

Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

Parable #35 ~ Luke 18:1-17 ~ The Persistent Widow ~ Scripture

¹ Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

⁴ “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, ⁵ 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!’ ”

⁶ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ 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? ⁸ 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?”

Parable #36 ~ Luke 18:9-14 ~ Praying: Pharisee, Tax Collector ~ Scripture

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

¹⁴ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Parable #35 ~ Luke 18:1-17 ~ The Persistent Widow ~ Discussion

1. When was a time when your persistence paid off?
2. Does persistence in prayer mean: a) endless repetition, b) long sessions of prayer, c) attending daily [or weekly] prayer meetings, d) keeping our requests constantly before God, e) something else (what?) Just what does it mean to be persistent in our prayers?
3. What do we know about the judge and the widow? Why did the judge eventually give in to the woman's requests? (18:4-5)
4. How are God's actions the same—and how are they different—from the unjust judge?
5. Why do people (you) stop praying? How should we respond when we do not see our prayers answered? How can you guard against the temptation to give up praying when you do not get the results you expect?
6. How can we be sure we are praying for things that are within the will of God? What phrase should we add to each of our prayers?

Parable #36 ~ Luke 18:9-14 ~ Praying: Pharisee, Tax Collector ~ Discussion

1. How does it feel to be in the presence of someone who is markedly better than you at what you do best?
2. What motivated the Pharisee to pray? How did he pray? (18:11-12)
3. What would be examples of "Pharisees" and "tax collectors" today? How important are outward appearances in our culture today? How do we judge people according to their outward appearance? Does outward appearance matter?
4. We all pray differently. Do you ever feel intimidated by someone who prays really well or has memorized great portions of scripture?
4. How do you approach God in your prayers? What enables us to be confident in our prayers to God? (Romans 8:26-27, John 15:7, Philippians 4:6-7)
5. Why does God honor the prayers of a humble person?

Parable #35 ~ Luke 18:1-17 ~ The Persistent Widow ~ Leader's Guide

1. When was a time when your persistence paid off?
2. Does persistence in prayer mean: a) endless repetition, b) long sessions of prayer, c) attending daily [or weekly] prayer meetings, d) keeping our requests constantly before God, e) something else (what?) Just what does it mean to be persistent in our prayers?

Before we get into the issues here, we should be aware that Jesus told this parable to just his disciples. It may, and probably does, have meaning for a broader audience, but the immediate focus is on Jesus' inner circle.

In this parable, persistence does not mean a, b, or c; rather it means d, keeping our requests before God. By the way, that does not mean that doing b or c is bad. In fact, attending a weekly prayer meeting is probably a very good thing.

There is a commonly-held belief that once you pray for something you should not have to pray for it again because God remembers all your prayers. But the reason for persistence in prayer is not to remind God but to remind yourself of your faith in God and your belief that he will answer your prayers. When we live by faith, we are not to give up. God may delay in answering, but his delays always have good reasons. As we persist in prayer, we grow in character, faith, and hope.

3. What do we know about the judge and the widow? Why did the judge eventually give in to the woman's requests? (18:4-5)

The Jewish Talmud accuses judges, especially those in smaller villages, of ignorance, arbitrariness, corruption, and being bribable and records many instances of injustice at the hands of such judges, both Jewish and secular. Isaiah says, "Woe to those ... who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent." In this instance, Jesus says the judge neither feared God or cared about people. All he cared about was himself.

Widows and orphans are often mentioned in scripture as having no family for support and who suffer most from injustice and oppression. God particularly urges his people to be their advocates. But in this case with no one taking any interest in her situation, she was compelled to seek justice from the judge. She was not asking for a special favor; she was simply asking for justice.

In more literal translations, the phrase in Verse 5 is, "the widow troubleth me" or "is troublesome to me." The original Greek expression means literally, "striking the eye" or "giving me a black eye" as in boxing. The sense is of wearing someone down through persistence. And it is for this reason that the judge gives in to her request. It was not from his conscience or sense of duty as a judge, or from a commiseration of the poor widow's case; but from a selfish end, for his own ease, that he might not be further disturbed and pestered by her day after day.

The character of this judge, his reasoning with himself, his principles upon which he acted, and the ends he had in view, are wholly irrelevant to the meaning of the parable; the intention of the parable being only to show the force, efficacy, and usefulness of persistence in prayer.

Gill's Exposition says, the meaning here is that men ought always to pray. This is opposed to them, who pray not at all, or have left off prayer before God, or who pray only in distress; and suggests, that a man should pray as often as he has an opportunity; should be constant and assiduous at the throne of grace, and continue putting up his requests to God, though he does not presently return an answer:

4. How are God's actions the same—and how are they different—from the unjust judge?

Obviously, God is not an unjust judge and he certainly has compassion for his people. He does not ask for or respond to bribes; you cannot buy or earn his favor; he gives it to you absolutely free (grace), in his time, and according to his plan. If persistence resulted in justice from this unjust judge, how much more will God, who loves both people and justice, answer out prayers.

5. Why do people (you) stop praying? How should we respond when we do not see our prayers answered? How can you guard against the temptation to give up praying when you do not get the results you expect?

6. How can we be sure we are praying for things that are within the will of God? What phrase should we add to each of our prayers?

Actually, we can't be sure if what we ask of God is in his will. He has a plan and we occasionally get glimpses of it, but we can never see it all or come close to understanding it. So the best we can do is remember the third line of the Lord's prayer, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" and add the phrase to our personal prayers, "if it be your will."

Remember too that when we say, "thy will be done," that we all have free will and God will not take that away from us. So what we are really asking for in this petition is that God give us the wisdom to know his will and the strength and endurance to carry it out. We are the ones that are actually doing God's will here on earth with his help, of course.

While this parable emphasizes requests to God, we must remember that there are four aspects to prayer, that should be present in all of our prayers:

A: Acclaim God's name and power. Revere God and be in **Awe** of him.

C: Confess your sins, wrongs, and weaknesses.

T: Give Thanks for God's love and care for you.

S: Supplication – ask God for his blessing, healing, forgiveness, and justice.

Parable #36 ~ Luke 18:9-14 ~ Praying: Pharisee, Tax Collector ~ Leader

1. How does it feel to be in the presence of someone who is markedly better than you at what you do best?
2. What motivated the Pharisee to pray? How did he pray? (18:11-12)

The Pharisee did not go to the temple to pray to God but to announce to all within earshot how good he was. He was confident of his own righteousness (Verse 9). This kind of self-righteousness is dangerous. It leads to pride, causes a person to feel better than others and even come to despise them, and prevents him from learning anything from God.

In his prayer the Pharisee praises himself on two principle parts of godliness: freedom from evil and the doing of good. He brags, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” The phrase “other men” refers to all outside himself, without exception, except for other Pharisees. The Pharisees were characterized by their name as the “separated” from other men, and also “divided” from the unclean men of their own nation. Can you see why Jesus singled out the Pharisees so often in his debates and teachings?

But we must be careful in interpreting this parable. Just because one Pharisee had this arrogant attitude does not mean that all Pharisees did. Likewise, the humility of this one tax collector was certainly not typical of all tax collectors. Although we think well of the tax collector in this parable, we should bear in mind that it is doubtful that his was a prayer of repentance, for there is no suggestion that he was turning away from his actual way of life. Yet it is precisely this that gives the parable its starkness: the tax collector while remaining a sinner, was actually more open to God than was the Pharisee. As in Luke 13:2-4, the startling contrast is made without either denying entirely the prayer of the Pharisee or approving completely of the lifestyle of the tax collector.

3. What would be examples of “Pharisees” and “tax collectors” today? How important are outward appearances in our culture today? How do we judge people according to their outward appearance? Does outward appearance matter?

First, think of what separates modern-day Pharisees from others – power, position, money, arrogance, education, accomplishment, dress? It’s probably some combination of these factors, but it’s dangerous for us to assume (or judge) that everyone who has these qualities is a modern-day Pharisee. It’s definitely true that power and position *can* corrupt a person but not that they definitely will. We must be very careful before we leap to conclusions in judging other people.

The two worshipers in this parable were taken respectively from the most *distinguished* and the most *despised* (or hated) classes of society. Tax collectors

were not poor, they were often greedy Jews working for the Roman government. They generally collected more tax than Rome required and kept the difference; as such they were guilty of much oppression and extortion, especially of poor people. But some tax collectors were probably honest and some even heeded Christ's call to repentance such as Matthew and Zaccheus.

Biblical-era tax collectors today are probably most often lawyers, especially those involved in class-action lawsuits against manufacturers, for example, of asbestos or lead paint. Each client may get a couple of hundred or thousand dollars, whereas the lawyer makes hundreds of millions. Are all lawyers bad? Absolutely not, but enough are that it tars many of the others.

4. We all pray differently. Do you ever feel intimidated by someone who prays really well or has memorized great portions of scripture?

4. How do you approach God in your prayers? What enables us to be confident in our prayers to God? (Romans 8:26-27, John 15:7, Philippians 4:6-7)

Romans 8:26-27 – In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

John 15:7 – If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.

Philippians 4:6-7 – Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

5. Why does God honor the prayers of a humble person?