

## HIDDEN: He Justifies

Luke 18:1-8

One day Jesus told his disciples a story **to show that they should always pray and never give up (never lose heart).** <sup>2</sup>“There was a judge in a certain city,” he said, “who neither feared God nor cared about people. <sup>3</sup>A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, ‘Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.’ <sup>4</sup>The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, ‘I don’t fear God or care about people, <sup>5</sup>but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!’”

**<sup>6</sup>Then the Lord said, “Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. <sup>7</sup>Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So, don’t you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? <sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?”**

There are many things to consider in the topic of prayer, but the subject of concern today is one of IMPORTUNITY. This is a fancy word utilized by E.M. Bounds, one of the greatest teachers on prayer.

**IMPORTUNITY: Persistence, especially to the point of annoyance.**

Jesus gives credence to this type of praying. He prepares His disciples for delays in prayer. He teaches them to pray by saying, “Ask anything and it will be given,” but He also teaches them to pray and not lose heart. He takes note and rewards persistence when He sees it. This reveals something about the nature of prayer. It will often include delay, disappointment, and great trial before seeing the breakthrough. Yet, this is the nature of prayer, and only those who accept it will see the fruit of it.

Jesus teaches us that laxity, apathy, listlessness, and carelessness must be guarded against in prayer. It is the fervent prayer of the righteous that has great power and produces results (James 5:16).

Nevertheless, in the delay and the inertia of unanswered prayers, we can begin to lose heart rather than increase in our tenacity. This is exactly what Jesus warned against. Jesus had a special affinity for those who didn’t take “no” for an answer and He often taught His disciples to press through the opposition to take hold of the blessing. It’s this type of prayer that marked the people of God from the beginning, it’s this type of prayer that preceded great revivals in Church history, and it’s this kind of prayer that will carry the Church through the last days before His return.

Today, I want to inspire importunate prayer and shield us from quitting in our prayers.

## The Prayer of Importunity

The prayer of importunity—it is the pressing of our desires upon God with urgency and perseverance knowing He is the only One to provide the justice needed. It is the type of praying that comes with tenacity and tension which doesn't relax or stop until its cry is heard and its cause is won.

**“Our praying needs to be pressed and pursued with an energy that never tires, a persistency which will not be denied, and a courage that never fails.”**

**— E.M. Bounds**

This fervent, constant, persistent prayer is the type that moves God. It is a prayer on fire. It isn't feeble. It isn't a flickering flame, but it shines through the darkness and the cold, winter season with a constant glow. It is the prayer of the fervent that accomplishes much. This type of prayer comes from individuals who have a clear view of God, not a diminished view of God. It comes from those who understand their relationship with God and the power of their history with God. It comes from those who know how to fasten impossibility, frailty, sin, and trial to God and hold on like a Pitbull until they see His unrivaled power breakthrough.

We see it over and over in Scripture:

- Abraham prayed over and over for Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16-33)
- Jacob wrestled with God through the night with dogged perseverance for the blessing of God.
  - So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." Genesis 32:22-32
  - He was given the name ISRAEL: "One who wrestles with God." Jacob said, "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."
- Moses prayed fervently in the Tent of Meeting for God to forgive Israel and go with them into the Promised Land. It was due to his friendship and history with God that his request was granted. God said, "I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favorably on you, and I know you by name." Exodus 33:17
- Elijah repeated and urged his prayer by bending low and groaning seven times until the rain cloud appeared. He didn't give up after the first prayer produced nothing. He persisted. 1 Kings 18:41. Finally, when he saw the sign of an answered prayer he prepared to run!
- Daniel pressed into God and fasted 21 days before hearing from the Lord.
- Hannah fasted and prayed earnestly until she received the blessing of bearing a child.

**JESUS is our greatest example for prayer.** Last time I exhorted us that Jesus fasted so who are we to think we don't need to fast. Today, I want to exhort you that Jesus PRAYED so who are we to think we don't need a prayer life?

- Jesus prayed many nights and early in the morning.
- He prayed on the mountain before He was transfigured.
- Jesus prayed after being baptized and the heavens opened, and He receive the Holy Spirit
- Jesus prayed when making big decisions. He prayed all night before choosing His disciples.
- Jesus prayed for comfort and consolation after His cousin was killed.
- Jesus prayed before going to the cross to prepare His disciples for His departure.
- Jesus prayed when He was hanging on the cross.
- Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemene with importunate prayer... He sweat blood as He agonized with the Father about the cross...
- Jesus prayed to the Father that He would send the Holy Spirit
- Jesus is praying for us right now. Hebrews 7:25 says, "... he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. ***He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.***"

It is the IMPORTUNATE prayer God desires to see from His people, and it is when He sees this type of tenacity that He releases His blessing.

"We can do nothing without prayer. All things can be done by importunate prayer."

-- E. M. Bounds

The widow in this story presses her case to the unjust judge until he yields. Jesus enjoyed this type of faith. We see this in how He responded to a woman He initially rejected for help:

... a woman who had heard about Him came and fell at his feet. Her little girl was possessed by an evil spirit, and she begged him to cast out the demon from her daughter. Since she was a Gentile, born in Syrian Phoenicia, Jesus told her, "First I should feed the children—my own family, the Jews. It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs." She replied, "That's true, Lord, but even the dogs under the table are allowed to eat the scraps from the children's plates."

"Good answer!" he said. "Now go home, for the demon has left your daughter."

Mark 7:25-29

Initially, Jesus seems to give her no attention and He seems to show no sympathy. She gets silence, a closed door, even a harsh reason He is not obligated to answer her prayer. Her importunity is fascinating. She doesn't pay attention to these things. She isn't phased by these feelings. She knows He is able, and she knows He alone can save her daughter. She has chosen to petition the Man of Justice.

- His silence intensified her request and increased her boldness. It did not diminish it.

E. M. Bounds says, "The superficial prayer subsides into silence when the answer is delayed. But the person of prayer hangs on and on and on. The Lord recognizes and honors this faith and gives rich, abundant answers to this faith-evidencing prayer."

"We have need to give thought to that mysterious fact of prayer—the certainty that there will be delays, denials, and seeming failures in connection with its exercise. We are to prepare for these, to brook them up, and cease not in our urgent praying. Like a brave soldier, who, as the conflict grows sterner, exhibits a superior courage than in the earlier stages of the battle; so does the praying Christian, when denial and delay face him, increase his earnest asking, and cease not until prayer prevail." -- E.M. Bounds, Prayer and Importunity

**John Piper says, "Until we know life is war, we won't know what prayer is for."**

The war is real and the delay is real, but it is no indicator as to the outcome. God has the final say in all things, and, we, like the persistent widow come before Him continuously asking for justice.

Yet, even after teaching this to His disciples, He ends with this saying, "Will I even find faith on the earth when I return?"

This tells me the cry for justice will be loud as injustice reigns. In the same way His disciples grew tired and weary under the weight of sorrow on the night of His arrest and ceased in praying, the Church will be at risk of this. Jesus urges us to let our hearts be lit with the fire of the Spirit and cry out to Him day and night for justice in every situation of injustice we see.

He is about to answer speedily, but will He find you praying, asking, seeking, and preparing?

What must we know so not to lose heart in the delays? Satan aims to cultivate unbelief to stop us from praying by questioning the following things about God... We must know, and believe in faith...

### **HE IS GOOD**

But You, Sovereign Lord, help me for Your name's sake; out of the goodness of Your love, deliver me. For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me...With my mouth I will greatly extol the Lord; in the great throng of worshipers I will praise Him. For He stands at the right hand of the needy, to save their lives from those who would condemn them. Psalm 109: 21-22, 30-31

"That God is good is taught or implied on every page of the Bible and must be received as an article of faith as impregnable as the throne of God. It is a foundation stone for all sound thought about God and is necessary to moral sanity... If God is not good, then there can be no distinction between kindness and cruelty, and heaven can be hell and hell, heaven." - Tozer

Regardless of trial, persecution, sickness, pain, and delayed answers to prayer, our minds must be convinced that God is GOOD. It is when we question His sovereign goodness that we enter the spiral of unbelief.

Jesus says, "Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So, don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly!" Luke 18:6-8

"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" Matthew 7:11

His goodness is fully displayed on the cross. Every one of us deserves hell. We all have fallen short of the glory of God. There is no work we can do to earn God's salvation or blessings. Yet, God, in His goodness, chose to become flesh and take our sin on Himself and pay for it. This is the glory and reward revealing the depths of His kindness and mercy. When Satan aims to destroy our trust in God due to unanswered prayers for blessing, healing, revival, etc., we must put our helmet of salvation back on our mind. His goodness to lay His life down and save us girds our mind regardless of the trials we endure in seasons of unanswered prayer.

If Satan can't convince us to believe God isn't good, he will try to convince us to embrace a low view of God and determine He is not able... or maybe He is not moving in miracles and power in this day as in the days of old.

### **HE IS ABLE**

"I have heard all about you, LORD. I am filled with awe by your amazing works. In this time of our deep need, help us again as you did in years gone by. In wrath, remember mercy."

Habakkuk 3:2

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Matthew 19:26

This week, He had me repenting of having a low view and low expectation. My prayers are not targeted toward the impossible as they should be. I am praying for greater faith.

I was listening to a preacher teach on prayer and he mentioned the story of Don Piper, a man who was hit by a semi-truck while driving on a bridge and instantly died. The EMTs pronounced him dead on the scene, but a Baptist pastor saw the accident, leapt over the rubble, held his hand and prayed for him for 90 minutes. When the EMTs were about to leave, he begged them to check his pulse one more time. When they refused, he laid on the ground in front of their cars and refused to move until they checked his pulse. They finally obliged and found a pulse. He was transported to hospital for a long recovery, but now has his story of what he experienced in heaven.

I admit, I would not have faith to do that! I want that kind of faith. We know God is able!

Even so, if Satan can't convince us that He is not good or that He is not able, he will try to shut down our prayers by convincing us He is not willing...

Pray for a gift of faith. Pray, I believe, help my unbelief. Pray for help to expect more.

### **HE IS WILLING**

**"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance but laying hold of His willingness." -- Martin Luther**

**A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. Matthew 8:1-3**

If He is good, and He is able, Satan will try to convince me He is not willing. This has potential to destroy my confidence in God but look at the widow in our story. Even when Jesus says He is not willing, she persists. We do not want to hedge in our prayer life by believing God is not willing to break through with His miraculous help. It is better to believe He is willing than to steady the tenacity of my prayers by debating whether He is willing or not...

Nevertheless, we must remember that prayer changes US, it doesn't change GOD. He has a plan and a will for our lives. We pray and engage in seasons of fasting so we can understand His good and perfect will. Sometimes I have compromise in my life and it is tainting my understanding of His will. Sometimes my season of difficulty is producing character in me and praying for it to end is off target... prayer and fasting helps me to see what He is transforming in me... "Oh! I need to learn to love! Oh! I need humility..." There are prayers He is longing for us to pray and He is willing to answer, but often our own ideas for how we think life should go are tainting our ability to be transformed in prayer. He is willing, but why the delay? What are you doing God? Let me bend to your will.

Nevertheless, our hearts can get sick while waiting. Hope can become infected. The Proverbs say, **"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a hope fulfilled is a tree of life."**

What do we do when our HOPE becomes infected? We bring it to Jesus, allow it to die under the reality that we live for Him, and He owes us nothing. If He never blessed us with another blessing in this life, would we still love and serve Him? (Story of prayer room experience).

We still have every reason to love Him, serve Him, and praise Him with all of our strength because He saved us. When we can't do this, we know we are stumbling in the lies of Satan believing He isn't really good or able or willing and we have now shut down in interacting with Him. We must allow the hope to die because it has gotten infected... but He will resurrect it.

Jesus had to experience this in the Garden when He asked the Father 3x that the cup of your sin and mine would pass from Him, but even in His request He said, "Not my will, but Your will be done." When the Father denied His request, Jesus was given something else. He was strengthened by angels for the road to calvary. Sometimes God has a bigger picture in mind and our surrender is part of our prayer life.

Prayer is not simply a list of requests. Prayer is a place to get comfort and strength to endure the path the Father has designed for us to walk. Jesus did not allow His knowledge of the necessity of the cross to deter Him from asking... He knew the Father was willing, but He also chose to pray, "But, Your WILL be done..."

What keeps you from laying hold of these three words of Jesus, "I am willing," in your own situation? Could it be your fear of being disappointed? Would you be willing to risk that again? Often, our choice to stop asking is a form of self-protection, but we need to bring that to God, trust Him, surrender our will, and believe HE IS WILLING...

If all of these are in place, Satan will try to get you to believe His ways are not actually perfect for your life, or He is not actually protecting you in the process of waiting and asking...

### **HE IS PERFECT & PROTECTIVE**

**God's way is perfect. All the LORD's promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to him for protection. Psalms 18:30**

We must believe He is always aligning things so that the full ramifications of justice can be realized in our lives, but also in the age to come. His way is better than ours and His way is perfect. Prayer is not intended only to answer my requests. It is intended to change me and transform me into what God designed me to be. Only after I have been molded into the "real me" can I be ready to ask for the right things and maintain the blessings of God.

God told Joseph I was his wife, but also told him to wait a year and pray. There was much work being done in me and him in that year that prepared us for one another. Also, our love for God was being solidified so that we wouldn't lose sight of God as our priority when falling in love with one another.

How often God gives the answered prayer and we run off with the blessing and forget about Him. His perfect will is to cultivate love and stability in us. His perfect and protective will is to see us love Him first so that we can love others with HIS love, not our flawed, infected, selfish love. He desires to make us whole, peaceful, anchored, strong, steadfast, and ready to fulfill His will on earth. We miss this reality so often when we get caught up in earthly pleasures. Prayer detaches us from worldly pleasures and helps us realize God is our portion and our pleasure.

HOW?

- Pray for infected HOPE to be healed and revived in purity
- Pray for a renewed tenacity in prayer