

A woman stopped at church on Friday afternoon. She was selling magazines and books but I think was really looking for someplace dry. We got to talking and she described how hard it was to do what she was doing. No one wanted to talk with her. Some ran the other way. Others opened the door not happy to see her. Still others said no in mean and nasty ways. When I asked her why she kept going she said this is what she needed to do to provide for her and her family right now. As she left I knew there would be more houses and more people that would turn her down yet she would be persistent.

Isn't life like that sometimes? We're doing things we don't want to do but we do them because we have to. Or we're experiencing a life that isn't what we thought it would be. We expected better but got worse. Surgeries come up, business fails, and families fight. It's times like these, when we don't know where else to turn, that we turn to God in prayer. And we pour our hearts out.

Jesus taught his disciples a lot of lessons. Today he teaches them a lesson on persistent praying. The gospel records Jesus telling his people a story to help them understand what he wanted them to know about prayer. We listen as Jesus tells his disciples to...

**Pray persistently
Demonstrated by the widow
Encouraged by the Lord's promises**

Both main characters came from the same community. That doesn't necessarily mean they interacted normally. One was a judge and the other a widow. One had authority built into the office the other was scraping and clawing just to survive. One didn't care about anything but himself the other cared about getting justice. One was a judge **"who neither feared God nor cared about men."** The other **"a widow who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'"**

The problem is this judge doesn't care about the widow's problems. He's got authority and that's all he wants. He simply refused to grant her the justice that she was owed. It didn't matter to him that she was having trouble in her life? Even in the face of being ignored and shot down constantly the attitude of this widow shines through. She persists. She keeps coming. And she would keep annoying and bothering the judge until he cracked. And that attitude is what got this judge moving. It wasn't the responsibility he had or the fact that she was owed justice. It was his sanity. She wasn't going to stop. When he couldn't take it anymore he said, **"Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!"** It was like she kept hitting him in the mouth with her pleas. And like a prized fighter she wouldn't let up till he fell.

Is there something that you've been praying for a long time? Like a prayer for your close relative to get better but it doesn't seem to be happening. Maybe you've been praying that the Lord would restore a past relationship that has gone sour. You've been praying for this country to turn around. Or you've been praying for this church to grow and get stronger. You pray that people would wake up and return to church. You've prayed for financial stability or for economic growth. As many times as you've prayed for whatever it is you'd think you would have it already. If we don't, what's wrong?

God hears us, we think. But if we don't have our answer we wonder. Could God have missed my prayer among the millions he gets every minute? He's so busy he's probably out getting to someone else's prayer. Maybe he doesn't answer because I'm being selfish. Praying for a new boat can't be nearly as important as the person with cancer. He probably doesn't take time for my prayers when others have much worse problems. Or maybe God's on break. He's letting us go by ourselves to see how we make it. Or we doubt God even hears us. Or he's ignoring us. What are we to him anyway? I'm just a teenager or a young kid or a senior citizen. God probably doesn't care about listening to my prayers anymore.

The widow is our example. Don't give up because persistence pays off. So pray persistently. Jacob wrestled with God in prayer and he wouldn't let God go until he blessed him. Why? Because Jacob knew who God is. He's a God who shows love. He's a God who is gracious and merciful. You might feel like you're wrestling with God in prayer. Don't give up because you know who God is. Pray like you need to wear God down. But know you don't. God looks on you with favor already. Jesus brought you into the family. God loves you and invites you to pray. Don't quit just because it seems God didn't answer you today. Don't quit just because it's been a week, a month, or years. Pray persistently.

Don't miss the one main point of this parable. It's the comparison between the unjust judge and God, the unrighteous judge and righteous God. Many people make the mistake of thinking the unjust judge is God, but they are very different. We might learn persistence from the widow. But it's the Lord's promises that encourage us to be persistent in prayer long after we would give up.

She had to badger him every day. Basically she tried to make life miserable for this judge till he gave her justice. God doesn't have to be badgered. In fact God doesn't have to be bought off with a deal, bribed, or coerced in anyway. We don't have to reach a certain number of prayers on the same subject. We're not looking for a combination of the lock of heaven figuring if we can find that God will pour out blessings. God made plans to win us for heaven before creation. The plan was to send Christ to die in place of every single human being. In Christ God chose you and me. We're loved by God. Those God loves he will not ignore. The one who died to save us won't now deny us any good thing. **"And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night?"** The answer is yes.

So how come you don't have the new boat or the vacation home at the lake? How come you don't have the money to cover even basic necessities sometimes? How come you still get sick and have to visit the doctor? How come loved ones still die? Isn't God answering my prayers now because he loves me and chose me? Jesus' answer, **"I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."** When Jesus says, I tell you, you know he's serious. This is a promise of God. So we should expect exactly what we want when we want it, right? That's what's quick enough for me.

We need to remember the facts about speed according to God's time. Peter said, **"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."** God's clock doesn't tick the same speed as ours. Some of your prayers are delayed today for a reason. He might want to strip the selfishness away from your request. Maybe he's increasing your desire or testing how persistent you'll be. Other times he knows the quick response will do nothing for your faith. So he delays and your faith and trust in him grows stronger. We tell our kids the waiting makes the present better. So too we must know that our waiting on God makes the gift of his grace that much better. We have his word that at the right time he'll answer and it will always be what's best for our eternal good.

The woman who stopped by my office told me part of what keeps her going to the next door is that person might say yes. Persistence is the only thing that will pay off in her line of work. God hasn't shut the door to your prayers. In fact he invites you to persistence. He invites you to recognize his love for you and let that drive you to more prayers. See persistence demonstrated in the widow's constant pleas for justice. But find your motivation and encouragement to persistence in the loving promises of God in Christ.