



Pastor Brian Davis

Keep Praying: The Parable of the Persistent Widow

November 26, 2023

Series: Plot Twist

Luke 18:1-8

BIG IDEA – ALWAYS PRAY AND NEVER GIVE UP

Good morning, Two Cities Church. It's so good to be with you guys. I hope you had a great Thanksgiving. This is actually your second-to-last weekend in this building. Were you guys aware of that? I tell you what. If you wanted to gift this building to our church, we'd be very grateful. We can call it *Plaza Church Winston Campus*. Something to pray about. Okay? Just something to pray about.

I'm so glad to be here with you guys. This church is like the Batcave for evangelicals. I mean, every time I come, I see something new that I've never seen before. I'm like, "Dave Vogel, what is that thing?" and he's like, "Well, that's just how you assimilate people into the life of your church." I'm like, "Whoa! Can I have it?" He's like, "Yes. Go ahead."

Then I'm like, "Hey, Kari, what is *that* thing?" She's like, "Well, that's just a well thought out communication plan." I'm like, "Can I have that, please?" She's like, "Yeah. Go right ahead." I learn so much whenever I'm here. I come with a pencil and notepad. So, I'm so grateful to be with you guys. If you have a Bible, go ahead and make your way to Luke, chapter 18.

Also, I'm just very thankful for your pastor, Kyle. He has played such a pivotal role in my life. Many of you guys know this, but 15 years ago I was a college freshman at UNC Greensboro, and I met Kyle Mercer doing magic tricks, meeting people in the dorm. Over the course of a couple of months, Kyle led me to Christ and began to disciple me.

He has had such a profound impact on my life to the degree that I'm not even quite sure where Kyle's thoughts end and my thoughts begin. I'm not sure. For example, I'll be at my church, and I'll make this point that I'm like, "That point was straight fire." I

mean, it's well balanced. Of course it's alliterated. It sounds really good. I'm very proud of myself.

Then I hear Kyle say it a few months later, and I'm like, "I guess he has been saying that for years, and I learned it by osmosis." I'm not quite sure. A couple of months before, there was this great thing that happened to me. There's a young woman who went to our church who then moved to Winston. She texted me in the middle of Kyle's sermon and said, "Kyle just said something you said about two months ago."

Then she went, "Did you help him write his sermon?" I couldn't help myself. I texted back so quickly. "Yes, I did. Yes, I did. Whenever he's lost or confused, whenever Kyle has a question about the Bible, he comes to me, and I help him out. What can I say?" But either way, I'm so grateful to be here with you guys.

If you made your way to Luke, chapter 18, let me begin by setting our time together and reading verse 1. We're hopping back into the series *Plot Twist*. Verse 1: **"And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart."** Let's be honest. Prayer is one of those things we know we should do but often forget to do. It's one of those disciplines that is easily forgotten.

You ask the question...*Why do we not pray?* There are probably several reasons, but I'll give you my top three. We're arrogant, we're anxious, and we're always in a hurry. Think with me. Arrogance says, "I've got this." Arrogant people need to pray. Maybe you remember Terrell Owens, the football player, the famous quote... "I love me some me." That's arrogant Christians. "I've got this figured out. I love me some me. I do not need to pray. I've got me." That's arrogance.

Anxiety is a little different. If arrogance is, "I've got this," anxiety is, "I'm doomed." Most of us don't take our anxieties to the foot of the cross. We don't cast all of our anxieties on him because he cares for us. We actually go inward, and we say, "Well, I've got to figure this thing out." For some of you, your anxiety pops up, and you become a control freak, so you don't pray. You say, "I'm going to fix this myself."

So, we're arrogant, we're anxious, or we're always in a hurry. "I'd love to pray, but I'm just too busy." In our culture, we love efficiency. I mean, "Can I get it out in 144 characters? What is the fastest way to get this information to me? What is the most efficient...?" I guarantee whenever you put something in your phone to MapQuest, or wherever, you're always trying to find the fastest route.

In a world that loves efficiency, prayer just feels inefficient. So I'm not going to pray because I'm just always in a hurry...on to the next thing, on to the next thing, on to the next thing. That's why we don't pray. We're arrogant, we're anxious, and we're

always in a hurry. But guess why we should pray. Oh, yeah, that's right...because we're arrogant, anxious, and always in a hurry.

Here's what prayer does. Prayer is going to humble the arrogant, heal the anxious, and help the hurried. So, we have to wrap our hearts and minds around prayer. This is a safe place. Okay? Show of hands. How many of you have ever fallen asleep while praying? Look at y'all. Yes! Round of applause for honesty in church. Very good.

Guess what? You are not alone. The disciples...yes, the disciples of Jesus...also fell asleep while they were praying. They knew they needed help. My hope today is that you will be able to say, "I know I need help with this. This is an area of my life that's not quite conformed to the life of Jesus. Jesus, would you teach me to pray?"

In fact, that phrase right there, "Jesus, would you teach me to pray?" was a phrase the disciples uttered themselves. Here's what gets me. Jesus preached a whole bunch of sermons. They never said, "Teach us to preach." Jesus did a whole bunch of miracles. They never said, "Teach us to do miracles." But they did say, "Jesus, would you teach us how to pray?"

I think it's because they recognized that when it comes to prayer, Jesus is different. When it comes to prayer, he's the GOAT. If you're under the age of 40, you caught that...the GOAT. If you're over the age of 40, you're like, "I thought he was the Lamb." Yeah, he's both. Being the *GOAT* means he's the greatest of all time. When it comes to prayer, he is the greatest of all time.

Funny little story. There's a guy in my church who loves to hit me with these NBA hot takes, and I'm not always here for it. We were talking one time, and he tried to convince me that LeBron James is not in the top five of all time. I said, "Brother, you are bearing false witness, breaking commandments. I rebuke you in the name of Jesus." And my kids were around. So irresponsible.

So, we were going back and forth about this, but do you know what was never up for debate? Who the GOAT of the NBA actually is. It's Michael Jordan. It's a fact. If you disagree, I think you have a prayer team that meets after, and I don't know if you have oil. I'm not sure. But for everyone else who has eyes, we know Michael Jordan is the GOAT when it comes to the NBA.

Well, the same goes for prayer. If you read the Bible, you recognize Jesus is the GOAT when it comes to prayer. He's just different. There are so many stories of Jesus doing wild things with prayer. For example, do you remember that one time when Jesus goes to Peter and is like, "Hey, Peter, come here. The Devil asked if he could sift you like wheat"? If you're Peter, you're like, "You said no, right?" What did Jesus say? "It's cool. I prayed for you."

What does Jesus believe about prayer that I don't? I think he believes it actually works. I think he believes it actually changes things. Some of us hide behind a theology of sovereignty to take the teeth out of prayer. I am a card-holding believer in the sovereignty of God. I have my card right here.

I believe in the sovereignty of God, but if your view of "God is in control of all things" means "I don't have to pray," you have that wrong. Jesus would often go to desolate places, and there he would pray. There's something about prayer that Jesus believed that I struggle to believe.

Second story. Remember the time the disciples were casting out demons? I mean, just a typical Tuesday in the life of a disciple, just casting out demons, you know, going to work. Well, there's one demon that won't leave. It's like a pickle jar. The lid is stuck, and they can't get that thing off. So they're trying, and then they have to go up the hierarchy. They have to go to Jesus and say, "Can you please help us?"

Jesus goes over there and casts the demon out like it's nothing. Of course, they're like, "Why couldn't *we* do that?" Remember what he said? "Some demons can only be driven out by prayer." That's true. I'm convinced there are some marriages in this room that will not be restored apart from prayer.

There are probably some sinful addictions in this room that will not get any better apart from prayer. There are some heart wounds that will not be healed apart from prayer. So, what is it for you? What is the thing in your life that Jesus is saying, "Prayer. This thing in your life will not improve until you commit yourself to prayer. I want you to always pray. I want you to always pray and not lose heart"?

So, the disciples said, "Jesus, you're different. Teach us to pray." We have the opportunity today to go to the GOAT and say the same thing. "Jesus, would you teach us how to pray?" Let's just pray right now and ask Jesus to teach us how to pray.

God, we believe that. We believe that when it comes to prayer, Lord, you were different, and you want us to be different. You would often go out in the Spirit of power, and you would pray, you would cast out demons, you would raise the dead, you would spend time with your Father, and things would happen. Things would change. So, God, give us the grace to believe that. Give us the grace to believe that prayer actually works. This we pray in Christ's name, amen.

Look back with me to verse 1 of Luke 18. I'm going to read it to you again. ***"And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart."*** There it is. There's the whole point of the parable. There's the whole point of my sermon: *you should always pray and not give up*. This is a one-point sermon. That is the point: always pray; don't stop. That's the whole point of the parable.

Here's what's interesting. Why does Luke tell you the point of the parable in the first sentence? Typically, these gospel writers like for you to work for it. I mean, there are times when Jesus will tell a parable, and he's like, "Do you get it?" and they're like, "Got it." He turns around, and they're like, "We don't got it. We have no idea what he just said."

But here it's very clear. Like, "Hey, here is the point: I want you to always pray, and do not lose heart. Do not give up." Why is that so clear? I think it's because of the very last verse where he says, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" He wants to be very clear. Prayer is an act of faith, because prayer is when you go to a God you cannot see. That's faith.

Faith is not "I see what God is doing. I'm good with it." That's called *sight*. No. Faith is "I'm not sure what he's doing, but I trust he's doing something. I can't see if he's hearing the words I'm saying, but I trust he is." Prayer is an act of faith. It is not sight. Prayer is when you walk by faith and not by sight.

When I was in high school, I was a wrestler. And not like fake wrestling. Don't insult me. Not like, "Get the chair!" No, no, no. Real, strategic, actual, weight-class wrestling. On our wrestling team, there was a guy, one of my friends. His name was Tyler. Tyler was this scrawny, scrappy 103-pounder. Tyler was one of the most amazing people I've ever met because Tyler was completely blind. Every opponent he wrestled he had to wrestle without sight.

Here's the whole point: you're Tyler. Everything you are wrestling with right now you are wrestling by faith and not by sight. Everything you take to God in prayer, you are wrestling with God, and you don't see what he's going to do. You don't see how he's going to work this out for good, but you have to trust.

I remember one time in particular. There was one match where Tyler was up by one point. His opponent snaps him down, and he's going to spin around to get two points and win the match, and Tyler just throws his arm out to catch a leg or something. Well, he catches the guy's leg, and this guy is walking back and walking back and walking back. I'm thinking, "Man, that shoulder is going to pop any second now. He can't keep..."

He's just walking, and you see Tyler gritting his teeth, just trying to hold. He has no idea how much time is left. He can't see the clock. He can't even see. But there are only 20 seconds left. So all of us on the bench jump up. We're like, "Tyler, hold on! Tyler, keep going! Tyler, don't let go!" Our coach is a former Marine with a booming voice. He stands up and says, "Keep wrestling!"

My whole point to you is this: Keep wrestling. Keep pleading. Keep praying. Maybe you need the people of God. Maybe you need the church on your bench to stand up for you and say, "I see what you can't see. I see you holding on. I see you fighting. I see you trying. I see you pleading. Don't give up." The point of the parable is "I want you to always pray, and don't give up."

Tyler reminded me of another story, one in the Bible, of another wrestling match...Jacob. Remember this? Jacob wrestling with God. There's this great scene where at the end of the wrestling match, Jacob just latches onto the angel of the Lord's ankle and says, "I will not let go until you bless me." That's prayer.

It's where you throw yourself on the mercy of God and say, "I will not let go until you bless me. I'm not going to stop pleading. I'm not going to stop asking. I'm not going to stop praying. I'm going to always pray and not give up." That's prayer. So, he begins this parable by saying, "Let me be very clear about what I'm trying to communicate. I want you to always pray and never lose heart."

Then see how he tells a story to back it up. Look with me in verse 2. ***"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 and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'"***

A widow. She's the star of the parable. Luke has a soft spot for widows, more than any other gospel writer. In Luke 20, you have him saying, "Woe to the scribes who devour widows' houses." In Luke 21, there's the widow with the two coins, which is all she has. In Acts, chapter 6 (Luke also wrote that), you have the Hellenistic Jews complaining that their widows are being neglected.

Luke has this unique soft spot for widows, and I think it's because he's the only Gentile who wrote part of the New Testament, so he's very sensitive to outsiders. He's very sensitive to people who are on the outside looking in, which is why you have some stories that are only in Luke's gospel, like the parable of the prodigal son. It's only in Luke's gospel. Zacchaeus is only in Luke's gospel. Why? It's an outsider who becomes an insider. He has a soft spot for widows.

Here's the whole point: you're the widow. You have nothing to offer, yet everything to gain. The gospel is not that you are this impressive person and God is like, "I need you on my team." The gospel is "I'm a poor widow. I am the person who society would shove to the side, yet I am the person who is the recipient of this grace." Yes, the gospel says you are the widow with nothing in your hands to offer God, yet God has bestowed on you crazy grace, crazy mercy, crazy love. Yeah, we're the widow.

So, the widow is the main character, but then keep on reading. Look with me in verse 3. ***"And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused..."*** There it is. Let's talk about that...unanswered prayer.

Few things are more disorienting in the life of a Christian than unanswered prayer. Some of you are very spiritual and very pleasant until you don't get what you want. We have to get a grip on unanswered prayer. Here's the thing. It's not even like she was asking for something outlandish. It's like, "Give me justice." Like, "God, you should care about that kind of stuff."

What do you do when you ask for good things, when you ask for things God should care about and you're not even guessing? It's in the Bible. "God, you care about *this*. You care about justice. You care about this thing. You said you're a very present help in time of trouble. You should care about me right now. I'm in trouble."

What do you do when you have unanswered prayer? You know, this is one of those things where people will literally change their theology because of unanswered prayer. They get into the whole "Okay. Is he good but not powerful or powerful but not good?" Some people change their whole view of God because of unanswered prayer.

I'll say this. Whenever you're dealing with a Christian who is walking through addiction, you are never just dealing with addiction; you are always dealing with unanswered prayer. Whenever you have a teenager in the church who is dealing with same-sex attraction, you are never only dealing with same-sex attraction; you are always dealing with unanswered prayer.

So, we have to get ahold of what God is up to. Why does God say "No"? I can think of two reasons. Here's the first one: sometimes his *no* is a soft *no*, meaning, "Not right now," which is why you have all of the psalms that say, "Wait on the Lord." Like, take heart. Wait for him. Just wait. He's going to do something. God is teaching you to wait. He's doing something in you as you wait. It's a soft *no*. It's a "Not right now." It's a "Not yet. I'm teaching you to trust me."

Sometimes God's *no* is a soft *no*, but sometimes God's *no* is a hard *no*. That's because pain is part of the plan. Listen. That is true, deep, and very hard to stomach. It's true. It's all over the Scriptures. Pain is part of the plan. This is James 1: "Count it all joy when you face trials of various kinds, because you know the testing of your faith." It's doing something. It's producing endurance and steadfastness.

Sometimes God is saying, "No. Pain is part of the plan." That's just true. Even the way you got saved... You're believers because Jesus experienced your pain on the cross.

Pain has always been part of the plan. Through many trials, through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God. Pain is part of the plan. That's just true. But it's deep.

You know what *deep* means. Kyle says it all the time. He says, "*Deep* means this impacts me on multiple different levels." The fact that pain is part of the plan impacts my marriage. The fact that pain is part of the plan impacts my parenting. The fact that pain is part of the plan impacts my finances and my career. It impacts everything. It's deep, and it's just hard to stomach. It doesn't always taste good.

But here's the thing: we need to develop an appetite for things that don't taste good but *are* good. I mean, I have this conversation with my son all the time at dinner. Apollos is like, "Daddy, I don't want to eat broccoli." I say, "Why not?" He goes, "Because broccoli is the wust." That's how he talks. "It's the wust." I'm like, "It's what's for dinner. You've got to eat the broccoli." He goes, "Daddy, it don't taste good." I say, "Son, sometimes in life you have to eat things that don't taste good."

Yeah, pain is part of the plan. It doesn't taste good, but it *is* good. If you don't wrap your mind around the fact that God sometimes says "No," that God uses pain to advance his purposes in your life... If you don't get your mind and heart wrapped around it, if you can't stomach that, you will either get bitter or badder. You'll get bitter. You'll get angry at God. You'll just say, "Well, God, forget you."

You'll be resentful. Or you'll get badder. You'll lean on your own understanding. You'll just say, "He's not going to help me. I'll do whatever I'm going to do. I'm going to do me." Yes, you will either get bitter or badder if you can't wrap your mind around why God says, "No." So, in light of that, what should you do? Always pray and don't give up. It's like, "God, my marriage is falling apart. What do I do?"

"I want you to always pray and never give up."

"God, my child is a prodigal. What do I do? They've run away. They don't care. They don't care about me or Jesus or the church. What do I do?"

"I want you to always pray and never give up."

"Jesus, I don't know where my next paycheck is going to come from. I can't pay the bills. What do I do?"

"I want you to always pray and never give up."

That's the whole point of the parable: always pray; do not give up. So, for a while he refuses, but then keep on reading. Look with me here in 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."

In other words, God rewards persistent prayer. The whole argument... It's called a *fortiori argument*, which is a "How much more" argument. You have this judge who's wicked, who's terrible, who gives in to persistence. How much more will a God who loves you give in to *your* persistence?

What's crazy... If you are a parent, this story makes no sense. They keep bothering you, and you give in? That's like breaking parent rule number one. Don't give in. Don't surrender. My kids will pester me for breakfast and food and all that kind of stuff, and I'm like, "If you kids bother me one more time, you will not eat today." Don't report me. I'm being vulnerable here. I'm just being honest.

Yet we have this wicked judge who gives in. This wicked judge says, "Okay, fine. Yeah." The whole point is...keep asking. Maybe God said, "No." Keep asking. Don't lose heart. Maybe you've been praying about the same thing for years, and you don't see any movement. You don't see any light at the end of the tunnel, but guess what. You don't need a light at the end of the tunnel to trust God.

You don't need to see progress in this thing to trust God. I mean, my goodness. This is a God who literally walks on water. I don't think he needs things to go the way you think they need to go. I'm pretty sure he can just do it. That's faith. For some of us, we don't ask God for things because it kind of feels unspiritual. It's like, "Doesn't God want me to just compliment him all the time?"

There is this Scottish preacher in this church. This is an old-school church where the choir is behind them. The preacher gets up, and he begins to pray. This is the most highfalutin prayer ever. He's like, "God, our Father, we thank you for your atoning sacrifice, the imputation of Christ's work."

Finally, this little old lady in the choir pulls on his robe and says, "Just call him 'Father' and ask him for something." I think that's right. Just call him "Father" and ask him for something. Just be persistent. Just continue to pray and not give up.

Tim Keller, a great preacher who passed away recently, said the only person who dares wake a king at 3:00 a.m. for a glass of water is the king's child. Listen. We have that kind of access. We are children of the King. So, she keeps on asking. Notice how the parable ends. Here's the plot twist. Look with me in verse 6.

"And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his 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?"

See that? Prayer is about faith. You trust a God you cannot see. Did you know that water boils at 212 degrees? Not 209, not 210, not 211...212. Water changes. It goes from a liquid to a gas at 212 degrees and not a degree cooler. Some of you gave up praying at 211. Some of you gave up praying at 210. Some of you gave up praying well before that, like 100, and some of you never turned the stove on.

You just resigned yourself to the idea that God doesn't care about that thing. Well, guess what? God cares about that thing. Today is a call to faith. It's a call to say, "God, I'm going to trust you even when I don't see you. I'm going to keep praying. I'm going to keep asking. I'm going to keep on pleading. I'm going to always pray and never give up." Let's do that today. Let's commit to saying, "God, I'm going to always pray, and I'm not going to give up." Let's pray.

Maybe you're here today and you've realized that you have had a weak faith. You've given up. You've lost heart. You've stopped praying. Today is a really good day to confess that to God and let your request be made known to him. Or maybe you're here today and you're not a Christian, and you need to place your faith in Jesus.

Listen. Christianity is simple but not easy. It's simple. Jesus has done everything necessary for me to be saved. He lived for me. He died for me. He rose for me. He forgives me. He loves me. He satisfies me. He saves me. You can put your faith in Jesus today. You can walk with God today.

So, Lord, do it. Teach us to pray. Teach us to always pray and never lose heart. This we pray in Christ's name, amen.