



THE PARABLE OF THE PERSISTENT WIDOW

Part 72 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 18:1–8 | May 01, 2011

Luke 18:1–8

¹ And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. ² He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. ³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ ⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” ⁶ And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. ⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?” ⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

INTRODUCTION

Before there was Jimmy Fallon and Conan O’Brien and Jay Leno, my personal favorite, David Letterman, there was, and many of you kids are too young to know it, a guy named Johnny Carson. And Johnny Carson in his day was the dude of dudes. He was the king of late night and he pioneered a whole new television genre of late-night comedy, so much so that there was recently a Comedy Central awards ceremony for comedians and they gave an award to David Letterman and he spent his time during his acceptance speech just honoring Johnny Carson, saying that he pioneered late-night television as we know it. He was the one who gave many comedians, actors, and actresses their start. And without Johnny Carson, many, many people today would not be enjoying late-night television as we know it.

And the sidekick for the show was a guy named Ed McMahon. And he sat down at the end of the couch and he tried to be funny with varying degrees of success depending upon the night. And his big moment was the introduction of Johnny Carson for *The Tonight Show*. And he would say, “Heeeeere’s Johnny,” in a much cooler way than I just did. And that is the story of Johnny Carson, who did 4,531 episodes of *The Tonight Show*. He did it for a long time.

Now, there’s another guy you probably don’t know anything about, John Searing. He lived in New Jersey, what we now call Bonjovi-ville, and he was a salesman of art supplies. And he loved watching Johnny Carson. That was his hero. And so he put basically one thing on his bucket list: before he died, he wanted to say two words on television, “Here’s Johnny.” That was it. His life goal was pretty simple. He just wanted to introduce Johnny Carson during *The Tonight Show*, saying, “Here’s Johnny.” That’s it.

So he sent a letter to Johnny Carson. “Dear Johnny, I would love to just once do Ed McMahon’s job and introduce you and say, ‘Here’s Johnny.’” Well, the staff was gracious and kind and they sent a nice form letter back and a free 8×10 photo of Johnny Carson smiling and assumed that would be the end of it.

And it wasn’t. He really, really, really wanted to introduce Johnny Carson. So, over the course of I don’t know how many more years, he handwrote over eight hundred letters. “It’s John Searing again. Hey Johnny, guess what I want to do?” Letter after letter after letter after letter after letter after letter after letter after letter. And to his credit, there’s no indication that he escalated. He never threatened Johnny Carson. He never tried to meet Johnny Carson. He never stalked Johnny Carson. He never impugned Johnny Carson in any way. He was just very persistent.

Well, lo and behold, finally he gets a letter back from *The Tonight Show*. “Guess what? Your dream has come true. Don’t send us any more letters. We’re gonna put you on the show.” So they fly him out to the show. They give him his own dressing room with his name, John Searing, on the door. And then the show begins and Ed McMahon says, “Here’s Johnny,” and John Searing’s confused. “Oh, I thought that was my job. That’s why I was here.” And then they surprise him. They bring him out on stage and he sits next to Johnny Carson and he’s a guest on *The Tonight Show* for six minutes, being interviewed by Johnny Carson. Like, “Why are you sending me all these letters?” And then they take him backstage and they hand him a script and he gets to read the introduction for *The Tonight Show* and say, “Here’s Johnny.” And his life goal is satisfied. He doesn’t send, insofar as we know, any more letters and everything ends well. Persistence, persistence, persistence.

BAD PERSISTENCE

The big idea is that sometimes, if you’re real persistent, it can pay off. This was a quirky persistence, a very quirky persistence. Sometimes there’s unholy persistence. Today, as we get into this parable in Luke 18:1–8, Jesus is going to teach us through the example of a persistent widow.

And so what I need to say is that persistence isn't always a good thing. It depends on who or what you're persisting in or for. That's really the issue. Let's say you're dating and one of you doesn't want to be together anymore and the other persists. Good or bad? Bad. We call it stalker, okay? That's bad persistence. Okay?

Let's say you're in a marital relationship, ladies, and your husband's very violent and abusive and you persist. That's not a good persistence. You need some distance and protection.

There is such a thing as an unholy persistence. The ever-annoying salesman who just won't quit. The Jehovah's Witnesses who keep coming to my house. Unholy, unhelpful persistence. They must be elect because God keeps bringing them to me to change their mind, so that's kind of my view of the whole situation.

So being persistent isn't necessarily a good thing. Sometimes if you're really persistent, you could be a bully, you could be pushy, demanding, overbearing. If you're committed to the wrong person or the wrong cause, persistence can be unholy. Sometimes, like John Searing, it's just quirky.

HOLY PERSISTENCE

Sometimes, though, as well, you can have a persistence that, quite frankly, is very holy. It's a noble virtue. It's a character trait. It's an ability or an endowment that God gives. If you're gonna have a good marriage, you both need to learn some persistence. If you're gonna be a good parent, you've got to learn some persistence. If you're gonna do ministry or have a business or lead anything, you have to have some persistence. You want to be a good athlete, you want to be a good musician, persistence. You got to keep on moving forward.

An example that comes to mind is my two sons, buddy Calvin, buddy Zac. They've got a friend of theirs who's been battling leukemia for a number—or at least a couple of years. A really wonderful little boy, a great kid. We love him very much. He's a friend of my sons and he's persisting to pray and hope and fight cancer. His family is praying and hoping. The doctors are praying and hoping. Children's Hospital has been a wonderful place for him. And everyone's persisting, their community of faith, their church, those of us who are connected to them. We're persisting in prayer and support and encouragement. And almost every day, my sons are praying for him, they're persisting in prayer, they're logging onto the Caring Bridge's website to see if there are any updates on his condition. Whenever his health is strong enough that he can have visitors, they persist in going to see him.

There can be a very holy, virtuous demonstration of persistence. And Jesus gives us an amazing example today from the parable of the persistent widow. And so he's going to talk about holy persistence in Luke 18:1–6. And here's what the Lord Jesus has to say about this virtue of holy persistence. “And he told them a parable,” which is a little story with a big truth, “to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him,’” over and over and over, “saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’” And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says.””

Now in the story, there is the Lord Jesus Christ who tells the story, and then the widow and the judge. They're the two primary characters. And they are exceedingly different. You have a woman and a man. The man is in power; he is powerful. The woman is powerless. The man is prosperous; the woman is penniless. In that day, he would have been in an exalted position, great authority. She was in a very humble position. Without a family to receive her or a husband to protect her, she was very legally vulnerable.

In that culture, it was very uncommon for a woman to be able to do such things as own property or vote. That meant even retaining her husband's possessions as an inheritance could be complicated. Many widows, as a result, were taken advantage of, they were ripped off, they were not given justice in the legal system. That's why the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments has a lot to say about widows and God's love for widows and how God's people are to love and care for widows, women whose husbands have died. This includes Jesus' own brother, James, saying that true religion is caring for widows, orphans, and those in need.

And we see this woman is a tragic tale of a widow who has been at least sinned against, but it looks like criminal activity as well has occurred against her. We don't know if she was beaten, robbed, abused, taken advantage of. Maybe her husband's assets are tied up in court. We do not know. What we do know is that she wants justice and she says that she has an adversary. Like some of you, like me, she has an enemy, someone who is against her.

Now, what would generally happen is there were three ways to pursue justice. Number one, you would pay off the judge. Well, she's got no money. Number two, you would threaten the judge. Well, she's a poor widow. She doesn't have power or strength. So, number three, you would persist. You would have to muster up the courage to just keep marching forward in the face of adversity for the sake of justice.

And she's doing so with a judge that we only know two things about. Number one, he does not fear God. Number two, he does not respect man. Well, those are the two criteria for a good judge, right? You're afraid of God and you like people. He's 0 for 2. This is a bad resume for a judge because if he doesn't fear God, what that means is he doesn't care about the laws of God, he doesn't care about the Word of God. He doesn't anticipate that he'll have to die and give an account to God. He doesn't believe in a capital-*J* Judge and a heaven and hell and eternal consequence for obedience and disobedience.

And as a result, he's going to live to some degree like some of you are and like I once did, as if he were his own god. He's a law unto himself. There's no authority over him. He sits on a throne; he renders verdicts. He's like a little god and his courtroom is like a little kingdom. He doesn't believe there's a God that he's going to give an account to and rules over him. Well, that means that he is going to be an arrogant man, a dangerous man who does what

is convenient, not what glorifies God.

Secondarily, he doesn't like people. Doesn't care about people. He's the kind of guy, if you're suffering, he doesn't care. If you were victimized, he doesn't care. If you were ripped off, he doesn't care. It doesn't affect him, so why should he care about you? We get the idea that he's heartless and cold and cruel.

And here's this widow up against that man. And eventually, he says, "That's it, I'm gonna give her justice. This woman is killing me." I mean, in some of your translations, it says, "She's beating me up." Some say, "She's blackening my eye." And you get the idea that she keeps pursuing him persistently. You get the idea he comes out of his house in the morning to go to work, there she is. "Good morning, Judge. Yes, I'd love to walk to work with you. Let's talk about my case." He comes out for a lunch break, "Hey Judge, let's pick up that conversation about my case." On the way home, "Hey Judge, good to see you again." And she's talking to him about the case in front of family, friends, coworkers, and colleagues. "You know, you haven't gotten me justice. You know it's wrong. You know what he did is wrong. How come you haven't done anything about it? You're supposed to be a judge." She's brave, right? And courageous. And eventually, like a cage-fighting granny who gets the judge in a clinch, he finally taps out and says, "Okay, I give. I relent." He has no fear of God, but he's afraid of this gal. It's a pretty sweet story.

And in this, he doesn't give her necessarily what she wants. He gives her what is just. And this is important because some of us, we just give in. If somebody is pushy, demanding, bossy, rude, we just give in, right? And it starts with your kids when they're little, right? Do you have kids? Isn't this how they do it? They'll usually demand something, either in the grocery store or particularly on an airplane because there's an audience and it's basically a hostage negotiation. That's what the children are doing. "I would like a Mountain Dew and a number of bottle rockets and a candy bar." "No." "Okay, then I'm going to have a nervous breakdown and I'm going to make it seem like you assault me or you're a perfect stranger who has abducted me. I'm gonna act like that." And then the parent looks at the child and says, "If you will stop, I will give you what you want." Ah, hostage negotiation. All right?

Now, we shouldn't give children or adults that are pushy, rude, demanding, bossy, and inappropriate what they want, but this woman, all she wants is justice. Now, we should give justice. We should give what is right. If someone has been abused, we need to help them. If someone has been victimized, we need to defend them. If somebody cannot defend themselves, we need to stand alongside of them. If someone is poor for a just cause, we need to be generous with a loving heart. Now we don't give everybody everything they want, but we do pursue that which is holy and righteous and just and good. And so she goes to the judge and she tells him, "I want justice." And he says, "I will relent. You have been resilient. I will give justice to you."

HOW ARE YOU LIKE THE JUDGE?

Now, as we examine the story, the parable, one of the ways that a parable is to be interpreted by us is that we try and find ourselves, to some degree, in the story. Which character am I like? Which character am I unlike? Who do I relate to and how?

So before I ask you if you're like the widow, I need to ask you, how are you like the judge? See, 'cause my fear is this, we're a culture of victims. We love to be victims. It tends to put us in a position where we have power and people owe us. And the result is we tend to see others' sin against us more clearly and quickly than we see our sin against others. Now the truth is, we're sinned against and we're victims like the widow. But we're also sinners like the judge. And we too have victims. And so I want you to think, in hearing this story, what people for what reasons would think that you remind them of the judge? How are you like the judge?

Number one, do you truly fear God? Do you respect God, revere God, honor God, obey God, submit to God, follow God? Or are you like the judge, saying, "God does not weigh heavily in my life. God does not factor heavily in my decision making. Who God is, what God does in this book, what God says, not really important to me." Maybe you think there is no God or that God necessarily owes you or that when you die, you will not stand before God, that there is no heaven, there is no hell. There is no consequence. There is no judgment. Or you're better than most people and it'll all work itself out in the end. All of that is no fear of God, no respect of God, no regard of God. Are you like that? That's where all of his trouble began.

Number two, do you truly care for people, really care for people? Not just in theory, but in practice. He sees this woman in need, suffering injustice. He does nothing. He says nothing. He's in a position where he could serve her and he could bring her justice. He could alleviate the complicated variable in her life. He doesn't. His is a sin of omission. Now someone has sinned against her. It's a sin of commission. Someone's done something wrong. And the judge's sin is a sin of omission. He could render a verdict and bring justice, and he doesn't.

Who could you be helping and you're not? Who could you be serving and you're not? Who could you be defending and you're not? And you may say, "Well, I didn't do the bad thing." Perhaps you did, perhaps you didn't. But if you don't do anything, that's a bad thing. We can't just have a value of compassion, empathy, love, mercy, respect, and generosity. We have to have a lifestyle that actually embodies, demonstrates those stated values.

So if we looked at your schedule, does it reveal a real care for people? If we looked at your budget, does it reveal a real care for people? Or are you like the typical person today who has an attitude of compassion, but not a lifestyle of compassion? And by definition, that's hypocrisy. Say, "I really care about people." Well, who are you helping? "Well, I love 'em in my heart." Well, great. Open up your wallet, open up your mouth, get your hands dirty. Love is what you do, right? Love is what you do.

Number three, when someone is vulnerable, do you protect or exploit them? Now this woman in the story, she's vulnerable. Her family has not received her back, her husband has died, she doesn't have good status under the law. She's been criminally opposed. Someone has done something illegal and sinful. She can't afford an attorney to stand before the judge. There's no one to represent her. She can't afford to pursue right legal recourse. She's vulnerable. And what does the judge do? He exploits that. He ignores her case. He dismisses her. He refuses to try it. He doesn't give her justice.

He doesn't care.

You and I have to ask ourselves who in our life is vulnerable. And we all have people that we're under the authority of. We also have people that we're over in authority. Teachers, coaches, parents, pastors, managers, bosses, leaders of various sorts and kinds, each of us has some sphere of authority and influence. And the question is, when we're dealing with people who are vulnerable, do we protect them or exploit them?

You single men, you meet a gal, new Christian, non-Christian, rough background, not a good family, no father present. You think, "Mm, she's vulnerable." Will you protect her? Will you exploit her? Ladies, you meet a guy, he's a Mars Hill guy, he really wants to get married, really wants to have kids. Are you gonna protect that or are you gonna expose that, manipulate that, manipulate him once he opens his heart?

If you're a boss in a job, you've got somebody working for you, they really need the job. They really need the medical benefits. Do you tend not to treat them very well, take advantage of them, dump a lot more work on them? Because after all, they're in a vulnerable position so you can abuse them. If you're a man who has a woman working under you, maybe a single woman or a woman whose life is in difficult circumstance, do you manipulate that relationship toward your own nefarious purposes or are you taking advantage of, exploiting someone who is vulnerable? Or are you protecting?

We've got to ask ourselves these questions all the time. When we meet someone who is vulnerable financially, vulnerable spiritually, vulnerable physically, vulnerable emotionally, are we like the judge to them? Do we cease to protect them? Do we take advantage of them? Do we exploit them? If so, it's all sin.

So my first collection of questions to you is this, how are you like the judge? And I ask this of myself as well. How are you like the judge? Who, in hearing this story, would say, "Yeah, I've got a judge in my life"? And your name would be affixed to that determination, tragically. See, we are sinners and we have victims.

HOW ARE YOU LIKE THE WIDOW?

In addition, we are victims and we have been sinned against. So that's the second series of questions. How are you like the widow, right? What good thing do you need to keep striving for? She keeps striving for justice. What do you need to keep striving for? Don't quit, don't give up, don't give in. Persist to persist to persist to persist. And this woman, it's the face of great adversity that she's staring into. A powerful judge, a prosperous judge against a powerless and penniless widow. And she wants justice. So she pursues it, strives for it vigorously, continually. What do you need to fight for?

What, number two, is worth fighting for? You can't fight for everything. And just so you know, not everything's worth fighting for. Some of you are warriors and you'll fight over everything and anything. Feel free not to. You're driving us crazy. Some of you won't fight for anyone, you won't fight for anything, feel free to pick something to fight for. You got to prayerfully, carefully consider who or what is worth fighting for. Jesus, worth fighting for. The church, worth fighting for. Justice, as she pursued, worth fighting for. Your family, worth fighting for. The oppressed, single moms, kids, victims, worth fighting for. What things are worth fighting for for you? What things has God burdened your heart to be fighting for, not that you want to be a contentious person, but you want to be a persistent person pursuing things that the heart of God has laid upon your heart.

Number three, how can your fear of God help you overcome the fear of man? And it says this early in Proverbs, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And then it says in Proverbs 29:25 that the fear of man is a trap or a snare. And here we see that the judge has no fear of God, no fear of God. And by "fear," it is meant honor, reverence, respect, submission, obedience, compliance, deference to God, that in your mind, in your heart, in your life, there's a functional lord. It may be the Lord Jesus Christ or someone that you have chosen to be a functional lord, a false god. If God is not the center of your life, if God is not the highest authority in your life, someone else will be. You'll live for their approval. You'll live for their affection. You'll want to make them happy and keep them from being angry at you or punishing you.

For some, it's friends and we live for them. And just so you know, when we live for someone, that's worship. We're worshiping them like a god. For some, it's a boyfriend or girlfriend, for others it's a husband or wife. For some, it is their children. For some, it is their teacher and their grade point average and their performance. And for others it is their boss and their performance review and their place on the organizational chart.

For some, tragically, like this man, it's themselves. They're a law unto themselves and a judge of themselves. This man has no regard for anyone's opinion of him. He has no regard for God's opinion of him. He acts as if he's a god and all he needs to do is impress himself. We would say today he has a very high self-esteem.

And if you live for the approval of someone else than the God of the Bible, you will end up like this man. You'll end up not doing what is right, not doing what is good, not doing what is fair, not doing what is just. You will end up living not in the fear of the Lord—love, honor, respect, obedience to the Lord—you will live with someone else as your functional lord and the result is that your soul will be judged by God and your life will be painful for others.

And the way we deal with the fear of man is with the fear of God. See, some of you have had fear of man, so you'll fear one person. And then you're able to get rid of them in your heart at least as the center of your life. And then someone else takes their place. The only way to overcome this problem of fear of man is with the fear of the Lord, that God is preeminent, that God is prominent, that God's opinion of us weighs most heavily, that God's judgment is what guides our decision making. And that we're trusting and waiting that the day will come when God will tell us, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And until then, everyone else's voice is not unimportant if they love him, but is secondary to his.

PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

Now in this, Jesus is telling us that persistence can be, if you're committed to the right person or the right thing, a very virtuous, noble thing in general, and he applies it to prayer in particular. Persistence in general can be good. Persistence in prayer can be most good. He says this in 18:1, "He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart."

So as we read this story, we are not to read that God is like the judge, that he's crooked, mean, nasty, unloving, unkind, and that we need to just beat him up in prayer to get what we want. That's not the point of the story. The point of the story is that above all judges, this would include the judge, the boss, the parent, the spouse, the boyfriend, the girlfriend, the coach, the teacher, the pastor, above all the little-*j* judges, people who speak verdicts in our life, there's a capital-*J* Judge named God and all people, including the little-*j* judges, all give an account to him.

And when we pray, we are giving request to the capital-*J* Judge, the one who judges the heart and the mind and the soul, the one who judges perfectly, justly, and forever, the God of the Bible. And when we pray to that God, we're praying to a judge who is completely unlike this judge. And the point is this, if this woman would persist in her request to a godless judge, how much more should we persist in our prayers to God the Judge? If he's unjust and our God is just; if he's unkind and our God is kind; if he's uncaring and our God is caring and she persists in making her requests to this bad judge, how much more should we be motivated to continually bring our requests to God, our good Judge. And we do that in prayer. We do that in prayer.

So ultimately under all of this persistence is an admonition, an exhortation, an invitation to be prayerful, to persist in prayer. So let me unpack a little bit about prayer, because I don't want to assume or presume that you have a lot of experience in prayer.

Prayer is simply talking to God. The Bible is how God talks to us. And prayer is how we talk to God and that's the means by which our relationship with God is formed and grows, like all relationships. There has to be two-way conversation and communication. God speaks to us through the Scriptures, and we speak to God in prayer.

And in this, I want to tell you that some of you will not persist in prayer because you believe that prayer doesn't work, right? Prayer does work. God answers. God hears and answers all prayer. Sometimes he says yes, sometimes he says no, sometimes he says later. Because God is like a parent.

How many of you are parents and you have kids and your kids come to you with requests, and you would be a horrible parent if all you ever said was, "Yes, yes. Mountain Dew, bottle rockets? Yes, that's fine. That's a—yes, at 2 a.m. in the house, yes, yes, yes." Say "No, no, no." Sometimes a good parent has to say no.

Sometimes a good parent has to say later, right? It was recently 48 degrees out and sunny, for the first time in more than forty days. And in the Bible, forty days without sun is an indication of God's judgment. So my daughter Alexie, cute as can be, she looks and me, she says, "Daddy, it's sunny out. Can I get my swimsuit on and go on the Slip 'n Slide?" It's 48 degrees. Answer? Later, much later, right? Months from now. I'm not against Slip 'n Slides, I'm against pneumonia. So, the answer is later, okay? So what that means is, Alexie is probably going to keep asking every time it's sunny, and then the day will come, "Today is the day. Go get your swimsuit."

God is like a parent, God is a Father, the Bible says. And like a good parent, he has three options when we make a request: yes, no, later. We persist in prayer because perhaps the answer is later. You've got a friend who's an unbeliever, family, friend, coworker, neighbor. You want 'em to meet Jesus. The answer may be later, so you keep praying to see if it's no or later. You don't know if you don't keep asking.

Additionally, prayer does work even if what we ask for didn't happen, because prayer always has two purposes. Usually our primary purpose is that we want to move the hand of God. But God's primary purpose oftentimes in prayer for us is that he wants to mold our heart. And so you may say, "Prayer didn't work. God didn't do what I told him!" Well, by definition, being God means you don't always do what you're told. I mean, that's just in the definition of God. It's not like God's in heaven going, "I didn't want to do it, but they said to do it, and who am I? Oh, I'm God! I can say no!" God never has to do what we tell him to do. God is free, God can do whatever God wants to do.

So sometimes we pray, and we're like, "Didn't work. God didn't do what he was told." Well, sometimes prayer moves the hand of God, but primarily prayer is also to mold our heart. That's why the Bible says to even pray for our enemies, why? So that our heart can be molded, so that we're not bitter, calloused, uncaring toward our enemies. That we love them, that we grieve for them, that we want good for them.

Ultimately as well, you will see as you pray, that maybe things don't change, and people don't change. But you do. You change. All of a sudden, you become, in character, increasingly more like God. And you can't say, "This prayer didn't work, 'cause they didn't change and things didn't change." And God says, "I love you and it did work and I wanted you to keep praying, 'cause I wanted you to change."

And so when we pray, friends, we pray like Jesus taught us to pray: "Our Father. Our Father." So if you want to know how to pray, don't look at religious people. They don't know what they're doing. They just don't—oh, but you can get real impressed. "Oh, look at that. A guy in a hat." Or, "Oh, there's a rug and they're on it and they're facing east! Wow, that looks amazing!" No, it doesn't. It looks ridiculous. It looks ridiculous. Because, when Jesus says to pray "Our Father," if you really want to know how to pray, look at how a child speaks to a father who loves them. That's how we are to pray. Not disrespectful or dishonorable, but like you're talking to your dad. In fact, that's what Jesus says. "Our Dad, who is in heaven." When he uses the language "Father," it's the language for "Dad."

Are you okay with that? Do you understand that? Some of you say, "I didn't have a dad." God is a Father to the fatherless. "My dad wasn't a good dad." Well, don't project your dad onto God the Father. Judge your dad by God the Father. Kids talk to their dad all the time about anything and everything. There's not a lot of pretension, it's not real formal, they just talk to him. I got five kids. I learn more about prayer just watching my kids.

They just ask.

So since God is our Father, that means we can persist in prayer. I'll tell you a few things that it doesn't mean. Number one, you don't have to pray eloquently. Right, we had this last night. We had dinner and my kids didn't come up to me for dessert and say, "Dearest father, we first would like to thank you for your kind provision in our former days. Furthermore, we know that you have the ability to grant requests, and we acknowledge that gladly. Furthermore, in addition, our sub-point is this, that we would beseech you, though undeserving as we are, that perhaps in your great mercies, we could have ice cream for dessert." No, my kids walked up. Two words: ice cream. That's it. That was the request. Answer? "Heck yeah," that's the response. It's really simple. It doesn't need to be eloquent and complicated. Just let your dad know, he's happy to hear.

Number two, your prayers don't need to be lengthy. You have an uncle like that, that guy? He's over at your house, and he's like, "I'll pray!" You're like, "Oh, no. My food's gonna be cold, I'm gonna miss a birthday. This guy prays forever." It's like he's thumb wrestling with God and he's determined to wear him out and get his prayer answered. You don't have to pray long. Sometimes you can pray long, sometimes you can pray short. Just like when you talk to your dad. Sometimes my kids come to me, "Dad, we need to talk," and it's thirty seconds. Other times, it's thirty minutes. You know what? Your dad loves you, your dad's there for you, sometimes it's short, sometimes it's long, but you don't need to pray long.

I got a church planter buddy of mine, he prays a lot. You know what his favorite prayer is? He told me. "Lord, help." He prays that all the time. "Lord, help!" It's a good prayer, it's a really good prayer. If I heard that from my kids, I would show up and help. "Dad, help!" Got it! I don't need a real long prayer. I don't need a long request. Just let me know. You're welcome to talk to God for hours, you're welcome to talk to God for seconds. Doesn't have to be eloquent or lengthy.

It doesn't need to be repetitive. You don't need to pray repetitively. Religious people do this. Man it—ugh. I saw this at the airport. It was a while back, but a Jewish guy, big hat, long sideburns, tassels, all dressed up, beard, spectacles. And I guess it was prayer time. He's standing up in the middle of the airport doing this, praying over and over and over and over and over and over and over. And I prayed for him. I prayed he'd meet Jesus and sit down, I mean just—because this is weird. I'm like, if my kids came to me and, "Oh, chocolate ice cream, we love chocolate ice cream. We want chocolate ice cream. We'd like a big bowl of chocolate ice cream. My brother would like chocolate ice cream. We like sprinkles on our ice cream. We like marshmallows on our ice cream. We would like whipped cream on our sprinkles on our chocolate ice cream. Could you please give us the ice cream?" I'd be like, I'm a horrible father with the world's weirdest children. Right? You get the idea.

Jesus says when you pray, persist in prayer. Just keep talking to your dad, working it out, letting him know where you're at. He already knows, sit down and have a conversation. Now how many of you, and you don't have to raise your hand, but you don't really persist in prayer. And part of it may be your misperception of God. You don't see him as a loving Father. But how many of you, you just fall asleep. You're like, "Dear Lord . . . Thank you, Lord, for sleep. I appreciate that." Maybe pray at a different time, right? Maybe that's not the best time for you.

How many of you, you're just totally disorganized? My kids have a prayer list on their phone and they've always got their phone with them and they keep a little prayer list. Two of my kids do. You just don't have a list. You don't record anything. You don't write it down, you don't type it up, so you don't really keep a running list. So when it comes time to pray, you're sitting down to pray. You're like, "I don't know what to pray for. I mean, I don't—uh, dear Lord, uh, help the guy in the place with the thing, amen." You're just like, "I don't know, I'm sure that'll hit some target. I just sent it out there generally." Pray. Keep a little list and it'll help you to pray.

How many of you ignore the Holy Spirit's prompting? God brings somebody to mind and you don't pray. The Bible says don't grieve, quench, or resist the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will bring people to mind. You're driving, you're working, you're doing something. Oh, somebody comes to mind. Great, you can pray silently and God knows your thoughts. You can pray out loud. You could call them up and pray for them on the phone. You could go see 'em and put a hand on 'em and pray for 'em. I mean, whatever. But you resist the Holy Spirit's prompting. God the Holy Spirit is always bringing people to mind that we can be praying for.

And here's what really encourages people. Let 'em know. Send a text, an email, a voicemail, "Hey, today, God brought you to mind. I prayed for you. I love you, just wanted to let you know." It means a lot, right? Persisting in prayer. I've got a list of people I'm, by the grace of God, trying to persist in prayer for. A buddy of mine keeps texting me. His kids are struggling, drugs with the son and trouble with the daughter and I'm just like, you let me know. I will keep praying. I just want to be a lifeline of encouragement for that guy.

All right, persevere in prayer for people. It's good for them; it's good for you. And if you don't know what to pray for, just ask people. Here's a simple question: is there anyone or anything I can be praying for? Is there anyone or anything that I can be praying for? And you know what I find? People say yes. Even atheists say yes. I get this all the time. I had this recently, a guy, he's like, "Well, I'm an atheist." "Is there anything I can pray for?" "Yeah, I'm not sure I believe in God but if there is, could you ask him?" We just moved you to agnosticism and it wasn't a big push, right? It didn't take a lot. People like to know that you're praying for them and it's a good thing to do.

Have you lost hope for people? "I'm not praying for them. They'll never change. They'll never get saved. I give up, I'm bitter." Then first pray for your own heart 'cause prayer is not always to move the hand of God, it's to mold our heart in addition to moving his hand. And maybe you need to first pray, "God, change my heart. I don't even want to pray for them. I don't even want them to get saved. I don't want them to even try and reconcile with me. I'm so bitter. I'm just done with them." Pray for your heart, pray for their heart. Pray for God's hand in both of your lives.

So Jesus' big idea is persistence can be a holy, virtuous, noble, good thing, especially when we persist in prayer, bringing our requests, bringing our family, bringing our friends, bringing our heart before God.

HOLY PATIENCE

The next question is: well, how long do we persist for? So then he concludes by talking about not only holy persistence but, in addition, holy patience. Luke 18:7-8, “‘And will not God give justice to his elect?’” Those are all that God has determined to save from sin, death, hell, and wrath. That’s believers in the Old Testament, those who are Christians today, and those whom God has not yet saved but he will. And by his grace we get to be a part of it. Those are all the saints of all time, the elect. “‘Who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’”

What he says is, persist in talking to God about this life until this life comes to an end. And when this life comes to an end, you and I will receive our proverbial day in court, that we will all stand before the capital-J Judge. And there will be justice. There will be justice.

For the Christian, justice came at the cross of Jesus Christ. God became a man. God entered history. God did not sin and we murdered him and he died as a substitute in our place for our sins as our savior. So for the guilty Christian, God is both a just and merciful God. He says, dropping the gavel, “‘You’re guilty, and I died in your place for your sins, you’re forgiven.’” And that is justice. So at the cross of Jesus, justice and mercy meet and the judge is also our savior. That’s amazing.

For the non-Christian, judgment comes in the end. All stand before Jesus and there will be a proverbial day in court. Jesus knows all, Jesus hears all, Jesus sees all, Jesus judges all. John 5:22, Jesus says, “‘The Father judges no one. He’s entrusted all judgment to the Son.’”

What that means is if you’re a victim, you will experience justice in the courtroom of God in the presence of Jesus. So just wait for your day in court. And I know it seems like a long time. For this widow I’m sure those days of longing and waiting were at times frustrating, perhaps even discouraging, but she persisted patiently.

If I could give you an equation, it’s this: persistence plus patience equals perseverance. Persistence plus patience equals perseverance. If you want to persevere, you need to have persistence and patience.

As well, for those of you who are sinning, for those of you who are rebelling against the just laws of a good God, you may think, “‘Maybe there is no God. Maybe there is no consequence. Maybe there is no judgment. Maybe there is no heaven. Maybe there is no hell because nothing has happened to me.’” Here’s what the Bible says elsewhere: You are getting away with nothing. You are simply storing up wrath for the Day of Judgment, that God is keeping full account and you’re getting away with nothing, that Jesus will perfectly, justly judge you in the end.

And Jesus says this Day of Judgment is assured, but the question is this: will you have faith to walk in that truth until that day? And he reveals himself here as the Son of Man. It’s his favorite designation, office, and title for himself. He takes it from Daniel 7:13-14. It was uttered hundreds of years before Jesus was even born on the earth. Jesus says he is the Son of Man roughly eighty times in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And the Son of Man in Daniel 7 is God. It shows us that the Son of Man is not a created being. He is the creator God. That in eternity past in his heavenly kingdom he is ruling, according to Daniel 7, with the Ancient of Days, God the Father, and then he comes to the earth on a mission as the Son of Man. God becomes a man.

Jesus Christ is the Son of Man. This is his way of saying to his original hearers, who were familiar with the Old Testament, “‘I am God. I am creator. I have come into human history to bring justice, either through the cross or through hell, justice that I pay or you pay. Either way, justice is assured.’” And Jesus is telling them, “‘The day of the fulfillment has come and I am in your midst.’” This is a very serious, sober claim by Jesus, the kind of claim that no one else has made in the history of the world. No one else will tell you, “‘I’m God! I’ve existed eternally. I have come down from heaven.’” No one says that but Jesus does. “‘I am the Son of Man. There will be a day in court. Trust me, persist patiently, and persevere until that day.’”

Now, this is a frequent exhortation of Scripture. And I was thinking about it. Roughly twelve of the books of the New Testament, there may be more, but roughly twelve books of the New Testament at or near their conclusion give an exhortation to persistence and patience that culminates in perseverance. Keep on keeping on, keep going. Dear victim, don’t quit. Trust the judge and get to the court date. I’ll read them to you because the Bible says elsewhere that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. And some of you are tempted to quit. Some of you are tempted to doubt God. Some of you are tempted to deny God. Some of you are tempted to disregard God. Some of you are tempted to disobey God. Persistence plus patience equals perseverance.

- Matthew 28:20 says to continue “to the end of the age.”
- 1 Corinthians 16:13 says, “Be watchful, stand firm.”
- Galatians 6:9 says, “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”
- Ephesians 6:18: “Keep alert with all perseverance.”
- Colossians 4:2: “Continue steadfastly in prayer.”
- 2 Thessalonians 3:13: “As for you, brothers, do not grow weary.”
- 1 Timothy 6:12-14: “Fight the good fight of the faith . . . until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- 2 Timothy 4:18: “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.”

- James 5:7-8: “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient.”
- 1 Peter 5:12: “This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.”
- 2 Peter 3:17: “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.” He’s saying remain stable.
- And Jude 24-25: “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling.”

God exhorts us, God encourages us, and, let me say this, God enables us and God empowers us to have both persistence and patience. The life we live is not just a life lived for God. That’s what religion teaches. It is the life of Christ lived for us. It is the life of Christ lived in us.

The one who is telling the story, he’s a better judge than the judge in the story. He judges justly and perfectly. He also pays the price for all guilty sinners through his death, burial, and resurrection.

Furthermore, Jesus, who teaches us the story and meets us on the other side of this life, is better than the widow. She suffered, to be sure, but he suffered more. She did not suffer to the point of shedding blood. She was not arrested, beaten, stripped nearly naked, disowned by family and friends, scourged beyond human likeness and nailed to a Roman cross. Our Jesus suffered an injustice that is in a completely different category than that which the widow suffered. And he suffered it persistently. He suffered it patiently. He suffered it perseveringly because he is a good God and savior.

And dear friends, you and I are called to follow in the example of Jesus and we are compelled to follow in the example of Jesus and it is ultimately by the grace of God and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that we can. The Bible says that this is Christ in you. So it is the life of Christ in you and through you empowering and enabling you to persevere through persistence and patience.

And in that way I want you to see this life like a marathon and to be a Christian is to run through to the end. The Apostle Paul uses this language elsewhere. He says, “I have run my race.” He sees the finish line in sight. And I don’t know about you, when we think of that, I tend to think of a marathon. I find marathons fascinating because people are running and there’s no dog and no fire and they’re running.

And marathons tend to be how long? Twenty-six miles. Do you know why? The Greeks had suffered many crushing defeats in battle. I learned this when I was in Greece last year with my family, touring and learning. And they went into one epic battle and they were outnumbered four to one and they won their battle. It was a miracle. It’s still a legend to this day in Greek history. And they needed to get news back to the city of Athens from the city of Marathon about the victory and to position and prepare themselves for a potential army that was still coming in via ship, so they needed to know what was happening.

So they commissioned a man. His name is Pheidippides. I’ll just call him Dippie, which is probably what they called him in elementary school. So they told Dippie he had to run from Marathon to Athens, about twenty-six miles. He had already fought all day in battle and he ran the twenty-six miles to bring news of the victory to Athens.

History records that he entered Athens and he shouted, “Victory!” and died. That’s the Christian life. You run to Jesus, you proclaim his victory, and you die. You leave it all in this life. You run through to the end. Persistence plus patience equals perseverance.

Father God, I pray for my friends. I pray, God, that we, by your grace, would persist as this woman persisted and we would persist until Jesus returns, the dead are raised, sin is judged, heaven and hell are assigned, and the kingdom has fully come. God, I pray for my friends, that they would not give up, that they would not give in. I pray, Lord God, that we would run our marathon. For some of us, the terrain is very hard and the work is very difficult. God, for those people I pray a Holy Spirit supernatural enablement to finish well. And Lord Jesus we thank you that we will stand before you as judge and that you will say that we are guilty and that you have paid our price and that we are forgiven so that justice and mercy might be unveiled. God, we thank you as well that you send the Lord Jesus to suffer injustice better than the widow, more than the widow. Lord Jesus, thank you so much that you ran your race, that you saw your mission through, the cross and the empty tomb. That you are patient with us today, that you are persisting with us today, and that one day you will come and there will be justice for all and sin will be no more. Lord Jesus, please give us the grace to run our race, amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.