

Luke 18:1-8 — Keep On Praying

August 25, 2019

Good morning CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am the campus pastor of the Spirit Lake campus. As many of you know, at CrossWinds, for the month of August, we are rotating different pastors across campuses as we study the topic of prayer. Pastor Jordan and I are covering the last two weeks of the prayer series. This week, Pastor Jordan is preaching on the topic of prayer at the Spirit Lake campus but next week he will be back to preach that same message in Spencer. Today, I am teaching on the topic of prayer with you in Spencer, but next week I will preach this same message in the Spirit Lake. After that, fall is upon us, and we will return to our series in the Gospel of Mark.

When we put together this series, I was assigned a tiny parable found in Luke 18:1-8. It is a small parable on the importance persevering in prayer even when it feels like prayer doesn't make a difference. We must keep on praying even when we want to give up. Why is it so important to continue in prayer when it doesn't feel like it makes a difference? That is what we will learn this morning.

Before we turn to the text, I want to ask you about your prayer life. How would you describe your times in prayer? How many of you would describe your prayer time as infrequent? I have yet to meet someone that feels like they pray too much. I think all of us feel like we don't pray enough. Let's try another word. How many of you would describe your prayer time as distracted? You can start in prayer but less than a minute into talking with God your mind remembers everything else you need to do. You are easily distracted. How many of you would describe your prayer lives that way? Let's try another word that is a little

more personal. How many of you would describe your prayer life as unimportant? Notice I didn't say that you would call prayer unimportant, but that you would describe your own prayer life as unimportant. Most of us have read the Bible well enough to know how God responded to prayer in powerful ways in the Bible. While we know prayer is important, subconsciously most of us feel our prayers are unimportant because they don't seem to make a difference. Many of us have prayed over particular issues a long time. We have wept and cried on our knees before God, asking him to intervene, but nothing has happened. After a while, we start to think that our prayer lives are unimportant, that prayer doesn't appear to make a difference.

If that is you, and you are struggling to keep on praying because your prayers don't seem to make a difference, then you came on the right morning. Luke 18:1-8 tells us why we must keep on praying and never give up even when it feels like God is not listening.

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Luke 18:1-8 (ESV)

Usually we would start with the first verse but today I want to do something a little different. Let's start with the last verse. If you noticed, the last

verse sounded rather strange. It is an odd verse that doesn't feel like it belongs at the ending of this parable. Why does this verse feel so awkward?

Let's read it again.

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? Luke 18:8 (ESV)

The reason this verse feels so out-of-place is because it connects back to what was happening in Luke 17. This verse comes as the ending to a much larger section that began in Luke 17:20. This parable is actually part of the conclusion to a unit of thought that began much earlier, and this concluding verse finishes that section. While there is a chapter break at the beginning of this parable, we need to remember that chapter breaks were , inspired by God. They were added to our Bible by copyists in the 1300s to help people find things. This was not a good place to place a chapter division because it cuts in half what Jesus was saying making it appear like two different things instead of all part of the same things. The entire unit starting in Luke 17:20 finishes at Luke 18:8. Those verses belong together.

If we are going to properly understand this parable and why Jesus told it, we need to back up and get a running start into it. We need to start in chapter 17 to see what Jesus was talking about and what prompted him to tell this parable in response to it in the first place.

Let's begin in Luke 17.

Be ready for the coming kingdom of God.

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." Luke 17:20–21 (ESV)

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming. In the mind of the Pharisees, they wanted to know when the Messiah would come and overthrow the Romans, establish God's throne on earth and put them in charge of the world. In their mind, it was like an American presidential election where they thought they would finally get to be in charge, but in a much grander way than a presidential election could accomplish.

Jesus' answer was not what they expected. He said, "If you think the only way you can recognize the kingdom of God is by miraculous power that crushes the Roman Empire, ends Roman tyranny and puts you in power, then you have missed the kingdom." Jesus told them the kingdom of God was growing in the midst of them. Some translations say, "The kingdom of God is within you," but that is not the best translation. "The kingdom of God is right in the midst of you," is a better translation. The point Jesus was making was that God was establishing his kingdom right in front of them.

The kingdom of God is established wherever people repent of their sin and give their hearts and lives to Jesus. In that moment, they are born again and made completely new people from the inside out. Those who have trusted Christ and are born again are now part of God's kingdom. God's kingdom in this world doesn't begin by Jesus overthrowing the Romans but by people of every tribe, nation, and background hearing the good news of what Jesus has done for them on the cross and by them placing their faith and trust in Jesus to forgive their sins and be born again. When that happens in people's lives, the kingdom of God expands one person at a time. Right now the kingdom of God is growing quietly

as hearts and lives are changed by Jesus. The kingdom of God is growing subtly and quietly. Next, Jesus looked at the opposite mistake, which is to think that the kingdom of God will always grow just behind the scenes.

And he said to the disciples, “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, ‘Look, there!’ or ‘Look, here!’ Do not go out or follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.” Luke 17:22–24 (ESV)

Jesus just told people the kingdom of God spreads as it grows in the hearts of men and women as they trust in Jesus. Then he warned us against thinking it will always be that way. There will be a time when the Son of Man will appear, and that will not be subtle. It will be catastrophic. When Jesus Christ returns at the end of history, it will not be a quiet or hidden return. You won’t need someone to tell you to go to L.A. to see Jesus because he is working with the homeless. Jesus’ return at that time will not be limited or geographically bound.

Jesus’s return at that time will be worldwide. It will happen instantly. He describes it like lightning flashing across the sky, lighting up everything and everyone. So while the kingdom of God is in our midst right now, growing in the hearts and lives of men and women, Christ will one day return to establish his kingdom, and when he does it will be worldwide, not secret. It will be seen by everyone at once. It will not be a private thing but a very public thing. Next, Jesus described what it will be like on earth in the days leading up to his return.

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot—they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but on the day when Lot went out from Sodom,

fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all— so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. Luke 17:26–30 (ESV)

Jesus gave two Old Testament examples to explain what it will be like prior to his return. It will be business as usual until Jesus returns. Jesus will return without warning. He will return suddenly and unexpectedly. It will be like the flood in the days of Noah. People were eating, drinking, marrying, shopping on Amazon and going to school while Noah, his family and the animals were on the ark until God shut the door and it started to rain. People had no idea God's judgement and the catastrophe of the flood had begun.

In a similar way, it will be like the destruction of Sodom by fire from heaven. In those days, people were busy living ordinary lives. People were eating, drinking, buying, attending soccer practice, eating in restaurants and living life as usual. The only thing unexpected was Lot and his wife running out of town like they were late for an appointment. People had no idea fire from heaven was about to rain down upon them. The day of God's judgment had come.

In a similar way, prior to Jesus' return it will be just another ordinary day. Then Jesus will return suddenly, cataclysmically, and unexpectedly in judgment to set up his kingdom. Just like people didn't see the judgment of the flood coming and people didn't see the judgment on Sodom coming, people will not expect to see the day of judgment when Jesus returns.

Since the day of the day of Christ's return will happen suddenly and unexpectedly, Jesus tells us we need to prepare for Christ's return and how we can be found to be ready when Christ returns.

On that day, let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away, and likewise let the one who is in the field not

turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it. I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left." And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." Luke 17:31–37 (ESV)

Jesus said on that day, in the hour of crisis, when he returns, do not be like Lot's wife. When Lot and his wife were running from Sodom, as Sodom was being destroyed, Lot's wife turned back to watch the destruction of the city. She turned back to watch the destruction of the city because she was more interested in the stuff of this world she was losing than the salvation from God she was gaining. As a result of her being more interested in the things of this world than in God's salvation, God turned her to a pillar of salt. She was not found fit to be saved.

Here is Jesus' point. When Christ returns, we do want to be found to be like Lot's wife. We do not want to have hearts that over time have become more in love with the stuff of this world that God will destroy than the salvation of God we will receive. Those who on the day of Christ's return are more in love with the stuff of this world than in the salvation of Christ will be unfit for the kingdom, just like Lot's wife.

Jesus described the day of his return this way. There will be a couple sleeping together. One will be taken and the other left. There will be people working together on an assembly line. One will be taken, the other left. Who will be taken and who will be left? Those who will be taken are those who are longing for Christ's appearance. Those who are left are those who are more in love with the things of this world than with Jesus.

What will it be like for those who are left behind? Jesus said where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. In other words, those who are left behind at Christ's second coming are left for destruction. It will be death. They will be corpses.

In our last series, where we studied hell, we studied the day of final judgment. I will not dive into the details of that message but instead encourage you to look it up on the church website if you have more questions about the day of judgment. In short, it will not be a good day for anyone who dies apart from Christ.

Jesus made it clear that eternity hangs on whether we are ready for Jesus to return. We must stay in love with Jesus while we wait for his return. We must not let our love for Christ grow cold and our love for the temporary things of this world grow to be more than our love for him as we wait.

Knowing this background — that we must be ready for Christ's sudden and unexpected return and we must not be found to be like Lot's wife and have grown more in love with worldly things we will be losing than the salvation from God we will be gaining — let's reread the final verse of this parable. You will see how it is a perfect conclusion to this section.

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? Luke 18:8 (ESV)

While we wait for Christ to return, which will seem like a long time, we must keep our faith and love for Jesus warm. We must not let the things of this world become more important to us than the things of Christ. What must we do

while we wait for Jesus? What will keep our love for Christ more important to us than our love for things in this world?

This parable give us the answer. It is pray. Keep praying! Don't give up on praying! Even when it feels like God isn't listening and like God never responds, don't give up on prayer. Prayer is what keep us in love with Christ more than the things of this world. Prayer to Jesus in all circumstances about all things is what will enable us to be fit for Christ's return while we wait. If we give up on prayer, we can very easily become like Lot's wife.

Let's see what this parable tells us about the importance of persisting in prayer even when it doesn't feel like God is listening or responding.

Keep on praying!

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. Luke 18:1 (ESV)

This is one of the few parable where Jesus tells us the point of the parable in the front of the parable. Jesus doesn't want us to miss the point he is making in this parable. Always pray. Don't give up on praying. Don't lose heart when we pray. Don't get discouraged when it feel like your prayers are not heard and they aren't making a difference! Keep on praying.

Let's look at the parable and what else it teaches us about persisting in prayer.

He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" Luke 18:2-5 (ESV)

This is just a story. This is a fictional judge, but it was based on real life in Israel at this time. Every city had a court and a judge that rendered verdicts. This was not a high court. It was not a religious court. This is a civil court. We would call this a small claims court. If you want to picture this kind of court, think of Judge Judy. It was that kind of court. If you are too young and have never seen Judge Judy, look her up on YouTube this afternoon for a good laugh, and you will know what I mean.

The judge in this imaginary court was not a good judge. This was a very wicked judge. The two defining qualities about this judge were that he did not fear God and he did not respect men.

What does it mean to not fear God? It means he did not care what God thought about the judgments he rendered. He didn't care that one day he will give an answer to God for his judgments. He didn't care that as a judge he answered to God as a higher judge. This was a judge with no fear of God in his eyes.

When judges were established in Israel, one of the passages every judge was familiar with was 2 Chronicles 19. It told them how they were to do their job as a judge.

He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and said to the judges, "Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the Lord. He is with you in giving judgment. Now then, let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the Lord our God, or partiality or taking bribes." 2 Chronicles 19:5–7 (ESV)

Judges were to fear the Lord. They were answerable to God. They were to be especially careful to make sure they ruled with fairness. The judge in Jesus' story didn't care about this. He was easy to bribe. You could get him to rule in

your favor by bribing him with nothing more than a gift card to his favorite fast food restaurant.

This judge was also described as no respecter of man. That means he didn't care about people. As a judge, his job was to protect people who were being taken advantage of by those who were evil. This judge would see people in his court that were abused and mistreated but instead of using the law and his power to enforce it to help them, he had no compassion and ignored them. This guy was a cold-hearted snake. He didn't care what God thought about his judgements. He didn't care about protecting the innocent with his power to render a judgment. This guy was the worst kind of judge. He was a nightmare.

The other character in this story is the woman. It tells us she was a widow. A little historical background would help us understand the uniqueness of this situation. In this day, women were not allowed in court. Court was a place for men. When a woman had a grievance, it was brought to court by her husband. If she didn't have a husband, it was brought by her father or her brother. The only way a woman brought her own grievance to court was if she was all alone in this world without any man in her family to take up her case and protect. That was the case for this woman. She was a widow so she had no husband to stand up for her. She was in court by herself because she had no father or brothers to look out for her. She was absolutely alone in this world. That was why she was in this court. This woman was powerless. She was vulnerable. She had no leverage. This is most likely why someone took advantage of her in the first place.

She also has a just a complaint. She was not asking the unjust judge to rule in her favor. She was asking him to give her the justice that was due her against her adversary. She didn't have a disputable case. She had a clear case. The judge simply needed to hear her case and give her the justice everyone knew she deserved. She was powerless in this world to get justice by herself. She needed this judge to stand up for her and give her the justice she deserved.

In addition, this judge had some clear biblical direction telling him how he should have dealt with her and her case.

...learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. Isaiah 1:17 (ESV)

God's Word reminded this judge that he had a special responsibility to stand up for a woman in this kind of situation. He had a God-given responsibility to go out of his way to protect and help her. Unfortunately, this judge didn't care about any of that. He ignored her and her case every day. Here is where it gets interesting. There is one thing this powerful, unjust judge didn't count on when it came to this powerless woman. That was her persistence.

Every day she was in court. Every day she was asking the judge to give her the justice she deserved. She wore out this judge with her constant coming. He finally decided to grant her justice because she exhausted him with her dogged persistence. She made herself an irritant to him. The judge said she was beating him down by her continual coming. The Greek term for beating someone down is a Greek boxing term. It means to give someone a black eye. This powerless woman forced a powerful and uncaring judge to do what was right by beating him up with her persistence.

At this point, many of you think you have things figured out. You think this woman is giving us an example to follow. If we just pray persistently, if we would just pray morning, noon, and evening about some things, then we would get the response we are looking for. We would be able to force God's hand into action by our constant persistence. Then he would answer our prayer.

Before you go too far down that road, you need to know this is not a parable of similarity. It is a parable of contrast. Our God is NOT like the unjust judge. While the unjust judge didn't care about justice, our God is committed to justice. While the unjust judge didn't care about this helpless widow, our God passionately cares about you and me.

He loves us so much he gave his own son to die in our place to completely forgive our sins to bring us to God. He loves us so much that Christ's sacrifice for our sins is so great that we cannot be outside the grace of God. No matter how much we sin, we are totally and fully saved by Jesus. When we come to God in prayer, he loves us. He cares about us. He promises to respond to us! Look how this parable flips direction.

And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily..." Luke 18:6-8 (ESV)

As disciples of Jesus, we are not strangers to God. Jesus called us his elect. The elect are those God chose before the foundation of the world to be the most blessed beings in the entire universe. The elect are those who have trusted in Christ and for all of eternity will be the most blessed beings in the universe because of Christ. We will be Jesus' adopted brothers and sisters for all of

eternity. God loves us that much. Our God is not like the unjust judge. He does listen to us. He does respond to our prayers, and he responds quickly.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Romans 8:31–32 (ESV)

This is great, but if all this is true, that raises the million dollar question. Even though our God is not like the unjust judge, he does hear our prayers and he does respond to our prayer quickly, why does it feel so many times like God is not listening, like God is not responding?

I will give you three reasons.

First, God is listening and responding but he is responding in the wisdom of his timing, not in the wisdom of our timing. Many times, we face a little difficulty and call out to God, asking him to take away all our adversity and pain. We wonder why he doesn't take it all away moments after we pray. Sometimes God uses adversity to bring us maturity. He uses difficult times to teach us to rely on him more and love him better. God may answer our prayers the way we request but he will do it in the wisdom of his timing, not in ours. He may let the adversity continue for a period of time to bring us greater maturity, humility and love for him through it.

Sometimes we can look back in life and see how God began answering our prayers when we started to pray but we didn't realize it until a few months later. Maybe you have had the experience of being without a job. You prayed on your knees for God to provide the right place to work but for months it looked like nothing was happening. When you finally landed the right job, it all became clear. When you started praying, God began moving people around in the company

you would later join. As he shifted people around over those two months he cleared the opening for the job he wanted you to take. God was answering your prayers from the day you began praying, he was just unfolding that answer gradually over time, not instantly.

Second, God answers our prayer in a way that brings God greater glory. We like to think the purpose of life is that we would be richer, fatter, and happier. That is not the purpose of life. The purpose of life is that God would get glory and honor through our lives. In eternity, when we stand before God, what will matter? Will it matter that we became richer, fatter, and happier or will it matter that God was brought great glory through our lives? On the day we stand before Jesus, it will be abundantly clear that all that really matters is that we bring glory to God. While we pray for God to answer our prayers in a particular way, because God loves us so much, he may not answer our prayers in the way we would expect. He will answer our prayers in ways that allow us to bring more glory to God through our lives than we ever prayed we could. That may not mean God answers our prayers by making life easier. He will answer our prayers by making sure he gets greater glory through our lives than we ever expected, hoped for, or planned for.

Third, God answers our prayers in a way that is good for us. We know this because Romans 8:38 tells us God works everything together for good to them who love him. What many of us don't realize is the way God defines our good is not always the way we define our good. We think our good is greater comfort. God says our good is that we would become more like Jesus. Since God loves

us so much, he answers our prayers in ways that will form the character of Jesus within us, not necessarily in ways that will fill our lives with comfort and ease. At the end of the day, what is better? It is better that God answers our prayers in ways that always provides comfort and ease or that God answers our prayers in ways that teach us humility, and dependence so we become more like Jesus in this world? Since God loves us so much, he will answer our prayers in ways that will make us more like Jesus.

At times will we be tempted to feel that our God is like the unjust judge who doesn't love us and doesn't care about us? Yes, those times will come, but we know the truth. Our God does love us. We are his elect. He sent his son to die for us. We are the most blessed beings in the universe. God is answering our prayers, but he is answering them in better ways than we could imagine or plan for. He is answering our prayers in the wisdom of his timing, not in the short-sightedness of our time. He is answering our prayers in ways that will not always make us richer, fatter, and happier but in ways that will give us the opportunity to bring God greater glory with our lives. He is also answering our prayers in ways that are for our good, that will help form the character of Jesus within us. That is why we never give up on praying. God loves us. He is answering our prayers, but he is doing it in ways that are better than we could imagine.

We also never give up on prayer because prayer is essential to keeping our hearts more in love with Jesus than the things of this world. Over the passing of time, a life without prayer can become like Lot's wife's life, where we are more in love with the things of this world that we are losing than the salvation of God

we are receiving. Let us pray, continue to pray, and never give up on prayer. We do not want to be found to be like Lot's wife on the day of Christ's return.



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