

**Pastor Madelynne Lindsey**  
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**The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Grease – Luke 18:1-8**

Let us pray: Dear God, let me speak the words that are pleasing to you and will bring comfort and understanding to those who hear them. Amen.

A few years ago, I worked for a bankruptcy lawyer and his clients would constantly call asking if their bankruptcy case was scheduled for court yet. I would ask my boss if he filed the paperwork necessary in order to get an assigned court date. And he often responded not yet.

Well, there was this one female client who would call everyday pleading to have her case scheduled because she was tired of being harassed by debt collectors. Finally, my boss got so tired of her calling that he threw up his hands and filed her case. The squeaky wheel gets the grease.

The widow in today's Gospel parable never lost heart and never gave up. Luke often used a widow, or widow and orphan, as symbols of vulnerability. A widow could inherit her husband's property, but she was hard put to keep it.

Luke tells the story of a powerless widow seeking justice for her cause. Her problem is compounded by the character of the village magistrate; he has no respect toward God, nor toward his fellows. So, the magistrate simply ignores her.

If she had the money for a bribe, she might be able to secure justice, but she is a poor widow, so she turns to the only means at her disposal, her capacity to nag. She pesters the life out of him and so finally, gets what she wants, namely justice.

As the magistrate observes, "I'd better give her what she wants otherwise her pestering will be the death of me." She had no other alternatives but to keep asking the judge to help her. Persevering was not only essential to her success but was essential to her survival.

We need to be as persistent with our prayers as she was with her petitions to the unjust judge. Jesus' use of a widow to make His point was obviously done for a reason. His choice of a widow was significant because a widow in those day most likely didn't have the money to bribe a judge, didn't have a husband to speak up for her, and didn't have enough influence to pressure the judge to do what was right. She was in a helpless situation.

Jesus asks his hearers to observe the response of the magistrate. Against his better judgment, the magistrate reluctantly gave the widow what she asked. If an unjust, corrupt judge will act for a poor widow, how much more will a just

God act for his people? "Do you suppose God, patient as he is, will not see justice done for his chosen who appeal to him day and night?"

The point Jesus makes is that God, the just judge, will not abandon us to a world out of control, he will inevitably intervene and do so justly. As God's people keep praying "thy kingdom come", will God keep delaying his intervention? The answer is no.

The living God will inevitably act for his people and will do so "suddenly". God's just intervention for his people, realized in the coming of the Son of Man, in the coming of the kingdom, will occur "unexpectedly".

There may come a time when we come to the same place as the widow did, a place of complete desperation, a place where we have no choice, no other plan, no other recourse. We need to get to that place like the patriarch Jacob did in Gen. 32:25 when he wrestled with God all night.

When his hip was dislocated, he had no leg to stand on, no strength of his own. All his self-reliance was gone. It was then that he held on to God and wouldn't let go until he got the blessing. In his weakness, he knew that perseverance was essential.

Jesus emphasized this same point in a previous parable dealing with persistent prayer ... the parable of "The Friend at Midnight" in Luke 11:5-8. In this parable, a man needs bread to feed a friend who showed up at his house late at night.

The man's only option that late at night was to go around knocking at his neighbors' doors asking for help. Perseverance in knocking ... in other words, perseverance in prayer ... was essential for success.

Speaking of perseverance, recently I heard scratching in my living room roof. I contacted the maintenance office and told them I had an emergency. Something was trying to scratch its way into my apartment. They told me it was probably a squirrel. That squirrel was relentless to degree that it made a hole in my ceiling. The roofer was called, and he captured the squirrel and patched up the hole that he created in my ceiling and on the roof.

Now you would think end of story. That critter found another spot in another area of my roof and began scratching again. Once again, the roofer ran him away and patched up another hole. However, I just spoke to the maintenance guy and he informed me that he believes the squirrel that was scratching in my area of the roof is now annoying someone else in the apartment complex. That is one persistent squirrel.

We need persistence like that squirrel. We need to get to a place where we realize that we have no strength of our own, that no plan that we have will

succeed unless God come through. Our perseverance comes from our understanding that our only hope depends upon God answering our prayers.

My goal for the Tuesday evening gathering is to inspire a congregational revival through sacrifice and prayer. I want to increase the number of people in this congregation who spend dedicated time with the Lord each day in meaningful prayer.

If you already do that, as I know some of you do, then my goal is to increase your determination, perseverance, and confidence in your prayer ministry, and it is a ministry, a very important, powerful ministry. If you don't spend dedicated time with the Lord each day then I hope and pray that you will be inspired to do so starting today. I believe in the time proven formula for power in the church: Little prayer, little power ... much prayer, much power.

Persistent prayer is not something contemporary American Christians are known for. Let me tell you, in Korea they hold prayer services every morning at 6 a.m. and these "prayer services" are attended by hundreds. The members of the Korean Presbyterian church who met in my previous church also prayed every morning at 6 a.m.

Many recent studies suggest that American Christians today, even ministry leaders do not have regular times of daily prayer. Or, if they do, they involve two, three maybe five minutes, hardly enough time to say much to God or hear much from Him.

The obvious questions are, "why?" Why don't we spend dedicated time with the Lord each day? Jesus explains to His disciples why it is so important to persist in prayer and what we miss out on when we don't spend dedicated time with the Lord each day.

Do you ever feel as though your prayers are being returned unopened? Does it ever feel like you're always getting Heaven's voice mail? Like you're getting the run around and you wonder if there's anybody else up there you can speak to? Maybe you've been praying for something for a long time, regularly, with great fervor, but no answer seems forthcoming. You know the kind of situation I mean. God hasn't answered your request, but He hasn't exactly closed the door on it either.

Towards the end of chapter 17 in the Gospel of Luke, a group of Pharisees ask Jesus when the Kingdom of God was coming. Jesus answered them and He told them this parable about their need to "pray always and not lose heart." Keep praying always and don't lose heart.

Why do Christians lose heart and fail to pray? Christians may lose heart and fail to pray is that prayer is slow and sometimes appears to show no results. Conditioned by our "drive thru," Alexa voice-commanded world, we like to see

results, and we like to see them now, yesterday, if possible. And when we don't, we lose heart, maybe even give up on prayer altogether.

Few are as outspoken and as openly hostile to Christianity as media mogul Ted Turner. According to this billionaire, "Christianity is a religion for losers." Turner was deeply religious growing up, he even considered becoming a missionary. That is until his younger sister, Mary Jane, contracted a rare form of lupus.

She suffered terribly before dying a relatively short while later. "All of my prayers, an hour a day, came to nothing," said Turner, so he concluded that prayer doesn't work, and that Christianity is a fraud. We may not jump to the same conclusion as Ted Turner, but many of us, if we were to get honest, can understand his frustration and doubt. We've all prayed prayers that seem to go unanswered.

I can understand how Ted Turner felt. My mother was diagnosed with lupus when I was around eight years old and from that time on, I prayed to God constantly to please cure my mother. But day after day I watched her slowly dying before my eyes. Finally, out of desperation for my poor suffering mother, I got on my knees and asked God to take her. That was the hardest prayer I ever had to pray.

But I also realized that my mother lived an additional ten years I believe because of my pleading, begging, nagging God to keep her with me and my family just a little while longer. He heard my prayer and momma lived to see me graduate from high school, get married and see my first-born child. What a blessing. Oh yes, there is power in prayer.

For those of us who read Scriptures, who pay attention to the spiritual disciplines, who strive to be formed in our faith, we know that prayer is essential. We remember the encouragement from the Apostle Paul that we should "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and that we should "pray in the Spirit ... and always persevere in supplication...." (Ephesians 6:18)

The widow in this story captures that with her tenacity and determination. But when prayers go unanswered, or we do not get what we had hoped for, a weariness settles in. We begin to give up. So, what can we take from this parable that might help us unleash the power of prayer for living faithfully?

First: that prayer is believing that God will act. If there is anything to learn from the actions of this widow it is her confidence that eventually the judge will respond. I like to picture her in the traditional posture of prayer, standing with head and arms lifted as a sign of being ready to receive what is poured out upon her. It is a way of acknowledging that God is eternal and transcendent.

Prayer is not about bringing God a "to-do" list of things we want, believing that somehow if we ask in faith and perhaps even have someone agree with us, it will be done. God does not hand out gifts based on what we want.

However, prayer is about positioning ourselves, to receive what God offers, confident that God will act. Kathleen Norris writes: "...prayer is not asking for what you think you want but asking to be changed in ways you cannot imagine.

To be made more grateful, more able to see the good in what you have been given instead of always grieving for what might have been." (*Amazing Grace*, page 60) Serious, intentional, disciplined prayer stands before God, arms outstretched, ready to receive, expecting God to act.

Prayer is an act of trust which reorders our priorities and helps us to see and to live into a different future. In a world filled with fear, prejudice, hatred, violence, we need to be living faithfully, boldly, tenaciously as people of faith who pray and strive for God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

As we do, we will discover that we have unleashed the power of prayer to make a difference in our lives and to help shape a different world. Be a squeaky wheel and I guarantee you will be greased. Amen.

Let us pray. We stand before you, O God, arms outstretched, hearts and spirits open, ready to receive a word, a sign, a gift of your grace. We, each of us, have concerns and worries, fears and anxieties. We turn to you, source of justice and mercy. Here our prayers. Come, Lord Christ. Amen.