their bread.

[ 20 : 17 ] That's how much God might keep us waiting. That's his timing for you. Just to remind us that it doesn't depend on us, but on him. Well, Muller, you know, he prayed, he covenanted to pray in 1848.

He prayed, sorry, 1844. He prayed for five people, friends of his that he wanted converted. That's no good to you. You can't see it.

Take a picture and you'll get it later. He says this, In November 1844, I began to pray for the conversion of five individuals. I prayed every day without a single intermission, whether sick or in health, on the land or on the sea, and whatever the pressure of my engagements might be.

18 months elapsed before the first of the five was converted. I thanked God and prayed on for the others. Five years elapsed, and then the second was converted.

I thanked God for the second and prayed on for the other three. Day by day, I continued to pray for them. And six years passed before the third was converted.

[ 21 : 26 ] So that's 11 years now. Yeah. I thanked God for the three and went on praying for the other two. These two remain unconverted, he wrote. The man to whom God in the riches of his grace has given tens of thousands of answers to prayer in the self-same hour or day in which they were offered has been praying day by day for nearly 36 years for the conversion of the individuals, and yet they remain unconverted.

They are not converted yet, he wrote, but they will be. Muller died in 1897.

The two men for whom he prayed for 52 years were both converted soon after his death. That's God's timing.

It keeps us dependent. Pray on, my friend, pray on, for your children, for your grandchildren, for your lost husband or wife, for your brothers, for your sisters, for your neighbors, for whatever and whomever you are praying.

Pray on, for God is not willing that any should perish. You pray on for their conversion. You pray on. It's all about his timing. Why does not God answer our prayers sometimes?

[ 22 : 52 ] Because it's not always his will, because it's not his timing. And thirdly, because it's not his best for you. It's not his best for you. God, please help me to win the national lottery.

I could do so well with 18 million pounds. Or even better, God, the euro millions, because that's 90 million. And then, well, I'd give you a bit.

And I'd look after my family, and then I'd be fine. Hmm. How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, says Jesus. God, if only you'd let me marry that gorgeous woman in the office, not me personally, because I've got a gorgeous woman.

Then I'd never ask you for anything again, except you didn't study the character of the woman, or consider whether she was a godly woman, or whether she would, you would just be compatible.

Everything was very, very, sort of, on the surface. God, if you want to give me this job, or help me to pass my exams, I don't want to revise, but if you help me pass my exams, well, there's lots wrong with our prayers sometimes.

[ 24 : 12 ] Sometimes we need to thank God that he doesn't always answer our prayers. For they would not be good for us. They're not his best for us. Sir George Adam Smith once climbed Weishausen in the Swiss Alps.

It was a stormy day, and the snow was blowing all around, and when they reached the peak, he was so excited that he got onto his feet and began to leap up and down, but he nearly got blue over the edge.

And then his guide said to him as he pulled him to the floor, On your knees, sir, you are safe here only on your knees.

Why do we pray? Because we are safe here only on our knees. We don't always know what God wants.

Next slide. But Jesus says to us, Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock and keep on knocking.

[ 25 : 18 ] Keep going. Keep praying. Keep trusting. Keep asking God. I know sometimes you doubt whether God is there. Sometimes you doubt whether he's listening. Sometimes you begin to feel hopeless, and you begin to despair.

But God says, Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. You will learn something of my love for you in the waiting. When we pray, says William Barclay, remember, firstly, firstly, the love of God that wants the best for us.

Secondly, the wisdom of God that knows what is best for us. And thirdly, the power of God that can accomplish it. There was a woman came to Jesus.

Her child was demon-possessed. And she cried out to him, Lord, son of David, have mercy on my daughter. But Jesus ignored her.

And the disciples thought, he's ignoring her because she's not a Jew. She's a Canaanite. So they said, send her away. She's bothering us. I think they're very arrogant. She wasn't interested in them.

[ 26 : 33 ] They bother you. She's bothering us. No, no, she was bothering Jesus. For only he could answer her prayer. But he ignored her. He pretended not to be hearing her.

He carried on walking. And then, when the disciples said, send her away. She's bothering us. He says, I was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel. She's not Jewish. I have no obligation to her.

But still, she came. And so she said, so Jesus said to her, it is not right for me to take the children's bread and give it to dogs. And she said, ah, yes, Lord.

But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the children's table. And then he said to her, woman, great is your faith. And her daughter was healed.

She never gave up. She knew where to go when she needed, desperately needed help. And she took it to Jesus to offer her that help. here is Jesus for you today, ready and willing to hear your prayer.

[ 27 : 42 ] If you go to him and cry to him for mercy, to help you overcome your trials and difficulties, your addiction, to help soothe your pain, to heal your wounds, he is here for you today.

holy holy holy If you will say, Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me. Let us pray. Can I invite you to open your heart to Jesus?

Maybe it's just saying, I don't even know if you're real, Jesus. But if you are, and if you're listening, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Can I invite you to say that? Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner. Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Amen. Amen.