
PARABLES | The Persistent Widow

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Introduction

My grandma prayed for me. We called her mommom.

I never knew this but, all through my years of addiction, my grandma fervently prayed for me. Even when I blew it, and relapsed the 10th, 11th, 12 time... over and over again, trying to get clean, my incredible loving and gracious mother would call her, bring her up to speed, and mommom would pray. And she'd keep praying. She wouldn't quit praying. No matter how deep in the hole I put myself, she never quit praying. Until one day — what she'd been praying for all those years happened. Jesus rescued her grandson.

In light of my idiocy and refusal to get with God's program through my years of addiction, it would have been really tempting and easy for mommom to give up. To think that God wasn't listening. That He didn't care. Or that I was too far gone...

Some of you might be facing that temptation. You'd been begging God for something for SO long... and it still hasn't happened. What began as a fervent prayer just began to fizzle out... that fire just slowly succumbed the lack oxygen and died out.

Today God wants to breathe new life into those little embers and reignite that fire. To give you hope again that maybe, what you'd been longing for, hoping for, pleading for all those years ago... is still a possibility because the story isn't finished yet.

Background context

Before we jump into this parable... we have to understand some context for the characters in Luke 18.

1. When we think of a “widow” in our culture... it paints a picture that is a bit different than what the experience was in the first century.

Widows in the first century were the most vulnerable members of society. No income. If they didn't have family nearby, or if they didn't look after you, you had no options for your future.

They had no power. No voice — no one to advocate for or defend them. No mandate from God for the church to step up and care for them. Widows in the first century world were the most vulnerable and defenseless members of society. Not to mention the grief and crushing pain of losing your spouse.

2. Today when we think of a “judge,” if you have a legal problem and you need to go before a judge, you hire a lawyer who will advocate for you, and they plead your case before that judge. If you don't like the decision of that judge, you can appeal, and get the case taken to a higher court with a different judge. If you don't like your lawyer, and you have the means, you can fire them and hire a new one. The judge is supposed to make rulings based on what is written in the law. That's their job.

But in the first century, often judges would come to have their position, not because of their wisdom, education, or training, but it was because they could be paid off. Because they were crooked, corrupt, dishonest, unethical, and the people in power knew it and leveraged it for their own advantage!

Not in every case, but in many cases in the first century world, if you were going to win in court, you had to have either power, influence, or money. Enough power to influence a ruling, or enough money to bribe the judge. In fact, judges were so commonly corrupt, that in the first century Jerusalem, there was a common name for judges in Hebrew that basically referred to them as “robber judges” or thieves — someone who did not care about justice, or what was right or good or even lawful. Their only concern was self-interest, self-preservation, self-promotion.

In our story in Luke 18, we have a widow pleading with a corrupt judge who was ruling over her case.

The Persistent Widow

And Jesus says this...

Luke 18:2-5

He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’”

- This widow doesn’t have means, power, or influence. She just keeps showing up and hounding this judge day after day about her case... to the point where the judge is going, “*My goodness lady, would you just go away! Leave me alone. I’ve got other cases to attend to, I can’t do my job, I can’t even think because you keep on PESTERING me...*”

Illustration: It reminds me Richard Dreyfus in the movie “What about Bob?” He plays Leo Marvin who is Bill Murray’s (Bob’s) therapist. Bob tracks Leo down while he’s on a family vacation and will not leave him alone. And I just picture this judge as Richard Dreyfus in that movie — because by the end of the movie, Dreyfus is so worn out, he’s so beaten down, so defeated, so fed up with Bob that he just gives in.

But that’s what this widow is doing —she is just wearing the judge down until he finally gives in, so she’ll just leave him alone!

Persistence: *Pursuing a course of action with the same energy, intensity, and consistency over a long period of time.*

Kingdom principles

IMPORTANT: We’ve said that every parable contains within it Kingdom Principles, and I want to make sure that we clearly understand what Jesus is NOT saying — because there are so many wrong conclusions that you can come to, just based on what we’ve read so far.

He is NOT saying that:

1. God is a grumpy, self-interested, corrupt judge, and if you just bother Him enough, eventually He'll just give you whatever you want so that you'll leave him alone.

How many of your kids have ever tried this method on you? "I'm going to keep pestering until mom or dad give in." How many of you have given in?

Maybe you wish God was that way so you could just get what you want — but that's not God's character, that's not what God does, that's not what God is like. *And this definitely is not what the parable is teaching.*

But it does seem like God is teaching us about persistence here... so what IS He saying?

Look at the context of the passage... what is the widow pleading for?

Luke 18:3

And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me **justice**...'

- She's pleading with the judge, that something unjust would be made right.
- She's recognizing that this judge has the power to make it right.
- She's not giving up until the judge uses that power to resolve it.

In Matthew 7, there's a similar teaching on prayer...

Matthew 7:7-9

Ask, and it will be given to you; **seek**, and you will find; **knock**, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give **good things** to those who ask Him!

This is talking about being persistent in prayer. Ask, seek, knock. Pray always, and don't quit.

Who gets to determine what is or is not a good thing?

Often we leave something out of this passage that completely changes our perspective on what Jesus is saying.

Who gets to determine what is or is not a good thing? Is it you? Is it me?

We say, "How could this thing I'm praying for not be good? How could this person's healing not be good? How could (fill in the blank) not be good."

One of my favorite quotes from Timothy Keller helps us reorient our perspective.

*"God will only give you what you would have asked for if you knew everything He knows."¹
~ Timothy Keller*

¹ Timothy Keller. *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (Penguin Publishing, Jan 2016)

Within the span of eternity and human history, and all that God is doing in the world, we have a very finite, limited perspective. Yet, we look at the world and assume, in light of the universe, that somehow, we in our wisdom, and knowledge, in intellectual and moral superiority, that we know what is truly good. We know what is right. What is best.

James 4:2-3

You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask **wrongly**, to **spend it on your passions**.

It's not just what you're asking for, praying for, pleading with God about — it's WHY you're asking, seeking, and knocking.

In the story of the persistent widow, she is pleading for a just, right cause, with a pure motives, and she will not relent.

IF you've been pleading with God about something that is a just cause... and you have pure motives... and GOD STILL hasn't made it happen... here's what that means:

Whatever it is you're asking for is either not good in God's view, or not good yet.

ILLUSTRATION: When my grandma was praying for me during all my years of addiction — she's praying, not for her own benefit... she was praying for MY benefit. And I know there had to be moments when she is asking, *"God where are you!? What in the world are you doing? Why haven't you rescued my grandson yet? Why are you allowing him to dig himself deeper and deeper into a hole he's not able to climb out of? Why aren't you doing something!?! God intervene please!"*

- God's saying, *"Not yet. Not yet. Not yet. Not yet."*
- **Why?** Because if he had intervened sooner than He did, maybe I would've been half-hearted in my commitment to Him? Maybe I would've abandoned Him later in life? Maybe when hardship came, I would've thrown in the towel? Maybe I would've relapsed and overdosed? Who knows!?
- We don't know. **But God does know and that's the point!** God knows. And my grandma trusted Him and kept on praying. And would not relent. And God, at just the right time, rescued me. I know it's because my grandma was persistent in prayer for me.

Sometimes when we pray, God says "yes."

Other times, God says "no."

Then there are those times when God says, "not yet."

These are the times that you'll be tempted to stop asking, seeking, and knocking — because we live in a world of immediate gratification, and we've forgotten how to persist. To stick with something, until it's a "yes" or a "no."

- It's in the "not yet," that your trust in God is tested.
- It's in the "not yet" that your character is tested.
- It's in the "not yet" that your motives, your REAL motives are exposed. *This is where the Holy Spirit can begin to change you and move you to a place where your motives are far less about what YOU want and far more about what GOD wants.*
- It's in the "not yet" where you find out if you REALLY TRUST God. His character. His timing.

Do you REALLY believe that God is good, right, fair, loving, and just?

Look at the promises

Luke 18:6-8

And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to His elect, who cry to him day and night? Will He delay long over them? ⁸ I tell you, He will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?”

Jesus says, *if you belong to me, I’ve chosen you, you’ve chosen me — when you pray, God hears you! He hears you, and He will answer you!*

*Is there something you’ve stopped praying for because you’ve lost sight of God’s purpose in it?
Is there something today that God is telling you start again?
Begin again? Pray again... don’t quit, don’t give up. Ask, seek, knock.*

**Because God is telling you right now, that today is the day to start again.
He is a good, gracious, benevolent, just judge — you can trust Him EVEN WHEN the answer is no or not yet.**

Look at the contrasts in this parable.

1. The widow has no access, or influence with the judge other, than pestering him!
 - a. *God’s children have unfettered access to the King of Kings!*
2. The widow had no one to advocate for her in court.
 - a. *We have a Heavenly Advocate in Jesus Christ who is our High Priest.*
 - b. *The Holy Spirit intercedes for us before the throne of God.*
3. The widow had no promises that she could claim as she tried to convince the judge to hear her case.
 - a. *When we pray, we can claim the promises of God.*
4. The widow was pleading out of her poverty.
 - a. *As God’s children we’ve been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms, and He supplies our every need.*
5. The widow came to a court of law
 - a. *We come to the very throne room of God. The throne of Grace.*
6. The judge is worn out, grumpy, and irritated by the widow’s requests.
 - a. *God never grows weary at our requests but invites us to bring them boldly and directly to Him.*
7. The judge put the widow off over and over again and had no interest in her well-being.

- a. *God cares so DEEPLY for us that even when God says “no” or “not yet,” we have the promise that He’s preparing something far better in us and for us than we even know to ask for.*

Always pray — never quit

Luke 18:1

And He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

We have access to the Throne of Grace for one reason — the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God in heaven.

Jesus Christ lived a perfect, sinless life. He laid down His life on the cross in our place — for punishment that we were due, and a punishment He did not deserve.

We have access to God because Jesus was rejected.

We are welcomed in because He was forsaken on the cross.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you know whether you have had someone who prayed for you without quitting? Can you see the results of those prayers?
2. Looking at this parable on the surface, what is the easy **but wrong** conclusion to come to?
3. What was the widow seeking, her motive for asking? Does motive make a difference in what/how you ask for something?
4. Do we have the capability to determine whether what we are praying for is a “good thing”? Why or why not?
5. Think of some of your prayers where the answers have been “yes,” “no,” and “not yet.”
6. Do you REALLY believe that God is good, right, fair, loving, just? Can you trust Him to do what’s best for you?
7. Is there something right now that you have been praying for, for a very long time? Why should you keep on praying?

NOTES