

## STUDY ON THE PARABLES OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

### The Parables of Persistence in Prayer

Read Luke 11:5-8; Luke 18:1-8

This is a study of two stories (parables) that hit home on the same point – Persistence in Prayer. The first is about a man who had a friend come to him late at night after a journey. He wanted to feed him with something, but he had nothing to serve. So, he went to a neighbour and asked, *"Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him"* (Luke 11:5-6). The friend did not want to be bothered. He had already gone to bed. But the petitioner kept pounding at the door, and eventually he got up and gave him bread, not because he was his friend but because of the seeker's persistence.

*"I tell you—because of your shameless persistence, even though it's the middle of the night, your friend will get up out of his bed and give you all that you need."* (Luke 11:8 TPT)

The Lord then said, in what has since come to be regarded as the great Magna Carta of believing prayer, *"... ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."* (vv9-10).

Jesus also compared God to a human father, saying, *"If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"* (vv11-13).

The second story is the parable of the unjust judge. There was a judge who was unconcerned with giving justice. A widow in his town who had been unjustly treated, and who had no husband to plead her case, kept coming to him with the cry: *"Get justice for me from my adversary"* (Luke 18:3). He refused for a long time. But at last, he gave her what she wanted, reasoning, *"Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me."* (vv4-5)

The Lord then drew this conclusion: *"And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"* (vv7-8).

### **PERSPECTIVES**

Before we speak further of persistence or perseverance in prayer, we need to place the subject in a wider biblical context. There are several points to consider.

First, the stories do not teach that God has gone to bed and is reluctant to get up and meet His children's needs. That may be true of Baal (*"Perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened"* [1 Kings 18:27]), but it is not true of the ever-watchful, all-knowing God of Israel. God is equally not an unjust judge. Merely to state it thus shows that the comparison is not one of likeness but of contrast. Indeed, that is the way Jesus spells it out in the application. We are evil, He says in the first parable. Even so, we will give to a person who persists in asking for something; and, if we are fathers, we will certainly give good gifts to our children. How much more will God give, since He is not at all evil or reluctant! The point of the second parable is that if even an unjust judge will give justice, because of a person's persistence, how much more will God who is not unjust but rather acts rightly!

Let us say it again; God is not unjust, and He is not asleep. He always does what is right; He is always awake to His children's needs. That is meant to be the greatest possible encouragement to us in our petitions.

Second, these stories do not teach that the privilege of prayer is for everyone. On the contrary, it is for God's children only. In the first story the person to whom the petitioner goes is his 'friend' (v. 5), not a stranger. When the Lord applies the parable, He speaks of God as "your Father in heaven," and God is not the Father of everyone. We see the same thing in the second story. In it there is no indication of any special relationship between the widow and the judge, but when Jesus applies the parable, He makes clear what the limitation is by the term "his elect." He says, "*And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?*" (v. 7).

Is this persistent prayer a model to persist in praying to God for anything?

### **PRAYING IN GOD'S WILL**

For what, then, are we to pray? What can we pray for and know that God will eventually give it even though His granting of the request may be delayed? For what things should we persevere? Here our answer falls into two categories:

1. Things clearly said in Scripture to be the will of God for us
2. Things not explicitly stated as God's will for us individually or for any one point in history, but, nevertheless, things generally conformed to God's desires.

What things would be included in the first category? Many of the desires of God are disclosed for us in Scripture. In the Bible God's will is expressed in great principles.

#### **God's Will for Unbelievers:**

*"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."* (**John 6:40**)

If you are not a Christian, God's will for you begins here. In one sense, God's will is wrapped up in the life and ministry of Jesus, and God will not take you on to other things until you believe in Him. He will not teach you spiritual calculus until you have mastered rudimentary math.

#### **God's Will for the Renewed Mind:**

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* (**Romans 12:1-2**)

Christians can accept as an unchangeable principle the truth that anything that contributes to growth in holiness and the surrender or renewal of the mind is an aspect of God's will, and anything that hinders growth in holiness is not.

#### **God's Will That We Claim His Promises:**

A Christian may also claim God's promises, for they are certainly God's will for his life.

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."* (**James 1:5**)

If you ask for wisdom, you can be certain that you are praying in God's will and that your prayer will be answered.

## PREVAILING PRAYER

Now we come to the second category. What about things that are in general conformity with God's desires, but for which we have no explicit promise that they will be true for us?

Here we must be most careful. On the one hand, we know that James says, "You do not have because you do not ask [it of God]." (**James 4:2 AMP**). That seems to say that we ought to ask and keep on asking. On the other hand, we know that in the very next verse, the writer goes on to say, "You ask [God for something] and do not receive it, because you ask with wrong motives [out of selfishness or with an unrighteous agenda], so that [when you get what you want] you may spend it on your [hedonistic] desires." (**v3 AMP**). It is obviously possible to pray wrongly in situations, and if that is the case, should we ever persevere in praying? I think the answer to that problem can be found along these lines.

If you find yourself wanting to pray for something in this category - things in general conformity with God's will but not necessarily promised to you or anyone else and find, as you pray, that your confidence in God's desire to answer your petition grows, then continue to pray; know that He will answer your prayers in due time. But if, as you pray, you do not find confidence and your ability to persevere in prayer weakens, then drop your petition. That does not necessarily mean that God will not do what you have asked for. Others may be praying but it may mean that it is not His will to give you that petition or at least, not to give it now.

That does not let you off the hook, however. You cannot say,

"Well, I have no great burden to pray for anything, so I guess I don't need to persevere in prayer at all." That does not follow. Not every age is an age of great revival, but Jesus told us to "Therefore, [prayerfully] ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest." (**Luke 10:2 AMP**). If you can pray for nothing else, you can pray that God will raise up workers and send revival to our land.

In the nineteenth century, the revivals under D. L. Moody and others were carried on in a spirit of prayer. Can we not have that today? One writer says, "It is not necessary that the whole church get to praying to begin with. Great revivals always begin first in the hearts of a few men and women whom God arouses by his Spirit to believe in him as a living God, as a God who answers prayer, and upon whose heart he lays a burden from which no rest can be found except in importunate crying unto God."

Have you nothing for which you can persevere in prayer? Then persevere in prayer for revival. Who can tell what God may do as a result of your prayer and the prayers of others whom He also calls to that service? The Bible says, "...for tremendous power is released through the passionate, heartfelt prayer of a godly believer!" (**James 5:16 TPT**)

