

## **“Be Prayersistent”**

Luke 18:1-8

*Series: Kingdom Come Week 7. Stick With It*

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hoglund

The Woodside Church

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This is the definition of persistent. Both sides sent an avalanche of letters, emails, texts. They called on the house phone, the cell phone, the work phone. They barraged me with commercials, billboards, lawn signs. Each communication questioned me. Did you receive your ballot? Did you open your ballot? Did you fill each circle in completely? Did you use blue or black ink? Did you place it in the secrecy envelope? Did you place it in the second envelope? Did you fill out the back? Did you sign it? Did you avoid making any marks which would invalidate your vote? Did you mail it immediately? Did you place it in the secure box surrounded by armed guards? Did you mail it? Did you mail it? Did you mail it NOW?! My cell phone was blowing up with texts. Then I discovered the texts were for my wife. She must have given them my number.

Why be so persistent? Voting is vitally important. As we saw this week, elections can be razor close. In general a person is persistent when he or she wants to achieve a goal, fix a problem, make a change, right a wrong. The more passionate you are, the more persistent you will be. In our seventh Kingdom parable, Jesus tells us to be persistent about prayer – to be prayersistent.

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

Why does Jesus tell this story? He knows his disciples will face persecution in the future. They will be hauled before judges and unjustly condemned. They will sit in dark prison cells and cry out “How long O Lord?” In those times it will seem the world is winning and God is napping. Who can blame them if they give up and stop praying? But that’s not our story. So why are we too busy to pray? Here are few explanations I’ve heard:

1. Prayer is not worth it. You prayed for something – your spouse to change, your child to stop rebelling, your friend or loved one to be healed, your financial burden to lighten and it just hasn’t happened. Maybe you’ve prayed for an end to division and divisiveness in our nation, an end to prejudice, an end to violence, an end to the corona virus. You spend so much time on your knees you’ve worn holes in your jeans. Yet nothing changes. Why not invest time in something that works?

2. You’re not worth it. You’re afraid to approach God because of your shortcomings and sins. You know about God’s grace, unconditional love and forgiveness. Yet you feel you’ve worn out your welcome. A friend sent me this email.

You, [recipient name], are hereby notified that under the forgiveness recommendations set forth in the Holy Scriptures - namely that we are to forgive one another 7x70 (equivalent to 490 times) - you are now at 478 and have only 12 free passes remaining.

3. God is not worth it. You'd probably never say that. Yet the way we spend our time reveals our priorities. The clock is ticking. The pressure's on. There is work to be done. "I'll make time for the Lord later." But there are always more demands waiting to eat up your time. You might also be angry at God for not answering your prayers in the past. Perhaps you feel like the widow in Jesus' parable.

In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused". Luke 18:2-4

Nothing can penetrate the hard heart of this judge. He breaks the two greatest commandments. He does not love God or people. He has no compassion for this poor widow. He may even be taking bribes from her adversary.

A widow is the most powerless person in the ancient world. And this widow is all alone. There are no family members to fight for her. Her rival may actually be a relative. Yet she has one weapon: persistence. She visits his courtroom every day. She wakes him up in the middle of the night. She leaves messages on his voicemail. She fills his inbox with emails. She posts about him on Facebook, Instagram and Snap Chat. She tweets.

...finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" Luke 18:5

The last phrase describes a boxer who punches his eye. She pummels him with persistence. She wears him down until he says, "Enough. I'll give you what you want." Is that what it takes to get through to God? Must we badger God until He gives us what we want? If prayer is just bothering God, why bother? But that's not what Jesus is saying.

### **Prayer is more about a Relationship than Requests.**

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? Luke 18:6-7

The judge in this story is not a symbol of God. He is a negative example. Rabbis in Jesus' day often used this teaching method. If something is true in a negative situation, how much more will it be true in a positive one? If this corrupt judge will satisfy the widow's plea, how much more will our loving Father answer the cries of his beloved children?

One of the radical teachings of Jesus is telling us to call Almighty God "Our Father." We view prayer like a vending machine. We measure the value of prayer by how often our requests are fulfilled. Prayer, for Jesus, is primarily a way to deepen our relationship with our loving Parent. That, alone, is the best reason to pray.

All week long I looked forward to celebrating my granddaughter's first birthday on Saturday. Since my children and grandchildren don't live with me, I treasure every moment

I get to be with them. You do not have to convince me I really should spend time with them. Nor do I measure the value of our time together by how well they fulfill my requests. It is a joy just to be with them. The time together deepens our relationship.

Who is the person you long to see? For whom would you rearrange your schedule and lay aside your to-do list? If you feel that way about someone here on earth, how much more wonderful will it be to spend time with your heavenly Father.

**Prayer is more about Alignment than Answers.** Often, we treat prayer like it is a magic 8 ball, a Google search, or that eerie SIRI woman. The main purpose of prayer, we think, is to get answers. It's true. Jesus did say God responds to our prayers.

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. Luke 18:7-8

God is always working in the world. Yet for Jesus, the goal of prayer is not to get God to do things our way, but for us to align ourselves with God's will. At the beginning of His ministry, when Satan tempted Jesus to make the world go His way,

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Matthew 4:10

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prays,

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10

And at the end of His ministry, on the night of His arrest, Jesus prayed,

My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will. Matthew 26:39

The most important prayer is "Not my will, but Thine be done." Prayer is not getting God to do what I want but aligning myself with what God is doing. In Oswald Chambers' devotional book "My Utmost for His Highest" there is a reading titled "What's the Good of Prayer?"

Our ordinary views of prayer are not found in the New Testament. We look upon prayer as a means of getting things for ourselves; the Bible's idea of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself. It is not so true that "prayer changes things" as that prayer changes *me* and I change things.

Let God realign you with His will through prayer.

**Prayer is about Rest if we give up the Reins.** Jesus said,

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30

If you turn over the reins of your life to the Lord, if you let Him reign in your life, you will find rest. Prayer is your opportunity to put the reins in God's hands. Prayer is the way we weary and burdened people find the rest God longs to give us. I have given many sermons on prayer over the years. Yet I know you won't make a prayer a priority until you finally realize prayer is not an obligation but an opportunity, not a duty but a delight, not something I gotta do but I get to do. Can anyone out there use a little rest right now?

I invite you to spend twenty minutes alone with God each day in prayer from now to Christmas. Do not do this in bed, in the car or while you are running. The point is to slow down, stop multi-tasking, and give God your full attention. Someone once said, "Why can't I pray while I'm jogging on the treadmill." Pause a minute and think about that word: treadmill. The point of this is to get off the treadmill of life, stop running, and give God focused, quantity and quality time. That is the way relationships grow.

**Prayer is about Justice but not Just Us.** Jesus tells us to be prayersistent, to cry out for justice, righteousness, reconciliation, healing and peace. Don't give up. Stick with it. Be patient. Be persistent. Keep praying. Then He adds one more lesson which, unfortunately, is buried in a poor translation. The NIV 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?* Luke 18:7

The literal words for the last line are, "And He is patient with them." Why should we be patient while we pray for God to act? Because God is patient with us. We pray for justice but we do not always act justly or fairly. We always put ourselves in the position of the widow. Yet sometimes we are like the judge in failing to fully love God and neighbor. We must be patient with God for He is exceedingly patient with us and others. Pray for justice and healing and don't give up. But also pray for patience, insight and the courage to change what's unjust in you.

2020 is a year of incredible stress, anxiety, tension and division. Some very dear friends in this church had the courage to speak directly with me and share their concerns. They felt in focusing on the issue of racism, that I am taking sides and becoming too political. I am grateful they cared enough to speak with me directly. If you feel this way – please come and talk with me. I want to take this moment to say it is not and has never been my intention to favor one side or another, to advocate for blue or red, to care more about black lives than blue lives. Loud voices on both sides of the political divide are crying out for justice! Yet they are also crying "Just Us" – just want we want! That is not the solution. The only way forward is together – and we start on our knees! I pray this church will be the one place in this community where people of differing views and causes can come together, speak the truth with love and unite in the common cause of Jesus Christ. I pray this church will be a place of light in this darkness, of unity in this

divisiveness, of healing in this disease, and love in this deadly hate.

Now more than ever we need to get down on our knees and pray: Lord, make us one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.