



LET US PRAY

DEVOTING | WORSHIPPING | ASKING | TRUSTING | WAITING | ENQUIRING | PERSEVERING | THINKING

LET US PRAY

© 2015, Cornerstone Church Johannesburg

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.

This means that this work may be copied and distributed freely as long as the work is credited to Cornerstone Church and that the work is never sold in any way or form. This work cannot be used for commercial purposes.

The work may also be altered or adapted, provided that it is made clear that the alteration or adaptation is not part of the original work and not endorsed by Cornerstone Church Johannesburg, unless the work is endorsed which would be agreed upon with Cornerstone Church Johannesburg.

If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license to this one.

See the details of this Creative Commons license at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission.

All rights reserved.

LET US PRAY

INTRODUCTION

There is a difference between knowing about prayer and actually praying. What we learn about prayer in Scripture is written to help us to actually pray. For the majority of Christians their knowledge of prayer outweighs their actual prayer.

“Prayer is the measure of the man spiritually, in a way that nothing else is, so that how we pray is as an important a question as we can ever face.” - J.I. Packer

This short booklet on prayer is designed to complement our four part preaching series entitled “Let Us Pray”, which was preached at all the sites of Cornerstone Church Johannesburg in May 2015. The recordings are available at :

<http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/category/messages/let-us-pray-messages/>

See more resources at cornerstonechurch.co.za

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION..... | 4 |
| Part One: DEVOTING AND WORSHIPPING..... | 6 |
| Part Two: ASKING AND TRUSTING..... | 14 |
| Part Three: WAITING AND ENQUIRING..... | 22 |
| Part Four: PERSEVERING AND THANKING..... | 29 |

Part One

DEVOTING AND WORSHIPPING

Luke 11:1

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

Jesus obviously had a lifestyle of prayer. So much so that his disciples noticed and wanted to learn from him on how to pray. Notice they never asked him, "Teach us how to preach," but "Teach us how to pray." There must have been something about Jesus and his prayer life that made them realise this was important. They must have seen a connection between Jesus' powerful public life and his devoted life of prayer.

Jesus' prayer life

As disciples of Jesus we need to learn from our Lord. So let us look at some major scriptures that tell us a bit about Jesus's lifestyle of prayer.

- Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days and nights in the wilderness at the outset of His public ministry and just prior to being tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:2).
- Luke 5:16 - "So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness

and prayed."

- Two times we see he prayed the whole night before he chose the twelve (Luke 6.12-16) and the night before he was crucified (Luke 22.39-46).
- While on the Cross, Jesus' first words and last words were a prayer to the Father - "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" and "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." (Luke 23.34, 46).
- There are fifteen occasions in the Gospels in which there is a record of Jesus praying. Of those fifteen, eleven are in Luke. Luke presents Jesus as the "Son of Man." As the "Son of Man" Jesus was totally dependent upon the Father and the Holy Spirit to execute the Father's will.

Early church prayer life

Acts 1:14

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Acts 2:42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

- We can see from these scriptures that prayer is a very important component of our Christian and Church life. We are to be 'devoted' to prayers, which is a very strong word.
- Paul says we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

When we see the central role of prayer in the life of Jesus and the early church we can only say, "Lord, teach us to pray." There is much room for growth in this area. Though most Christians somehow agree on the importance of prayer we don't reflect this in our lifestyle. Why is it that prayer meetings are less attended than Sunday meetings? Do we see prayer as some kind of extra-mural, optional extra?

"Lord teach us to pray" is not "Lord, teach us about prayer." Our aim is not to know more about prayer but actually pray.

"Prayer is the measure of a man's spirituality, in a way that nothing else is, so that how we pray is as an important a question as we can ever face." - J.I. Packer

Lord, teach us to pray

Matthew 6:6-10

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the

Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.*

What can we see here?

1. Prayer is tapping into the very purpose of our salvation

We know God and therefore bear fruit for God. The very reason Jesus came was to deliver us from the curse of sin and make us children of God. His work was to restore fellowship with God. He came to make His Father our Father too.

John 17:1-3

When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

When we pray we:

- Celebrate our relationship with God
- Get to know God better. Wayne Grudem says, “Prayer is personal communication with God.”
- Express our trust in God

The relationship Jesus came to restore is between us and God (creator and creature). He expressed it as a father / child relationship. It is marked by trust and dependence.

Jesus mentions “Father” four times in four verses above in the Lord’s prayer. God as Father is central to prayer. A Father hears us when we pray, cares, and will act for our good in response to our asking.

Luke 11:13

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Jesus used the father / son illustration to assure us that when we come to God (Our Father) he will act for our good. Martin Luther said, “Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness.”

2. We get to be involved in eternally important things: God's Kingdom mission.

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in

heaven.”

God is on a mission to bring the whole of creation back under the perfect rulership of His chosen King Jesus. This involves discipling all nations and preaching the Gospel to all nations (Matthew 28; Mark 16). God's kingly rule breaks out on earth in response to our prayer.

Matthew 9:36-38

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

This is a great privilege and responsibility. Most revivals in history of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit were preceded by prayer.

3. Prayer allows us to fulfill the single most important purpose of our lives: WORSHIP

“Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”

This call is to:

Isaiah 43:7

*Everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.*

Man's chief end is to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31) and to enjoy him forever (Psalm 73:25-26). Part of what it looks like to glorify God is to acknowledge who God is (our Creator, for starters) and to praise and worship Him as such. This we do in prayer.

- “Father in heaven” - We become aware of His supreme power and worth. True prayer is prayer that sees and affirms Him for who He is. And this is worship.
- “Hallowed be your name” – a cry for God to be revered and respected and acknowledged for who He is. First, however, this must happen in our lives. A prayerless life does not glorify God.

If prayer is at the very core of our lives as children of God we are to be devoted to it. Saying we ‘have to pray’ is not legalism any more than saying we have to put petrol in our car or we have to breathe. So we must be devoted in two ways:

Personally

- Regular, scheduled prayer times
- Spontaneous prayer times
- Make prayer our first response to everything

Corporately

- Regular, scheduled prayer times
- Regular prayer meetings

- Pray as couples
- Pray with friends
- Pray in Life Groups
- Pray spontaneously in all these

Part Two

ASKING AND TRUSTING

Luke 11:1-13

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.”

And he said to them, “When you pray, say:

“Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread,

and forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.”

And he said to them, “Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything’? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, 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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Jesus continues to teach His disciples about prayer with a parable that shows us that before we get to who and what to pray we must examine our attitude. More properly, we need to examine our belief. There's no plan or formula to prayer, but there is plenty to be said about what we think of God when we pray. The right deep-rooted belief translates into fervent prayer.

"And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, 6 for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'?"

This question evokes the response: no way, I won't do that. The question is essentially this: Would you get up to ask a friend for something whom you know will probably say no? You probably wouldn't. Jesus then leads into this:

"I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything

because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.”

Impudence means shamelessness or boldness. The knocker got what he wanted because he asked. Here is the point: even someone who would probably say no will eventually get up and respond, because you were shameless enough to ask. The reason why Jesus uses this illustration is to speak into the very problem of our heart when we pray.

When doing this series we surveyed sixty people and asked what their number one reason for becoming discouraged in prayer was. The answer was a lack of answers. In other words, they lose trust and are not sure if God can be trusted. It's as if we believe God says this:

“Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything.”

Andrew Murray says, “God knows that doubt and distrust towards Him are natural to us and that we view prayer as religious work without expecting an answer.”

But we can be assured of an answer.

If you think that God is like this friend who would not get out of bed, and that's what keeps you from asking, then the encouragement is to not let it. Be bold and shameless and ask anyway. Even an unkind friend will eventually get up and answer, so how much more will God? That's exactly why Jesus continues with this:

“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will

find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

Or the reverse of it in James:

James 4:2-3

“You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”

Assurance is rooted in the goodness and willingness of God

“Nothing is better adapted to excite us to prayer than a full conviction that we shall be heard.” - John Calvin.

Often we hear people talk of how they ‘believe in prayer’. But while what they’re saying makes sense, we really ought to be saying that we believe in God. We need to move from faith in prayer (as if it is some kind of formula) to faith in God. As a result of that faith, we pray.

This passage teaches that our assurance of an answer to prayer is not in persistent prayer but in the nature of the one we are praying to. Jesus assures us that God would never say ‘don’t bother me’ because God is always ready to answer. ‘Knock, and it will be opened to you’. Or, in another place, “Come all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28.) Instead of ‘don’t bother me’ there is an invitation to come. God never sleeps.

Psalm 121:1-4

*I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

The door is not shut. The temple curtain was torn from the top. God opened the way to him, not us.

Hebrews 10:19-20

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.”

Instead of being the friend knocking, you are actually one of the children in bed with their father! But Jesus does not just leave the parable here but goes even further to stress the point.

”How much more”

“What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

So Jesus comes full circle. He started with “Our Father” in the Lord’s Prayer and he ends with an illustration of how a father treats his sons. A father will respond to the needs of his son. Though we are evil, as parents we respond to the needs of our children. Though sinfulness has marred the image of God in us, we still love. Broken sinful people still know how to do good to their children.

So how much more will God? The Father is the one who is completely good.

Luke 18:19

“And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”

He gives good gifts. Not only does the good Father give good gifts, he gives the best gift – the Holy Spirit. God gives us Himself.

And this is the greatest gift of all. This is the solution behind every problem, behind every trouble. This is what gives us complete assurance. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee that every time we ask for something, anything; physical, emotional, anything; the solution comes from the Holy Spirit, from God Himself who abides with us and in us. This is what we have most need of.

But what about what looks like unanswered prayer?

- Maybe you just didn't ask.
- Maybe God's answer was no.

What father will give his son who asks for a scorpion, a scorpion? Sometimes we ask for scorpions. We might think they are needs, but sometimes our needs will actually be unhelpful. He knows what is best for us as a father knows what is best for their son / daughter.

- Maybe he wants to give it, but not now, because right now it will be unhelpful.
- Often in the waiting and continued prayer, God shapes us to handle His blessing.

Remember this text says that God gives His Holy Spirit. Maybe instead of changing the situation He changes us and produces the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

- Of course there is mystery.

Romans 8:28

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Even Jesus had a prayer not answered in the affirmative. He prayed, “Please take this cup from me.” But then prayed, “Not what I will, but what you will.” (Luke 22:42.)

The picture God uses to reveal himself here, as a father, teaches us of both His willingness to answer prayer and His own will and purpose, knowing what really is good and what is not. If we are outright living outside of His will and purpose we can't have an assurance of answered prayer. But He gives us the Holy Spirit so we can know what

is his 'good, pleasing and perfect will.' (Romans 12:2.)

Our assurance is rooted in the Father's character.

So therefore we become people of prayer.

“And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

This is in the present-continuous tense. In other words, keep on asking, keep on knocking, keep on seeking. We pursue God all our lives. By asking we recognise we have a need and realise we can't do everything ourselves. And our first lack is of God himself. But we know that He will open and answer, convinced he will meet our lack. Because He is good.

Part Three

WAITING AND ENQUIRING

Isaiah 64:1-4

*“Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains might quake at your presence--
as when fire kindles brushwood
and the fire causes water to boil--
to make your name known to your adversaries,
and that the nations might tremble at your presence!
When you did awesome things that we did not look for,
you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.”*

1 Peter 5:6-7

*“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so
that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your
anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”*

A key component to prayer is what the Old Testament calls “waiting on God”. Prayer is a lifestyle, not just an occurrence. To become someone who waits on God we have to start with prayer.

God acts for those who wait for Him. “It is the investment of all God's energy in every way for our eternal good. This he does only for those

who wait for him.” (John Piper.)

God acts and we wait. This speaks directly to our relationship with God. It speaks of our utter dependence on God to fulfil our every need.

Isaiah 31

*“Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help
and rely on horses,
who trust in chariots because they are many
and in horsemen because they are very strong,
but do not look to the Holy One of Israel
or consult the Lord!”*

The context of this scripture is that Israel's enemies were attacking them. Egypt is the very nation where they were captive for so many years. It represents the world. Yet they go looking for help from them! Sin makes us look for life and security and deliverance and purpose and identity and fulfilment in other places than God.

But there are promises for those who look and wait on God .

1. Satisfaction

Psalms 145:15-16

*“The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of every living thing.”*

2. Deliverance

Psalm 33:20

*“Our soul waits for the Lord;
he is our help and our shield.”*

3. Assurance of God's forgiveness and acceptance

Psalms 130:5-6

*“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.”*

4. Answer to prayer

Psalms 38:15

*“But for you, O Lord, do I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.”*

5. Strength

Isaiah 40:31

*“But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;*

they shall walk and not faint.”

6. Guidance

Psalm 25:5

*“Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.”*

Waiting on God means our first response is prayer. We are to seek God's counsel and his will before we pursue any human solution.

Psalms 106:13

*“But they soon forgot his works;
they did not wait for his counsel.”*

When we pray seeking God's guidance and insight we acknowledge our trust in him. Waiting on God is the proof that we trust Him. Prayer for so many of us is just rattling off our shopping list. But it is a relational act through and through.

Habakkuk 2:1

*“I will take my stand at my watchpost
and station myself on the tower,
and look out to see what he will say to me,
and what I will answer concerning my complaint.”*

It is often in prayer that we discern God's will. Waiting also implies that we are willing to submit to his will. It's in prayer that we give the weighty matters in our life to God.

1 Peter 5:6-7

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

We come to him and give Him the things we are longing for or are in need of. Notice above that God gives an answer “at the proper time.” This means there might be a period of waiting. In prayer we give the weighty things to God - waiting is then refusing to take it back and make your own plan. Waiting is refusing to take matters into your own hand because you are sure of God's answer. It means we persevere in the basics.

Psalms 37:34

*“Wait for the Lord and keep his way,
and he will exalt you to inherit the land;
you will look on when the wicked are cut off.”*

We are called to be faithful.

Galatians 6:9

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

Examples of not waiting

- Abraham was promised a son and that he will become a great nation. But time kept ticking by. So he slept with his servant and this proved to be a thorn in his flesh. (Genesis 16 -- 18.)

- Saul's company of men had a victory over a band of Philistines. The Philistines started to assemble and strike back. Saul's army got fidgety. He had to wait for God's word from a prophet before acting, but couldn't wait. So he just went ahead. His impatience and lack of waiting proved that He didn't really trust God. He was led by circumstances and insecurity and things went badly for him and the nation. (1 Samuel 13:8-15.)

Example of waiting

- David could have killed Saul two times. He refused to do so and let God work it out. As King he sought God's guidance in military affairs. He was a God-made man, not a self-made man. That meant he often had to patiently wait for God.

We often miss God's best by not waiting. Very often in:

- Provision
- A good business deal that is illegal or in a grey area
- We get involved in a bad relationship.

Ask God. Submit to His will. Waiting is not easy. Even the word implies that life is not ideal. There are challenges.

Wait on God to

- Supply Strength

Sometimes the road of honouring God is tough, and it's there that we need his strength.

So we wait on him in prayer. We cast the burden onto him, confessing our weakness, and in those moments that God strengthens us.

- Bring forgiveness

- Bring courage

Psalms 27:13-14

*I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living!*

Wait for the Lord;

be strong, and let your heart take courage;

wait for the Lord!

Blessed - Happy and to be envied are those who wait for God. God is Gracious to those who wait. He stands on his toes to show mercy to those who wait.

Isaiah 30:18

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you,

and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.

For the Lord is a God of justice;

blessed are all those who wait for him.

Isn't it interesting that the Lord also waits? It's like God is saying that if you take matters into your own hands he will wait. As soon as you stop and wait for him, then he will act!

Part Four

PERSEVERING AND THANKING

Luke 11:1-4

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

Our cry is, 'Lord, teach us, help us, challenge us, to pray more and to pray rightly.' We want to become a people that are found in prayer, that live in prayer, that thrive on prayer.

Prayer is our spiritual sustenance. It's like breathing, eating or sleeping. Without it we begin to starve, we become malnourished, we will be weak and incapable; we stray from God, we don't hear his voice, we don't know his will, our paths become dark and confused. Mankind does not have answers for us and you cannot do this thing called life yourself. We turn to our Father in Heaven.

As we ask 'teach us to pray' we're asking 'what is prayer? Why do we pray and how do we pray?' We are asking God to motivate us and give us insight and show us the benefits and power of prayer and to help us to pray more. We need to pray. Please pray.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice [in God] always [i.e. praise him joyfully], pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Colossians 4:2

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

In both these passages, Paul refers to steadfastness (perseverance) in prayer and thankfulness together. In his mind the two aspects are intertwined. Let's look at them individually and then together.

Perseverance

Prayer can so often and easily become a religious or superstitious routine. This is particularly the case when it comes to the matter of perseverance. We have a particular matter that we want God to take care of and because of a faulty view of what the Bible teaches on the subject, we end up in an unending cycle of monotonous requesting, thinking that our endless prayers must eventually store up enough spiritual go-go juice to make God do something. But this is not what the Bible teaches, including in this passage below:

Luke 18:1-8

1 And he [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' 4 For a while he refused, but afterwards he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the

unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Jesus has been answering the Pharisees' questions about the coming of the Kingdom of God and of His second coming. He talks about remaining faithful until the end. He goes on to stress the importance of humility, trust, and spiritual poverty in prayer and in our relationship with God in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector.

To 'always pray' and 'not lose heart' refers not to specific prayer requests but rather to prayer in general. We must be people who pray all the time. The nature of this parable is a classic one that can be described as, 'if this, then how much more so?' If an unrighteous judge will respond, how much more will God? God is compared to the judge not in that He is like the judge in the parable (at all!) but in that He is so much greater and better and more compassionate and loving than the judge. If a person can get justice from a wicked man by being persistent, how much more will God watch over, protect and sustain those that continually depend on Him in prayer?

The point of the parable is that we must continually draw near to God in prayer at all times because He is a generous, loving and powerful Father who will watch over and lift up those that depend on Him.

1. The context is the patient waiting for God's Kingdom to come (see Luke 17). The Kingdom of God is the second coming of Christ but it also refers to any matter in which God will establish His reign. For example, we need God to establish his reign over our finances,

relationships, etc. and we pray into these things.

2. This parable is not saying that God is like a grumpy judge with whom we have to persist in order to get anything out of him. It is saying that God is so much better than that. If hanging onto a grumpy judge will give you results, how much more will hanging onto the loving Father result in justice?

So then, what is this passage teaching us about prayer?

1. Prayer should be something that we do ongoingly.

“And he [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.”

- Do not give up on prayer. As we patiently wait for coming of God's Kingdom, as we hope for a better day, as we work out our salvation: **do not give up on prayer.** Daily, ongoingly. Crying out to Him night and day. Like breathing or eating or sleeping.
- Prayer is the life blood of our relationship with God, the substance of our connection with Him. Therefore we don't stop. If we stop we will lose heart. If we stop we will lose touch with God - we will begin to starve spiritually.
- This, then, is not for God's benefit but for our own. He is our life-line. If we lose Him, we lose hope. God does not need our persistent prayers. We need our persistent prayers. How do we keep on keeping on? How do we persist through all that is to come? We pray and we keep on praying. We keep on

turning to God. We keep on hanging onto Him. We keep on trusting Him.

- This passage is **not** referring to a particular prayer request but rather to **prayer in general**. We often take it to mean that we need to endlessly and repeatedly pray for one issue as if this will somehow get our prayer answered. This is not the right understanding of this parable.
- This requires deliberate attention: “do not lose heart!” It is a command. It requires obedience. It requires discipline. Prayer is something that will dwindle if we are not actively disciplined and attentive to it. (Keep watch! Colossians 4:2.)

2. Ongoing prayer focuses on justice

“And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?”

- In other words, the coming of God's Kingdom. The passage is concerned primarily with the coming of righteousness and peace and godly fear. It is concerned primarily with the spread of the gospel and the establishment of godly principles and lifestyles. It is concerned with others coming to know Christ and sin being driven out and ungodliness being replaced with godliness. This happens when God is shown and proven to be right. When the oppression of darkness falls away and the light shines out.

What are we crying out to God for?

3. Prayer should be ongoing because it will always result in justice for us.

“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?”

- We can rely on Him. We turn to Him again and again because we can rely on Him. As we patiently wait for the coming of His Kingdom, we turn to Him, the only one who can bring about His perfect peace.
- Our prayers are answered not because of our persistence but because He is good, just and loving.
- God is NOT some crummy, grumpy judge that needs to be constantly pestered in order to get a result from him. NO! He is supremely better than that: loving, generous, kind, gracious, merciful.
- Persistence does **not** make God act. This parable is not teaching a formula that forces God to act. God acts because of who He is. Persistence keeps us close to God and demonstrates and works out our faith and trust in Him.

4. Prayer should be ongoing because it will result in speedy justice for us.

“Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.”

- We can rely on Him. He is not slow in answering our prayers. He answers them in the right way and at the right time. He does not make us wait unnecessarily (although he does sometimes make us wait for the right reasons).
- Remember that this also means that our prayers are not always answered in the way we think they should be or when we think they should be. God is right when it comes to such matters, He will answer our prayers in the right time.

5. Prayer should be ongoing because it will result in sustained faith right until the end which is pleasing to God.

“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” [i.e. will we lose heart despite God's goodness? Not if we hang on to him in prayer]”

- We can rely on Him. Prayer will sustain us, ensuring that we are steady and faithful servants of the king.
- This does not necessarily refer only to the second coming but could also refer to any circumstance in which the Kingdom of God finally breaks in.

Let's clarify:

What perseverance is not

- It is not continually bothering God until he gives us an answer. It is not chipping away at an immovable mountain of granite.
- Our perseverance does not somehow give God the power to act or the will to act as if we need to fill up a petrol tank of prayer before the car will run. We do not have to earn a certain number of prayer points before God will or is able to act. **God is able and is willing.**
- Persevering is not endlessly repeating a request because we feel that the diligence and effort that we put into such an act must somehow impress God or please Him. This would be empty religion.
- Persevering is not some superstitious, magical process or wishing really hard.

What perseverance is

- Persevering is the working out of our dependence on God. We keep turning to him because he is the only one that can resolve the matter.
- Persevering is faith in action.

- Perseverance is being earnest, serious, genuine in our prayers.
- Perseverance is trust. We turn again and again for all things, big and small, in thankfulness and in asking, because He is able and willing and just.

When, then, can we stop praying?

Never. Well, not until Jesus returns in any case. What about a particular matter? Only if God has completely satisfied the request, tells us to stop praying, or if he has already answered 'no.'

Thanksgiving

Perseverance without thanksgiving will result in the wrong attitude in our prayer. We need to remember that, if we trust Him, God will answer our prayers in the right time and the right way. Thanksgiving focuses on the person of God – who He is and what He has done and will do. It is worship. It is us appreciating Him. It is relationship. It is an appreciation for His generosity and goodness. It is the realisation that He loves and looks after us.

Psalm 68:19-20 (NKJV)

*Blessed be the Lord,
Who daily loads us with benefits,
The God of our salvation! Selah
Our God is the God of salvation;
And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death.*

- Thanksgiving is an appreciation for who God is and what He has already done for us: our life, our sustenance, our provision, our salvation - all of these things come from God.
- Thanksgiving is an appreciation for all that God is doing for us - He is hearing our prayers, He is working things out for our good, He is showing love and mercy and compassion to us.
- Thanksgiving is an appreciation for all the things that God will do for us - all things will be answered and perfectly completed in time. Maybe not exactly as we imagine them, but rightly.

We always have something to thank Him for:

- For who He is
- For all He has done for us (all good things come from Him - James 1:17, salvation)
- Even when we cannot see any good in our circumstances we can thank Him that He is watching over us and working for our good (Rom 8:28)
- For all that is to come (the fullness of His Kingdom).

When we leave thanksgiving out of prayer:

- We may be taking Him for granted. We ask without appreciating Him. We ask without acknowledging or focusing

on our relationship with Him.

- We may not have a sufficiently high view of who He is. We do not genuinely believe that He is watching over us and loving us and providing for us.
- We may doubt His sure hand in our lives, or His ability or willingness to look after us. We doubt his love or provision for us.

Prayer begins with worship ("Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed by your name...") and must contain worship and acknowledgement of God and what He does for us throughout (thanksgiving). Our attitude in prayer must continually be one of appreciation for who He is and what He has done for us.

Trust is perfect when we match a full appreciation for who God is and how He acts for us, with a continual dependence on Him for all things. Prayer needs thanksgiving. Prayer needs to be ongoing.

Colossians 4:2

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.