

Henry Ow
HCC Sermon
Luke 18:1-8

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: I prayed regularly for my English buddy to come to faith, but he seemed uninterested in spiritual things until he left.
2. Need: Many of us have unanswered prayers
3. Subject: What should we do when our prayers go unanswered?
4. Text: Luke 18:1-8
5. Preview: What should we do? Why? What should our attitude be?

BODY

- I. Pray continually (Luke 18:1)
 - A. Jesus teaches his disciples to develop a practice of continual prayer.
 1. Continual prayer is necessary.
 2. Continual prayer is hard.
 - B. Develop a practice of praying regularly.
 1. Set aside time to pray.
 2. Keep a list of what you're praying for.
- II. Pray continually **because God hears you** (Luke 18:2-7)
 - A. Jesus illustrates how an unjust judge hears the request of a widow due to her persistence (18:2-5)
 1. The unjust judge looked out only for himself (18:2).
 2. The widow needed someone to look out for her (18:3).
 3. The widow's persistence led the unjust judge to look out for her interests (18:4-5)
 - B. If an unjust judge hears the request of a widow, then God, who is just, will hear your request (18:6).
 1. God doesn't need to hear our prayers because we are sinners.
 2. God hears us because of Jesus.
 3. God did not answer Jesus in two instances.
 - a. Garden of Gethsemane
 - b. At the cross
 4. Tim Keller: "We know God will answer us when we call because one terrible day he did not answer Jesus when he called." (Prayer, 237)
 - C. Believe that God hears your prayers because of what Christ has done.
- III. Pray continually because God hears you **so trust his timely reply** (Luke 18:8)
 - A. Jesus promises that God will answer the requests of his followers soon.
 - B. Know that God's goodness means that we receive what a response at the best possible time.
 1. Sometimes, God replies: "no".
 2. Sometimes, God replies: "wait."

3. Tim Keller: "God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked for if we knew everything he knew."
- C. Even though our prayers are unanswered we believe that God alone has the resources to answer them.
- D. Jesus challenges us to keep praying.

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Pray continually because God hears you so trust his timely reply.
2. Closing Image: George Mueller prayed for 52 years for his friend to come to faith in Christ.

Over 500 years ago, a believer named George Mueller prayed for his five unbelieving personal friends. After praying for five years, one came to Christ. In ten years, two more came to faith in Christ. He prayed for twenty-five years before another friend came to faith in Christ. For the fifth friend, George Mueller continued to pray up to his death. A few months after George Mueller's death, the fifth and final friend came to faith in Christ as well. It took George Mueller praying for fifty-two years before his fifth friend came to faith in Christ. Would we also have the same persistence to pray continually even if we didn't see that fifth friend come to faith in Christ? Would we have the discipline to pray continually?

MANUSCRIPT

This past year, I participated in one of our church's ministries: English Buddy. For those of you who don't know about English buddy let me explain. The ministry connects one of our church members with an international student to serve as a conversational partner. English buddy hopes that through these conversations, these international students would have an opportunity to hear the gospel and come to faith in Christ.

The English Buddy ministry paired me with an international student from Beijing. He came to study supply chain management at the University of Houston. After I discovered that I had been paired with him, Josephine and I prayed for his salvation. We met on a regular basis. I helped him work on a resume. We talked about his research project on how to alleviate traffic in Houston. He shared about his passion for golf. I even learned about how Chinese culture viewed marriage and divorce.

I talked with him about spiritual matters a few times. I remember sharing the gospel with him when I shared about Josephine and me considering adoption. We invited him to Good Friday service. But he dozed off in the middle of service. I think he anticipated hanging out afterward rather than understand what the service meant. We invited him to our small group when we watched Case for Faith. After his wife gave birth to his son, they returned to Beijing. We didn't get a chance to see him before he left. **I prayed regularly for him to come to faith, but he remains uninterested in spiritual things.** My prayer remains unanswered.

Many of us have unanswered prayers. Some of us have prayed for years that our unbelieving family member would come to faith in Christ. But they seem to get more hostile to God every year. Others of us have prayed for pregnancies only to be disappointed time and

time again. Some of us pray regularly for a spouse. But with every subsequent date, you begin to wonder: where are the quality guys? Where are the quality gals? It could be a prayer for a wayward child to return to faith. It could be a prayer for a suitable job. It could be a prayer for healing. Many of us have unanswered prayers.

What should we do when our prayers go unanswered? What should our response be when God seems to be silent when we pray to him? How should we act when prayers receive no response? **What should we do when our prayers go unanswered?**

To answer this question, we'll turn this morning to the passage just read for us in Luke chapter 18. The travelogue within the gospel of Luke makes it unique. The travelogue focuses on Jesus's journey to Jerusalem beginning in Luke chapter 9 and ending in Luke chapter 19. Our text this morning occurs as Jesus journeys to Jerusalem. It's more than a geographical journey. It depicts a spiritual journey of what it looks like to follow Christ as his disciple. One thing that we must learn as his followers is how to handle unanswered prayers. Again, we'll be in Luke chapter 18 if you have not turned there already. Luke, chapter 18.

This morning, we'll answer three questions: **What should we do when our prayers are unanswered? Why? What should our attitude be?** The answer to each of these questions will build on the last. What should we do when our prayers are unanswered? Why? What should our attitude be?

First question, what should we do when our prayers are unanswered? **Pray continually.** Continue to pray. Pray persistently. Pray doggedly. Don't give up. Don't be discouraged. Keep praying. **Pray continually.**

Jesus teaches his disciples to develop a practice of continual prayer. Look with me at verse 1: *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.*

The phrase: continual prayer might make you wonder: Does that mean that I should be praying every waking moment of my day? Does that mean I should be praying even now in service? Is that what Jesus means by: *“always to pray”*. Jesus refers not to a constant prayer, but more of a practice of prayer. Do you set aside time regularly to pray for things? Think about it: when your dentist teaches you: always brush your teeth. It doesn't mean that you carry a toothbrush in your mouth and constantly brush throughout the whole day. It means that you set aside time both in the morning and evening to brush your teeth. Continual prayer sets aside time on a regular basis to pray.

There are two things that we can learn about continual prayer. First, **continual prayer is necessary**. The ESV uses the word “ought”. But I think that the word should be stronger because the Greek word used should be translated: necessary. Verse one could say: “It is necessary for them to pray always”. Continual prayer is critical for a believer.

Luke picks up on the importance of prayer in his gospel. When you read the gospel of Luke, you'll discover that the word: “prayer” occurs more here than any other gospel. Jesus prays after he chooses his first disciples (Luke 5:16). Jesus prays before Peter professes that Jesus is the Christ (Luke 9:18). He prays before his transfiguration (Luke 9:28). He prays at Gethsemane continually before his crucifixion. Luke's gospel contains three unique lessons on prayer: the story of the friend asking for bread in the middle of the night (Luke 11), the parable

of the persistent widow (Luke 18), the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18). Luke throughout his gospel teaches us that a follower of Christ prays.

Second, **continual prayer is hard**. Why is it difficult? We tend feel discouragement and disappointment when our prayers are not answered. That's why Jesus says in verse 1: "*Do not lose heart.*" It could say: do not grow weary or tired. Do not grow weary or tired of praying regularly. Prayer requires work. You have to set aside time to pray. You have to think about what you're going to pray about it. Fatigue or tiredness makes prayer difficult. Sometimes, you don't feel like praying because you're unwilling to put in the effort. We get tired of offering prayers about the same topic daily, weekly, or monthly because it seems to be offered to no effect. This causes us then to pray less and less. Jesus says here that we should not grow weary of praying continually.

How do we then pray continually? **Develop a practice of praying continually. Set aside time to pray.** Now I'm not talking about your regular prayers for your meals at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I'm talking about finding time in your schedule to pray. It could be the morning. It could be the evening. Put it in your calendar. **Set aside time to pray.**

Keep a list of prayer requests. You could use a notebook, notecards, or Evernote to keep track of the things that you're praying for. I have a friend who keeps a word document of all his prayers. He sets aside time on Mondays to review those requests and to see which requests have been answered and those that are still pending God's response. Find some way to remind yourself of things that you are praying for. Keep track of what you're praying for. **Keep a list of things that you're praying for.**

Why do we keep on praying even when our prayers are unanswered? Why do we persist to pray even those we don't receive a reply from God? Why?

Because God hears you. When you offer up your prayers, it does not fall on deaf ears. Imagine sending your prayers via iMessage. Every time, you send God a prayer it would have the line delivered at 9:30am. It would be say immediately: "Read". God reads your prayers the moment you think them and send them. You receive an immediate read receipt. God hears you. Pray continually **because God hears you.**

To teach us this truth, Jesus uses a parable. The Parable of the Persistent Widow. **Jesus illustrates how an unjust judge hears the request of a widow due to her persistence.**

Let's take a look at the characters. **We're first introduced to an unjust judge who looked out only for himself.** Look with me at verse 2: *"He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.'" A judge in Israel had a responsibility to dispense justice according to the law of God as described in the book of Exodus. The judge should also look out for those who are oppressed such as widows and orphans (Exodus 20:22-24). But this judge didn't care for God's law or people. He cared only for his own interests.*

Next, we're introduced to the widow. **The widow needed someone to look out for her.** She needed an advocate. In the first century, widows needed a male figure such as a brother or uncle to help her. But the widow in the parable had no one to help her. She had to help herself. Verse 3 says: *"And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'"*

Imagine the scene. The unjust judge sits at the gate dispensing his justice. In the line, he sees this widow. Eventually, it's her turn. She explains her case. The unjust judge then asks:

“how much money do you have?” She replies: “What?” He answers: “I’ll take your case only for a denarius.” (Amos 5:12) She says: “I don’t have a denarius.” Then he replies: “Then I can’t take your case. Next.” He dismisses her. He thinks: “This is the last I’ll see of her. Good riddance.” But when he goes to the market. He finds her over his shoulder asking him to take her case. When he enters the local pub, he sees her there waiting for him. Even when he’s goes home after the end of a day’s work, he finds her at the entrance of his home asking him to take her case. Every day, he sees her in the line at the gate requesting justice. Even when he sleeps at night, he dreams of this widow asking for justice. He wakes up in a cold sweat. The widow follows him during the day and haunts him in his dreams. Eventually this unjust judge gives in.

The widow’s persistence led the unjust judge to look out for her interests. Look with me at verse 4: *“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.”* The phrase: “beat me down” is terminology taken from boxing. Imagine this unjust judge cornered in the boxing ring. You have this widow on the other side. With every request, she jabs in the face. One strike here. One strike there. Continual blows. Eventually pummels the judge to submission and he says: “Enough! I give up. You win.”

What is the point of this parable? Jesus uses a lesser to greater argument. [Don’t know if I need to explain what this is] If **an unjust judge hears the request of a widow, then God, who is just, will certainly hear your request.** If a judge who has no concern for men helps the widow, how much more would God who loves humanity help his followers? This leads to

Jesus's explanation of the parable in verse 6: *"And the Lord said, "hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to the elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?"* Jesus assures his followers, those whom God has chosen before the foundation of the world, that God hears their prayers. God will act. How do we know this?

If you think about it, then you would realize that God doesn't need to answer our prayers. After all, we are all sinners. Just as oil and water do not mix neither does a holy God and unholy people mix. Our sin should be just cause for God to ignore our prayers. Yet he hears us? Why?

Jesus. Jesus lived a sinless life. He lived in perfect relationship with God. Whenever God the Father asked Jesus to do something, he did it without reservation. When Jesus asked God to heal the lame, the lame began to walk. When Jesus asked God to heal the blind, the blind saw. When Jesus asked God to someone's sins to be forgiven, they were forgiven.

But God did not answer Jesus's prayers in two instances. The first is at the garden at Gethsemane when he asked for the cup of God's wrath to be removed from him. And God said: "No." When Jesus hung on the cross and cried out: "My God, My God" as if he were requesting God's help (Matt 27:46). God fell silent. Why? God placed the sin that barred us from access to him upon Jesus. Jesus received rejection while we received acceptance. Jesus experienced God's ear turned away from him while we experience God's ear turned toward us. When we place our faith in Christ as our Lord and Savior, Jesus's righteousness is given to us and we can rest assured that God hears us. He may not answer us immediately. But we know that he hears us. Tim Keller writes this: **"We know God will answer us when we call because one**

terrible day he did not answer Jesus when he called.” (Prayer, 237). **Believe that God hears your prayers because of what Christ has done.**

But how about those of you have not professed faith in Christ? If you haven't yet believed that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins and rose from the dead, then there is only one prayer that he will hear from you. And I assure you that God will answer this prayer. Offer to God a prayer of repentance and belief in Jesus Christ as your savior and Lord. Ask God to help you turn from your sin and trust in the saving work of Christ. When you do, he will save you from your sin and have relationship with you.

If we know that God hears us when we pray, then what should our attitude be? What should we think? What should we believe?

Trust his timely reply. Believe that God will respond to your prayer the wisest way possible. Know that God's answer is coming. Trust that whatever God's reply is it will be for your best interest. Pray continually because God hears you **so trust in his timely reply.**

Jesus promises that God will answer the requests of his followers soon. Let's look again at the end of verse 7 again: *“Will he delay over them?”* What causes the delay? What causes God to be slow to answer prayer especially that for justice? If you look at the prior section in Luke 17, Jesus explains that the kingdom of God is already here but not yet. If you look at verse 21, Jesus says: *“the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”* But he talks then about the day of judgement coming at an unexpected time. Hence, there exists a delay between Jesus's first coming and his second coming. Why? The word translated delay is the Greek word: makrathumos. This is the same word used in 2 Peter chapter 3, verse 9: *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness but is patient toward you, not wishing*

that any should perish but all should reach repentance.” Hence, some of our unanswered prayers for justice may not be answered until the return of Christ when he will make all things right. He will fulfill his promises.

When we believe God will answer our prayers soon, it may not be soon as understood in days or weeks. Look with me at verse 8: *“I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth.”* Speedily seems to imply a quick or fast response. But this phrase in other contexts (Rom 16:20; Rev 1:1; 22:6) render the phrase soon referring to the return of Christ. It should be understood as soon: *“I tell you, he will give justice to them soon.”* After all, God sees one day as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day (2 Peter 3:8).

What then should we believe? What should we know? **Know that God’s goodness means that we receive a response at the best possible time.** This is difficult. Although we may not express it, we often think that God is like a soda machine. If we put in a dollar into a soda machine, then the machine should dispense a soda. We think that we should receive a reply immediately. But it isn’t always the best.

Sometimes, God replies: “no”. For instance, if a child asks for a snack before dinner, then the parent will typically respond: “No” because she knows that if the child has a snack before dinner then he won’t eat dinner. Since we believe that God knows all things, we need to trust that he will deny requests that are unhelpful to us.

Sometimes, God replies: “wait.” God delays in giving a reply because he simply wants us to wait. Maybe there are some things that need to happen in our lives first before he is able to grant us a request.

Think about a child who asks: “Dad, can I drive us to the grocery store?” Any right-thinking father will respond: “No.” The child’s feet can’t even touch the gas or brake pedal. But the request to drive will be granted when the child becomes a teenager and obtains a driving permit.

We ought to realize that we don’t have omniscience. We need humility to recognize that we don’t know everything. I remember the story of my professor in seminary. He and his wife couldn’t conceive. This led them to adopt two Ethiopian children. If my professor and his wife had conceived a child, then it may not have led them to even consider adopting. His two children may have lived their whole lives in an orphanage. We don’t know why some of our requests go unanswered because often times we don’t have a full picture. We live life with a limited perspective.

We need to trust God always wants the best for us. Instead of trusting that we know best. We need to believe that God knows best and that his timing is ultimately perfect. Tim Keller puts it this way: “God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked for if we knew everything he knew.” (Prayer, 228).

Even though our prayers are unanswered we believe that God alone has the resources to answer them. We don’t ask God for help with taking out the trash or helping us to run our errands. God has given us responsibilities. We pray to God when we’re unable to conceive because we recognize that even with the advancement of medical technology only God can open the womb. We pray to God for a spouse because we can’t force a person to feel attracted to us. That is something only God can do in another person’s life. We ask God for help finding a suitable job because only he can control all the intricate details of opening up a position.

Maybe it's an increase in company workload. Maybe it's a lack of a certain skill that only can fill. These things are beyond our control. We pray because we believe that only God has the power and resources to bring about change in our circumstance. When we do this, it focuses our attention on God. It reminds us of our inability. Without God's work we can do nothing. This gives him the credit he deserves. In other words, he receives all the glory and we receive none of it. Hence, we trust his timing rather than our own.

Jesus challenges us to keep praying. Do you see it in verse 8? "Nevertheless" meaning regardless of what happens. *When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?* When Jesus returns as the king, what will he find you and me doing when our prayers remained unanswered? Will he find his followers praying continually or just going about their daily business? Will he find his people pleading for the souls of men or just praying before meal times?

What should we do when our prayers go unanswered? Pray continually. Why? Pray continually because God hears you. What should our attitude be? Trust his timely reply. **Pray continually because God hears you so trust his timely reply.**

Over 500 years ago, a believer named George Mueller prayed for his five unbelieving personal friends. After praying for five years, one came to Christ. In ten years, two more came to faith in Christ. He prayed for twenty-five years before another friend came to faith in Christ. For the fifth friend, George Mueller continued to pray up to his death. A few months after George Mueller's death, the fifth and final friend came to faith in Christ as well. It took George Mueller praying for fifty-two years before his fifth friend came to faith in Christ. Would we also

have the same persistence to pray continually even if we didn't see that fifth friend come to faith in Christ? Would we have the discipline to pray continually?

Comments for Future Sermons:

1. I wonder if for a future message if I were to preach this again, then should I alter it so that it says: Pray continually for God's justice. After all, the text repeats the word: "justice" at least 6 times in the text. The reason why I didn't use "justice" is because Jason wanted me to focus on why we persist in praying.
2. Opening Image: I think I might want to change it because Jason feels that it doesn't seem long enough. Praying for my international student was only for a duration of 1 to 2 years.
3. Preview: The questions need to have a fuller sense. For example: what should we do when our prayers go unanswered?
4. Under the main point: "Pray continually", there should be a definition of what does pray continually mean? It could be three subpoints.
 - a. Continual prayer is habit? [This would need tweaking]
 - b. Continual prayer is necessary
 - c. Continual prayer is hard.
5. Under MP II: because he hears you, ask the question: "Why would Jesus use the judge as an example?" and develop it to build tension for the audience.
6. The Dr. Vic illustration needs clarity. Jason believed that he eventually had biological children.
7. This sermon could possibly be used when a national tragedy occurs. The text is about the idea of praying for justice. Ex. Where is the justice when a mass shooting occurs?