

Welcome and Reminders

Welcome to any visitors and welcome back to the group members. It is important to remember that everything said and done in this group is confidential. The expectation is that there will not be discussion about our conversations to anyone outside of the group that is represented here and now. We understand that sometimes personal insights or information may be shared by someone who feels comfortable doing so in this group and not around others. Let's be respectful of that and carry our commitment to confidentiality as we leave this group. (*Pass out the confidentiality reminder to anyone who has not yet received one*).

Prayer and Praises

The Widow and the Unjust Judge

Luke 10:25-37

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "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. But 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!'"

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? Will he keep putting them off? 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?"

Let's take a moment to recap the story in discussion:

- *What happened?*
- *What do you think the general theme is of this parable?*
- *Who do the characters in this parable represent?*

Many who read this story are so troubled by one question that they miss the point of the story itself. Why, they ask, is God compared with an unjust judge, a brutal and merciless man?

- *How does God compare and contrast to the judge in this story?*

The point of the story is also troublesome, especially with regard to certain theories of prayer. The stated issue of the story, clear and inescapable, is that we should not give up in our praying; we ought “to pray always and not...lose heart.”²

- *Why should we pray persistently?*
- *Do you believe it is necessary/important to convince God of our earnestness?*
- *Do you ever feel like God indifferent to your prayers? Explain*
- *Must we convince God of the rightness of our cause and of our need of divine help?*

If this were the only place in the Scriptures where we are taught to “pray without ceasing,” we might perhaps find a way around the issue (though doing so would surely take some artful maneuvering). But this theme of unwavering prayer comes up again and again in both the Old and the New Testaments.³

- *What is your initial response to the question, “What is the purpose of prayer?”*

Isaiah 40:31 promised that those who “wait upon the Lord” find themselves renewed; and the renewing equips us to rise up like eagles, run, or walk, whatever the demands of life may be. Thus, when we pray, we are restoring our own spirit.⁴

- *Does Isaiah’s perspective in waiting on God change or expand your answer to the question “What is the purpose of prayer?” If so, explain.*

But prayer does more than change the mind and manner of the person who prays. When we pray, we engage in the eternal struggle against evil. Far from arguing with God to convince God of the rightness of our wishes, prayer, at its best, puts us in alliance with God for the achieving of God’s purposes.⁵

- *Do you ever see prayer as a kind of partnership with God?*
- *Do you ever feel God is unresponsive to your prayers? If so, how do you reconcile yourself with God’s unresponsiveness?*

This parable is a powerful reassurance in a world where evil seems sometimes to run rampant. It must have been particularly bracing to the generation that first received copies of Luke’s Gospel, for by that time the tiny band of believers was again and again being victimized by persecution. In the midst of attacks by powerful governments that were not overly concerned with justice or fair play, believers were promised that God cared and was at work to set things right.⁶

- *Where is God, do you think, in the midst of sin and when life seems out of control?*

Jesus did not conclude the parable by asking, “Will your prayers be unanswered?” or by promising an answer.⁷

- *What are Jesus’ final words?*

At the turn of the century when a coalition of dedicated citizens tried to overturn a corrupt political machine in New York City, at first they won; then after a short period of time the political machine was back in power. Someone wisely explained that this happened because, “the good people got tired of being good before the bad people got tired of being bad.”⁸

- *What happens when the good people get tired of being good before the bad people get tired of being bad”? Does prayer matter here?*

¹ J. Ellsworth Kalas, *Parables of Jesus*, 69.

¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹ *Ibid.*, 77.