

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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Let's get ready to pray!

¹ Jesus told them a parable about the need to always pray and not lose heart: ² "There was a judge in a certain town who did not fear God and did not care about people. ³ There was a widow in that town, and she kept going to him, saying, 'Give me justice from my adversary!' ⁴ For some time he refused, but after a while he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God or care about people, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice so that she will not wear me out with her endless pleading.'" ⁶ The Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ Will not God give justice to his chosen ones, who are crying out to him day and night? Will he put off helping them? ⁸ I tell you that he will give them justice quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

—Luke 18:1-8

What if I told you that the God of the universe listens to your prayers... that when you don't know what to say, the Spirit intercedes for your wordless groans... that all that you pray for is 'yes' in Christ? What if I told you that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful... that you can approach God's throne in prayer at any time... that God wants you to approach him in prayer? What if I told you that praying isn't always that easy, though... that the Bible often speaks about prayer as a struggle?

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks about prayer in terms of a struggle... a fight. Jesus encourages his disciples to do something that isn't always easy: keep on praying. So, to the hundreds seated in the pews and the tens worshipping virtually... **Let's get ready to pray!** Jesus encourages us to pray persistently and confidently.

Jesus gave his instructions on prayer when he focused his disciples on the end times. Jesus would make his triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week in just one chapter. Just before this lesson, Jesus told his disciples about the difficulties that would come for people before his second coming. In doing this, Jesus moved their attention away from the question of 'when is this coming?' to 'how can I be ready?' Jesus gave these instructions on prayer in the setting of the struggles that would come in the end times.

At this lesson's beginning, Luke shares the purpose behind the parable that Jesus taught. Jesus taught this parable to encourage his disciples in prayer. He was encouraging them to keep praying and not give up their heart. In other words, Jesus said to them, "**Let's get ready to pray: persistently and confidently.**"

Ali vs. Foreman, Holyfield vs. Tyson, Pacquiao vs. Mayweather... some of the biggest fights in boxing history. Jesus' parable sets up another match that could be considered one of the greatest; Judge vs. Widow.

In one corner, there was the judge. Jesus describes him as a man that did not fear God nor respect men. This judge was nasty. This judge was ruthless. This judge was a person with whom many would not want to get into a dispute.

His contender was the widow. In Scripture, widows were THE picture of the helpless. They had no means of provision. They had no voice. She had no options. Yet, she was persistent.

In Jesus' story, it appears someone had wronged this woman. The judge must have known this. Yet, he would not uphold justice. Instead, the widow's adversary went unpunished.

The widow was not going to allow this wrong to go unnoticed. Instead, she persisted. She came back to the judge over and over again. She continued to bring this to the unrighteous judge.

Finally, the unrighteous judge, who did not fear God nor respect men, gave in to her demands for justice. In Greek, this judge says that he would give in to her endless pleading before she would give him a black eye.

You see, the widow did not give him one big undercut punch. Instead, she gave him consecutive jabs. She kept going. She did not win this fight by a knockout. Instead, she won by an unanimous decision. The widow was persistent.

The widow's persistence is part of what Jesus holds out as exemplary for his disciples. Jesus was teaching his disciples to keep praying. In the end times, difficulties would arise. Yet, they were not to give up. Instead, they were to keep praying. They were to be persistent.

Jesus uses fighting words to describe prayer in this parable. This may seem different to us. Yet, this is something the Bible does. Think about the First Lesson. In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestled with God. All night Jacob wrestled with God. In this wrestling, he would not give up. Jacob was persistent. Jacob would not let go until he was blessed. Then, Jacob

is renamed by the LORD. He was named Israel because he struggled with God and humans. Israel was persistent in his wrestling with God.

You can imagine persistence. What better example than Rocky Balboa? In Rocky IV, Rocky fights the Russian machine Ivan Drago. If you have not seen the movie, Rocky goes for 15 rounds against Drago. Drago landed many punches. It would have appeared that Rocky should have lost early, yet he persisted. Finally, because of his persistence, Rocky could deliver the knockout blow in round 15.

Rocky is a classic example of persistence. In the face of struggles, this is the lesson that Jesus holds up. Jesus holds up the example of being persistent. Whether we look to Rocky or the widow, we see the encouragement to keep praying. **Let us pray persistently.**

Why does the Bible use this imagery for prayer? It is not because we need to twist God's arm or something. We don't need to make a blow that causes him to give in. Instead, the struggle to keep on praying comes from our side. In the face of the problems of this world, we can be led to not trust God. We can be led to doubt him.

The widow faced injustice due to her adversary. What injustices are you currently experiencing? Perhaps, you feel that you are disenfranchised. Perhaps, you feel you are treated unfairly due to your race, gender, convictions, or religion. Perhaps, you have been wronged by someone that you know. There are many injustices in this world.

These injustices could lead you to give up. They could lead you to lose hope. They could lead you to lose heart. Maybe when you experience such things, you doubt God has the power to provide for you. Maybe you doubt that God has the care to cover you. Maybe you doubt that God has the love to lavish on you. Are you led to doubt God in these ways? Have you allowed this to lead you to be passive in your prayer life rather than persistent?

Persistence in prayer comes from knowing who Jesus is and who you are in him. Does God have power, care, and love? You see all this in Jesus Christ. Out of God's care and love for you, he sent his son to live and die for your sins. In Christ Jesus, God demonstrated his power by raising him from the grave and defeating your adversaries. The ultimate plea for justice against the adversary was answered on the cross in Christ Jesus. Sins were punished. You were saved.

Now, you are covered in the perfection of Jesus. Because you were declared not guilty in him, you know you can approach God in prayer. You can continuously do so. In the face of difficulties, you can be persistent. Yes, **let's get ready to pray; persistently.**

Jesus' parable taught his disciples to be persistent in prayer. They saw the example to keep praying in the face of troubles through the widow's example. In explaining the parable, Jesus points to the love of God as a reason to be confident in prayer.

The judge in Jesus' parable was a brute. He did not fear God nor respect men. The woman had to be persistent to wear him down. Ultimately, Jesus says that, as opposed to this person's attitude, a Christian can go confidently to God in prayer because his disposition is different. God gives justice to his chosen people. God will do so quickly. God listens to the prayers of his people. Therefore, Jesus encourages his disciples to be confident in prayer.

"Float like a butterfly. Sting like a bee. You can't hit what you don't see." "I am the greatest. I said that even before I knew I was. I figured that if I said it enough, I would convince the world that I was really the greatest." These are two of Muhammad Ali's most famous sayings. Was there anyone more confident than this boxer? Ali had reason to be confident. He was confident because of his strength, hard work, and talent. Muhammad Ali had reason to be confident. Yet, confidence in himself could fall. Muhammad Ali was one of the greatest fighters of all time, yet he lost five times. Five times Ali was defeated in the ring. Unlike Ali, Christians can put their confidence in someone infallible. Christians pray confidently to a God who is all-powerful and promises to listen to and answer their prayers. Therefore, they can pray confidently.

Do you approach God confidently in prayer? Do you pray knowing that he can do something? Perhaps the struggles of this life can cause you to doubt that God has the power, care, or love to do something. Perhaps, death, disease, and disaster cause you to doubt. If a family member has cancer, do you think, 'why bother to pray?' If you are overcome with anxiety, do you think, 'will he listen to me?' If you see injustice in the world, do you wonder if God cares to hear your prayers?

Do not doubt. God sent his Son to atone for your sins and to make you righteous in his sight. God has done this. Now, God listens to all your prayers. The Bible is full of passages that speak to our confidence in prayer. "*This is the confidence that we have before him: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.*" (1 John 5:14) And "*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their requests.*" (1 Peter 3:12) And "*Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask, and you will receive, so that your joy may be made complete.*" (John 16:24) Brothers and sisters, as people justified by grace through faith in Jesus apply these unfailing promises to yourself. Then, **let's get ready to pray; confidently!**

All those 'what if's' about prayer are true. God promises to hear the prayers of his people. God promises to act. God invites us to approach him in prayer. Since God has demonstrated his love for us in Jesus, let's get ready to pray! We can be persistent and confident. Amen.