



**“And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?” Luke 18:7.**

## **Keep on Praying**

**Lesson Aim:** To develop persistence in prayer.

**L274. Date:** May 1978. **Text:** Luke 18:1-14.

**Topic:** Prayer; Sin: Forgiveness of.

The Bible affirms two great truths concerning prayer. (1) God answers prayer. (2) Men ought to pray in every condition and concerning every situation. The apostle Paul declared that truth when he wrote, **“Pray without ceasing,”** I Thessalonians 5:17.

He repeated the injunction in writing to the Philippian believers: **“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God,”** Philippians 4:6.

Jesus stressed the same truth by giving a parable which teaches **“that men ought always to pray, and not to faint”** (Luke 18:1). Living in the light of such Bible truth, the Christian will find his needs met and his joy multiplied in the Lord.

There are two alternatives open to the Christian: (1) He can pray, or (2) He can faint. Luke 18:1 does not use the term, **“faint,”** to mean to become unconscious. It rather means to quit, to desert one's place. It is used in secular writings to describe the soldier who flees his post of duty for fear or because of pressure.

God intends for His children to stand, having on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). One must be prayerful to stand in his place. Therefore, the two alternatives open to the Christian are to stand or to faint.

Jesus' parable of the unjust judge teaches truth by way of contrast. It pictures an unscrupulous lawyer who did not have respect for God or reverence for people. A poor widow came to him requesting a certain legal

action to protect her from an unjust man. He refused to help her. She kept returning with her request until he grew weary of her. He took care of the matter just to get rid of her.

Note the contrast: God is not like that crooked lawyer; He is just the opposite. Therefore, men ought always to pray and not give up and lose heart.

Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican teaches truth by illustration. A man who was guilty by crooked business practices repented of his sins and received forgiveness. Jesus used the illustration to teach that God forgives the sinner who is repentant. Therefore, men ought always to pray and not give up and lose heart.

## I. PETITIONS IGNORED, 18:1-8

Read once again the parable of Luke 18:1-8. Get the picture clearly in mind. Then consider the following facts.

### **A. The judge should have heard and responded to the petitions of the widow.**

(1) His position as a judge placed him under solemn obligation before God to dispense justice (Leviticus 19:15). (2) Her need as a widow was great since a woman did not have the liberties then which women enjoy today. (3) She was a citizen of the town and deserved the protection and help of the law as much as any other person. (4) Her persistence as a petitioner indicated the seriousness of her case and should have brought forth a quick response. (5) Her danger from the adversary should have aroused pity and brought immediate protection by the law. Any man moved by normal sympathy for one in need would have responded and helped the poor widow. That judge did not.

### **B. There are specific reasons why the judge did not respond to the petitions of the widow.**

(1) He was a man of unprincipled and reckless character. He **“feared not God”** (verse 2). The man who does not fear God will have little concern to obey the law or serve people. (2) He had no respect for any person. He was so self-centered his only concern was for his personal pleasure and profit. How hopeless the case of the poor widow. (3) He had no shame for his sin. He personally expressed his depravity, saying, **“Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me”** (verses 4, 5). (4) He had no concern except for his own convenience and personal profit. What a scoundrel! How did he ever get in such an important position as a

judge of the law of God?

The Bible draws a careful contrast between the wicked judge and the loving heavenly Father. **“And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And SHALL NOT GOD AVENGE HIS OWN ELECT, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that HE WILL AVENGE THEM SPEEDILY”** (verses 6-8). God is not like the unjust judge; He is the very opposite.

Contrast the unjust judge with the just God. Contrast the friendless widow seeking help with the beloved children crying to their Father. Contrast a crooked lawyer unwilling to serve with a loving Father ready to give more than enough. God is the very opposite of the judge in the parable.

It may seem to some Christian that God is ignoring his prayers. He may cry and pray and seem to get no response from heaven. He may ask, “Does God hear? If He hears, does He not care? If He cares, is He not able? Why should I pray any longer? Will God ever answer prayer?”

Jesus spoke the parable to answer such questions. The parable teaches **“men ought always to pray, and not to faint”** (verse 1).

Answer to prayer is sometimes delayed. It is delayed because the motive is not right, the time is not right, or for some other reason known to God. Keep on praying and trusting. God does not delay needlessly. Even if the heart is sick and hope fades, continue to pray and wait. God answers prayer.

Zacharias and Elisabeth prayed for a son. Years passed, and they had no child. Finally, they passed the time of childbearing. They gave up hope. Then the angel of the Lord appeared and announced to Zacharias that God would give them the prayed-for son (Luke 1:13).

Why did God delay to answer their prayer? If He had given them the child they desired in their young adulthood, they would have had another little Jewish boy. He waited until the time was right and gave them a John the Baptist!

God may not answer prayer immediately, but Jesus promised He would answer them speedily. Things may not be right to receive everything you request at the time you request it. But when the time is right, the answer comes without delay.

Someone gave these thoughts concerning answered prayer. “When the request is not right, God says, 'No.' When the spirit is not right, God says, 'Grow.' When God has something better in mind, He says, 'Slow.'” Think about that in the light of God's seeming delay in answering your prayers.

Keep on praying and waiting. God will respond. “I know not by what methods rare, but this I know: God answers prayer!” Keep confidence in

God. He who has promised is faithful.

Jesus promised, **“Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it”** (John 14:13, 14). What a promise! Claim it as your own and pray with assurance.

## II. PETITIONS HEARD, 18:9-14

The second parable on prayer is concerning the Pharisee and the publican who went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee stood and prayed with himself. He praised himself and condemned others in his prayer. He did not worship God; he did not confess sin; he did not ask for blessings. He was content with self-praise and condemnation of others.

The publican was not mindful of others. He felt himself to be the worst of sinners. He prayed simply, **“God be merciful to me a sinner”** (verse 13), and went home justified! God hears the prayers of some and rejects the prayers of others.

**A. God does not hear (in the sense of responding to) some prayers.**

**“And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood,”** Isaiah 1:15. He does not hear those prayers which are but a cloak for sin or those prayers which are sinfully centered in selfish desires.

**“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts”** James 4:3. Even a prayer can be sin when its spirit is wrong. God does not hear those prayers.

God does not hear prayers which are expressions of self-righteousness. The prayer of the Pharisee was such a prayer (verse 11). He listed the points in which he felt superior to other people and expected God to endorse the good opinion he held of himself.

The Pharisee listed negative qualities in other men which he felt he did not share. (1) Other men lust, but I do not commit adultery. (2) Other men use force to gain their advantage, but I am not an extortioner by high interest rates or unjust debts. (3) Other men commit fraud, but I am not unjust. He almost said, “I’m sure, God, you are pleased to have a person like me in the world to show other men how they should live.” God was not impressed.

The Pharisee listed positive qualities which he felt recommended him to God. (1) **“I fast twice in the week.”** The Old Testament has set the Day of Atonement as a day of fasting. The Jews had added four other days during the year. Many of the Pharisees added each Monday and Thursday as days of fasting in commemoration of Moses going up, and coming down Mount

Sinai. That Pharisee was a twice-a-week faster.

(2) **“I give tithes of all that I possess.”** Leviticus 27:30 required the Hebrews to give a tithe of their flocks, herds, grain, and fruit. The Mishna obligated devout Jews to tithe garden vegetables and even the herbs used for seasoning. The Pharisee obeyed all those rules. The listing of those positive qualities indicated a great fault in the Pharisee: He was judgmental. He said, **“I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.”**

Watch out about judging people. **“Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. . . . Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingsblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way”** (Romans 14:10, 13). Judgment belongs to the Lord.

**B. God hears and responds to the prayers of the unworthy but penitent person.**

The publican was a sinner. He knew it and all the community knew it. No decent Jew would associate with a publican. His testimony would not be received in a Jewish court of law. Yet, God heard the prayer of a publican.

God heard the prayer of the publican because of his spirit of humility. Humility was indicated in the place he stood — afar off from the altar of the temple for he did not feel worthy to approach.

His humility was indicated in the posture he assumed — not lifting up his eyes toward heaven out of embarrassment over his sin. His humility was indicated by the petition he offered — **“God be merciful to me a sinner.”** It showed his admission of guilt and request for forgiveness. His humility was indicated by the actions he performed — smiting himself upon the breast in dismay over his undoneness. He had a profound sense of divine holiness and his own failings, so he prayed as he did. God delights to hear the cry of the sinner and rescue him from his sin.

The publican confessed his sins. He did not list them, for God does not require that. He admitted his personal guilt and did not try to excuse himself. He did not compare his sins with the sins of any other. He opened his heart to God, even calling himself “the” sinner (the definite article is in the Greek text) as if he were the only sinner or the worst of all sinners. God responds in grace to the person who will confess his sin.

The publican appealed for mercy in view of his sin. His petition, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” might be correctly translated “God be propitiated (by the application of the blood on the mercy seat) to me the sinner.”

What a petition! No wonder he went home justified. He made no

excuses for his sin; he simply sought the atoning blood to cover his sin.

The publican was sincere in his prayer. His sincerity is reflected in the brevity of his petition. His prayer contained only seven words. (Compare the lengthy prayer of the Pharisee.) God is not impressed with much speaking (Matthew 6:7). He looks upon the heart. Sincerity in prayer is honored by His hearing and responding to the prayer.

Keep on praying. God will hear and answer prayer. You do not have to persuade Him with your insistence. Prayer does not overcome God's reluctance; it lays hold on His willingness. God wants to answer your prayers ten thousand times more than you want His answers. Keep on praying in faith.

All Christian victory is possible through prayer. No Christian victory is promised without prayer. If the devil can keep Christians from their prayer closets, he will gain a tremendous victory. He will tell the Christian that God does not answer prayer, or at best answers only with great reluctance.

Satan will turn one's attention upon oneself so that the believer begins to doubt his qualifications to come to God and present his petition. His deceitful dealings are intended to keep every Christian from knowing the power of God in answered prayer. Someone has said, "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees." God answers prayer!