

Faith Prays
April 6, 2014

If you are a Jesus follower, I hope you prayed today. Jesus expects His followers to pray. He doesn't expect you to pray as a religious duty. He doesn't expect you to pray as a way of trying to win the favor of God. He doesn't expect you to pray to try to manipulate God into granting your wishes. Instead, Jesus expects you to pray because you realize your need to pray.

You need wisdom for making good life decisions, so you pray. You need to understand the Bible more, so you pray. You need to thank Jesus for dying for you, so you pray. You need to spend time enjoying Jesus, so you pray. You need strength as you battle temptations, so you pray.

For these reasons and more, you realize your need to pray. That's why a Christian prays. It is for these reasons Jesus expects you to pray.

And He wants you to keep on praying. As life gets harder keep praying. As the world slides further into immorality, keep praying. As your body ages and it gets harder to do what you want to do keep praying. Keep praying and don't quit. Don't give up on prayer.

Have you given up on prayer? Have you given up on seeking help?

Maybe you have hit a dry time in your prayer life. God seems distant. You took your Bible questions to God and He didn't answer them to your satisfaction. Did you quit praying?

Maybe you were worried about something and asked for courage, yet worry still haunts you. Did you then quit praying?

Maybe you asked for wisdom to make a difficult decision and still don't know what to do. So have you quit praying?

Maybe you hit a rough patch in life, and it has gone longer than you know how to cope with. Have you started doubting God and you quit praying?

Maybe you are doing more for God than ever before but not seeing any good results. Have you quit praying?

Jesus wants you to hang in there and keep on praying.

After Jesus finished His time on earth, He left for heaven. That was the plan. Jesus knew that His first followers were about to face some pretty challenging things after He left them to go back to heaven. So He told them a parable, a made up story, to illustrate that they should keep praying always and not give up hope of receiving an answer. Let's look at this parable together.

Luke 18:1 (NIV) Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

That phrase, "not give up" in verse one literally reads in the Greek, "not to give in to evil".

Luke 18:1 (NIV) Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and **not to give in to evil**.

Other translations for this read "lose hope", "give up", "not faint", "not become discouraged", and "turn coward". The evil aspect of it is that you are doubting God. Prayer relies on faith, not doubt. Doubting God is evil. Faith in God is good. So let me reword this verse for you.

Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not cease to do so because they doubt God. They should continue to have faith in God and pray.

With that background let's read the story Jesus told.

Luke 18:2-5 (NIV) He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 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 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!'"

In those days it was not uncommon to have dishonest judges. Judges were not elected, but appointed. Consequently if you really wanted to be a judge and had enough money, you could buy your way to an appointment. Then you could make more money by taking bribes.

The widow represents all the poor of the land. They did not have money or power to make sure they got justice. This woman wanted the judge to do the right thing, but she only had one way to try to convince him to do so. She would become a buzzing fly in his face. Don't you just hate it when a fly or gnat decides that you are the most interesting person in the room? They definitely get your attention from whatever it is you are doing.

Every child knows how to do that. "Please, mom. Can't we buy some candy? Can't I get this toy? Can't I buy that sweater? All the other kids have one? Can I have one? Please, please, please?" And your child will learn if that works on you. And if it does, your child will do it all through life.

This woman determined that she would be like that to this judge until he got so tired of her that he would give her justice. And it worked. Eventually, he did the right thing. He did not do the right thing for the right reason. He cared nothing about her. He had no compassion for her plight. He cared nothing about justice. He did not even fear God. The only person he cared about was himself. For his own peace he gave her justice, just so she'd quit bothering him.

Then Jesus switches gears and starts speaking of God.

Luke 18:6-8a (NIV) 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.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that Jesus was likening God to the unjust judge. Jesus was not saying God is like the judge. Rather, Jesus was contrasting God with the unjust judge. Jesus was speaking to His disciples, His Jewish disciples about the God they knew. They knew God is not like the judge. Jesus did not need to say so specifically because His followers knew the character of God. They had been taught the character of God all their lives.

Deuteronomy 32:4 (NIV) He (the LORD) is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

God is just. He cannot be bought off. He cannot be bribed. He cannot be influenced to swerve from justice. The Jews had been taught this since their early history. And that same history proved the justness of God. What else did they know?

1 Chronicles 16:34 (NIV) Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good...

God is good. God is good and everything He does is good. Everything He does for us is for our good, too. And one more.

Psalms 116:5 (NIV) The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.

God is compassionate. While we always want a judge to be just, we also want a judge to have compassion. This is especially true when we, or a loved one, is the accused. Compassion and mercy are qualities we have learned from God, because God is both.

God is both just and compassionate. We can expect to be treated fairly by God. And we can expect God to deal compassionately with us. These things Jesus' disciples knew. And they knew Jesus was contrasting the righteous God with the unjust judge.

Well Jesus isn't finished. He has one more point to make. Remember His goal in telling this story. His goal was to keep them praying and not give up.

Luke 18:8b (NIV)

However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

In addition to what they already knew about God, and about Jesus, they were about to learn a lot more. They were going to learn that God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son to die on a cross for all sinners. They were going to see Jesus die on the cross. They were going to see Jesus after God raised Him from the dead. They were going to see Jesus ascend up into heaven. And they were going to see and hear angels tell them that Jesus will return one day in the same way.

In this knowledge of God and Jesus they went out into the world as witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. They preached that all people could now be forgiven of sin and find eternal life in Jesus.

Many of us, too, have experienced the risen Jesus. We have become His followers. We have been baptized into His name. We are living for Him. And so we pray.

And sometimes we are tempted to quit praying.

When you are discouraged and tempted to doubt God because of your circumstances, remember what you know about God. Look back at your previous experiences with Jesus. Think back on other times that you were in a tough spot and He came through.

You might now be tempted to give up on prayer. Maybe you have been praying for several decades that Christianity would win the day in America, and instead we are losing ground. Don't give up praying.

Maybe you have been praying that Roe v. Wade would be reversed and it hasn't. Don't give up praying.

Maybe you have been praying for a spiritual awakening in our country. Don't give up praying.

Maybe you have been praying for world peace. Today the world has less peace than ever before. But don't give up praying.

Maybe you have been praying for a loved one to become a Christian and the person is as far from Christ as ever. Don't give up praying.

Maybe you have been praying for deliverance from a specific temptation or sin and you have not yet found victory. Don't give up praying.

Maybe because of one of these or something else, you have tired of praying. It doesn't seem to be doing any good. So you have become neglectful in prayer. But it isn't just prayer. Your faith is slipping too. True prayer is based on faith. That is why Jesus asks what he does at the end of the parable.

Luke 18:8b (NIV)

"... when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

When Jesus returns, will you still be praying? That's what Jesus expects. You have more reasons for continuing in prayer than for ceasing. Don't give up. Keep your faith in the Lord and keep on praying.

Invitation

Do you know yourself to be a sinner? Do you know you need a savior? God sent you one. God sent Jesus to die for your sins. Today, tell Jesus of your belief. Confess your sin to Him. Choose to believe on Him as your Savior. Turn your life over to Him as your Lord. Be baptized in His name and live for Him, and you will be forgiven of all sin and will inherit eternal life.