

Persistence in prayer

How long O Lord?

Luke 18

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 what people thought. 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 what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!"

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?'

Introduction

One of the questions which dominates most people's minds when it comes to prayer is, "Why hasn't my prayer been answered?" A closely related question is, "How long should I pray for or about something, or for someone?"

Offering up a prayer is a relatively easy matter. But knowing that it has been heard or answered is something else.

When a prayer appears to have been answered quickly we may be encouraged. But what if nothing obviously changes, things get worse or there is just "silence"?

How are we to interpret this? Are we to keep on praying, change the way we pray or just give up?

Of the many parables that Jesus told one begins with a clear explanation of its purpose.

Luke tells us that,

"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." (Luke 18:1 NIV)

The Amplified Bible offers some additional insight with its expanded translation:

"Also [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not to turn coward (faint, lose heart, and give up)." (Amplified)

1. Prayer requires courage, but where does it come from?

The courage to persevere in prayer comes first and foremost from an understanding of the character of God.

“To whom am I speaking”, is a good question to ask when a stranger answers the phone. It is also a good question to ask ourselves when we pray.

Who or what has shaped your view of the character of God?

The Bible tells us that the only reliable reflection of God’s character is Jesus Christ. (John 14:7-9, Colossians 1:15-20)

2. But even when we know that God is good we can be tempted to give up praying? Why?

- Our failure to understand the presence of an adversary
- Our false assumption that we are trying to “twist God’s arm”
- “Prayer is laying hold of God’s willingness not overcoming God’s reluctance”.

3. What helps us to keep on praying and to modify our prayers when needed?

Praying with the support and in the company of other believers. (Luke 18:7)

Conclusion

God is just and we are chosen (Luke 18:7)

Prayer takes courage and persistence based on a deep understanding of the goodness and justice, which are central to God’s character.

It also requires the support, encouragement and discernment of other members of God’s family.

Questions

- What do you like about this parable?
- What does it teach you about the character of God?
- What does it teach you about the nature of praying and not giving up?
- Which people and experiences have shaped your view of the character of God?
- In what moments has God felt silent, absent or less than just or good to you? How have you processed these moments?
- In what moments have you been encouraged by the support and prayers of others to keep on praying or to change how you’ve prayed?