

## Prayer That Moves God (Luke 18:1-17)



Why it is some people seem to develop deep prayer life while others find prayer difficult? Some are blessed with deep spiritual encounters and others are not? It is not due to personality, upbringing, or spiritual gifts, but 'attitude'. Jesus gives us three keys that will enable us to develop a deep intimate prayer life, especially in view of the end time. They are persistence, humility and dependence.

### A. Persistence

If you want to have deep communion with God, you must be persistent with God. Those who give up quickly, don't develop a deep relationship with God, or receive many answers to prayer. This helpless widow had no way of getting justice for herself other than to keep pestering the judge. Jesus already taught on the importance of persisting in prayer (Luke 11:5-8) via the story of a man who woke up his sleeping neighbour at midnight to get hold of some bread. This story has two main differences. It is set in the context of:

- (a) Receiving justice in the court of law, rather than having our personal needs met in a domestic situation.
  - (b) The Lord's imminent return. Luke 18 continues Jesus' teaching on the coming kingdom from Luke 17.
1. The self-proclaimed corrupt judge in this story has no fear of God nor concern for people (v2). He has no sense of duty to uphold the law, and no sympathy for the weak people suffering injustice. We can expect bribery and deals under the table to run his courtroom. The widow is a picture of 'utter helplessness', alone and vulnerable to abuse. Her appeal for justice fell on deaf ears. The godless judge has no incentive to work for this widow (v3). She had no money for bribery, and no man to defend her. There are two problems in this corrupt court.
    - (a) The widow is asking for 'justice', not revenge but what is her right. But justice is not served. The widow knows she is in the right, and that she has the right, but her right is not granted. This is terribly frustrating. What's the point of knowing your rights if they cannot be enforced?
    - (b) Justice can be served so slowly to the point it is no justice. E.g. if a victim is 70 years old and it takes 30 years to deliver justice for him, then what is the point? This is the common tactic of large corporations against little people. So, the godless judge here is also dragging his feet, thinking if he just drags out the widow's case long enough, she will just give up and go away (v4).

This widow has only one weapon – to pester the judge day in and day out, till the corrupt judge finally gives in, *'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'* (v5) 'Weary' here means to 'give a black eye', i.e. the judge would get dark circles and bags under his eyes from sheer exhaustion!

### 2. Lessons to learn:

- a. **God, the Good Just Judge:** If persistence works with the godless corrupt judge, *how much more* will it work with God, the Good Just Judge? (a) God rules with absolute justice and He cannot be corrupted by bribery. God is totally impartial to how rich, famous, or well-connected people are. Furthermore, God is *intensely concerned* for the weak - the fatherless, the widows and the migrants. (C.f. Deut 24:19-22; Jas 1:27) (b) If you plead your case before God the Judge in heaven, He will not drag His feet like this corrupt earthly judge in favour of big people, but He will act speedily on behalf of His elect.
- b. **Those Who Persist with God:** We need to learn 'persistence' in our approach to God, like this widow. She knew she had no power and nobody backing her, but she didn't give up until she got her justice, which was her right. Jacob persisted in the wrestling match with the angel of the Lord until the Lord blessed him, *'I will not let You go unless You bless me'* (Gen 32:26). Jesus emphasized, *'Shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?'* (v7) There is another woman in Luke who prayed day and night, Anna the prophetess. *'[She] was a widow of about 84 years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day.'* (Luke 2:37) Why we must go on praying for 84 years? Because persistence builds our faith.

c. **Faith in the Last Days:** ‘...When the Son of Man comes, will He really find [the] faith on the earth?’ (v8)

(1) Jesus already taught His disciples in Luke 11 to pray: ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’ (11:2) When Jesus returns, absolute justice will rule speedily and to the full. But He asks, ‘When I return will I find My people praying this kingdom prayer with active living faith? Will I find overcoming persevering faith on the earth?’

(2) There will be failure in the judicial system and lawlessness on the earth prior to Jesus’ return as in the days of Noah and Lot. Franklin Graham warned recently, ‘Socialist Left will close the church down: The storm is coming.’ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/franklin-graham-warns-socialist-left-will-close-the-church-down-the-storm-is-coming.html> In the last days God’s people will cry out ‘day and night’ to our Heavenly Judge for His justice, and our prayers will affect even the self-proclaimed godless judicial-political system.

‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ (Rev 6:10) ‘...until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favour of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.’ (Dan 7:22)

Will GI be a praying church with vibrant faith, calling down divine justice on earth until Christ returns?

## B. Humility (Repentance)

To get the prayers answered we must be in the right, especially right with God. How then can we be right with God, so that we can pray the kind of prayer that moves Him who rules over the highest court of all, the court of heaven? Apart from persisting in our prayer, what kind of prayer does God love to hear and answer instantly? Jesus draws the picture of two men praying in the temple. They are both in the house of prayer and they are both praying. But one prayer rose no higher than the temple ceiling, whereas the other prayer went straight to heaven and was answered before the man even left the temple. What made such a difference?

### 1. **The Pharisee’s Proud, Self-Righteous Prayer**

- a. We can go to extraordinary lengths to justify ourselves. When a man seeks to justify himself, he is blind to his faults and flaws. He can list all the vices he is NOT guilty of, and all his virtues in comparison to other people’s failures (v9-12). Here was a Pharisee, a man very sure of his own goodness (v9). He stood inside the temple quite apart from others (v11), so he can stand out from the crowd. And very sincerely in the house of God, he recommends himself to God, ‘God, I am even better than what You require of us in the law. You require us to fast once a year, but I do it twice a week. You require us to tithe certain crops, but I tithe from all my possessions, even backyard herbs. I just want you to know how much I do for You, Lord.’ (v12 C.f. Lev 23:27-32; Deut 14:22-23) It was all true, and he was quite sure of God’s approval of his life.
- b. This Pharisee was also focused on other people’s ‘badness’. *If you are trying to whiten yourself, you will try to blacken others.* This is a sure sign of self-righteousness and pride. With equal force, this man despised others, ‘Lord, I thank you that I am not like that tax collector in the corner.’ He kept away from ‘gross sins’ and ‘gross sinners’, such as the tax collector standing at the end of the prayer line.

His prayer follows the format of thanksgiving in the prayer book. His thanksgiving is not for what God has done, but for what he has done. See one example of similar prayer below (*Talmud, Berakhoth 28b*).

*‘I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou has set my portion with those who sit in the House of learning, and Thou has not set my portion with those who sit in street corners, for I rise early and they rise early, but I rise early for words of Torah and they rise early for frivolous talk; I labour and they labour, but I labour and receive a reward and they labour and do not receive a reward; I run and they run, but I run to the life of the future world and they run to the pit of destruction.’*

- c. Why didn’t this man’s prayer get through to God? (1) Too much ‘I’, said 5 times, in his prayer left no room for God. (2) He has no awareness of his pride and self-righteousness. (3) His prayer didn’t even need an answer because he was doing fine. He didn’t need God’s help. (4) In fact, his prayer wasn’t even directed at God, but at himself! ‘[He] prayed thus with [to] himself.’ (v11) Do we know we need God desperately?

## 2. The Tax Collector's Humble, Repentant Prayer

a. In contrast to the Pharisee :-

(1) The tax collector didn't feel he even deserved to be in the house of God. As a tax collector, he was despised and compromised in so many ways, and he knew it. He tries not to stand out from the crowd. He can't even lift his eyes to look up to God. He sobs and beats his chest at the end of the prayer line, *'God be merciful to me [the] sinner!'* (v13) This tax collector was quite sure of his own 'badness', so he doesn't try to justify himself, but asks for God's mercy. It is very unusual to see a grown man beating his chest and sobbing in prayer. Praise God for the mercy He has already given to this man. It takes a mighty miracle to bring a grown man to this point.

(2) We don't know what happened to bring this successful businessman to this point of repentance, but he doesn't use the word 'I' even once. No doubt, the tax collector could have fished out some good from his life and remind God of his goodness as well. But he didn't. He uses the word 'me'. He is not the subject of his prayer, but the object. God is the One to grant mercy to this man, who knows he is 'the sinner' in desperate need of divine mercy.

(3) His prayer of repentance is much shorter than the Pharisee's lengthy prayer about himself. God delights in short prayers arising out of humble hearts over lengthy prayers about our achievements.

(4) Jesus says this man's prayer rose from the corner of the temple straight to the highest heaven! This tax collector left the house of prayer justified before God, rather than the Pharisee (v14). Jesus repeats the supreme lesson on life, *'For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'* (v14)

b. Here is a profound truth. Those who are right with God, are not the people who are confident about their moral and spiritual superiority over others, but those who come before God to say, 'Lord, I am in the wrong. I need your mercy.' Those who can confess, 'God, I am a sinner, I need Your mercy,' goes home justified rather than those who are sure of their goodness.

If you have a high view of yourself, then most probably God would have a low view of you. If you have a humble and realistic view of yourself, then surprisingly God may have a higher view of you than you think, and He will exalt you in due time. Jesus taught, *'Blessed are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'* (Matt 5:3)

When we come into God's 'holy' presence, we immediately know we are sinners in utter need of His forgiveness, so we ask for it. We delude ourselves when we try to justify ourselves before God. The only way to get right with God is to receive His mercy. God loves to answer prayers rising out of repentant hearts. That's how this tax collector was put right before God and went home justified.

What is the challenge for the prayer warriors in the last days? To keep humble hearts.

## C. [Trust / Dependence / Cling to God](#)

It was the Jewish custom to bring their infants to a respected rabbi for a blessing when they turn one year old. So, the fathers were bringing their babies to Jesus to be blessed. But the disciples didn't want Jesus to be harassed 'unnecessarily'. Children were a 'nuisance'. They cannot understand Jesus' teaching. They cannot follow Jesus. They cannot contribute anything. So the disciples rebuked them and shooed them away (v15).

But on the contrary, Jesus says, these babies have something to teach us! *'Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.'* (v17) What then can we learn from these one-year-old infants? What qualities do they have, that make them such good recipients of God's kingdom?

1. It is their ability to 'trust' their parents. Babies instinctively know they are helpless, and that they need their parents to look after them. When a father takes his baby for a swim in the pool, the baby trusts the

father's strong hands as he lowers him into the water. If we were to plunge a fully-grown adult, who can't swim, into the deep waters, he will not stay calm!

2. Little children easily 'depend' on their parents. As they grow older, they grow less trusting and less dependent. They ask all kinds of questions. The 'unknown depth' of the pool to the baby is the 'unknown future' to us. We find it difficult to stay calm and at peace and lean on the invisible arms of God, as we face the unknown future. But do you trust the invisible hands of God to uphold you and carry you, all the way through the challenges of the end time?
3. So, God's children too must not lose the endearing quality and ability to simply and unquestioningly trust and depend on Him. When a father gently lowers his baby into the pool, singing, 'lower and lower', he will get a reaction from the baby. The baby will tighten his hold and cling to the father. Adults do not cling. They are self-sufficient. They want the self-help / self-serve system. But the baby's instinctive ability to 'cling to his parents' makes him the best recipients of their help. So, our ability to cling to our heavenly Father makes us the best recipients of His protection and blessing.

We are to replace our 'doubt' with 'trust' in His word. We are to replace our 'independence' with 'dependence' on God. When we cling on to God like a little baby, it brings great joy to Him. Jesus said, '*The kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*' (v16)

#### D. Summary

1. Why is it that some people go on to develop a deep intimate relationship with God in prayer, while others find it difficult? It is not due to temperament, Mary & Martha syndrome, or intelligence, etc. But it has to do with our attitude towards God.
2. What are the three keys to developing a powerful prayer life?
  - (a) Persistence - Learn not to give up. Go on praying with living faith in Christ's word until He returns. This is Jesus' challenge to the end-time generation who faces His return.
  - (b) Humble, Repentant Attitude – Resist pride and conceit when you develop a strong prayer life. Don't focus on how good you are and how bad others are, but be able to confess, 'Lord I am in the wrong. I need your mercy.'
  - (c) Dependence - Know that you truly need God every single day. Like little children, learn to trust God with the unknown future. Consciously depend on God for everything, and above all cling on to Him like a little child. We are God's children, and we need to be cared for and looked after by our heavenly Father.