

On Speaking Terms with God 2022  
Deuteronomy 4:31-32, 37-39 Luke 18:1-8

### Deuteronomy 4:31-32, 37-39 (New Revised Standard Version)

Because the Lord your God is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you; he will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them.<sup>32</sup> For ask now about former ages, long before your own, ever since the day that God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of heaven to the other: has anything so great as this ever happened or has its like ever been heard of?<sup>37</sup> And because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them. He brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power,<sup>38</sup> driving out before you, nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, giving you their land for a possession, as it is still today.<sup>39</sup> So acknowledge today and take to heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.

### Luke 18:1-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>1</sup>Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. <sup>2</sup>He said, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. <sup>3</sup>In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, “Grant me justice against my opponent.” <sup>4</sup>For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, “Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.”’ <sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup>And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? <sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?’

Is the purpose of prayer, to persuade God to give us what we want?

Is Christian prayer about changing God’s will and intention?

It seems that a little girl desperately wanted a kitten,  
but her mother was definitely not a cat-loving person.

Weary of her daughter’s persistent pleas to get her a kitten,  
the mother told her daughter that if God wanted her to have a kitten,  
then God would provide her with a kitten, otherwise no way.

Certain that God would not let her down,  
the little girl went out into the back yard,  
knelt down, bowed her head & prayed for her kitten.

Looking out a window, her mother could see her praying.  
Suddenly, a kitten fell from the sky & landed right in front of her,  
which she lovingly scooped up, hugged and thanked God.

**Truly, the wonderful mystery of the power of prayer.**

As it happened, it seems that a few houses over,  
a kitten had climbed up into a small tree  
and was too frightened to come back down.

So a neighbor had backed his car over next to the tree,  
tied a rope from the tree to his bumper,

intending to bend the tree over enough to reach for the cat.

A good plan until the rope suddenly broke  
and the kitten was sent hurling out of sight.

The guy had no idea when the kitten finally landed ...  
... until he was in the supermarket later that day and noticed  
that a woman he knew didn't like cats from the neighborhood,  
was putting some kitten food into her grocery cart.

Surprised and curious, he asked her why she was buying cat food.  
She explained that her daughter had been begging for a kitten,  
and so she had told her little girl,  
that if God really wanted her to have one,  
then God would provide her with a cat.

Then she described watching her daughter pray in the backyard,  
and then suddenly from out of nowhere,  
she saw a kitten drop from the sky in front of her...  
**... and so now she truly believed in the incredible power of prayer,  
as she found herself unexpectedly needing to buy cat food!**

**Yes, doesn't God work in wonderful and mysterious ways?**

But is prayer really about  
persuading God to give us what we want and desire,  
by our persistence in prayer changing God's mind,  
**like the widow getting justice from a corrupt judge of Luke 18?**

In that culture, a widow was totally dependent and powerless.  
Women weren't allowed to own or inherit property,  
or permitted to speak for themselves in legal matters,  
but had to rely on a male relative to handle their affairs...  
... and who may have been the reason she needed justice from the judge.

The widow had no power or control over any property or assets.  
The widow had no one to demand justice on her behalf,  
and nothing to bribe the judge in order to buy justice.  
She had no other weapon than her desperate pleas and persistence.  
**All she had was to keep annoying the judge incessantly,  
and keep bothering that judge until he finally relents.**

And though that judge had no shame, or compassion, or honor,  
so to keep her from persisting and bothering him further  
he grants her petition, just to silence the annoyance.  
**I suspect Jesus told this parable with a slight twinkle in his eye.**

When I first read this parable, I understood its point  
as a call to keep praying relentlessly for what I wanted,  
until I got it, and not to stop until my prayer worked.  
And if my prayer wasn't working and didn't accomplish what I desired,  
then it must somehow be defective or I wasn't praying hard enough,  
or maybe it would work better if more folks would pray with me,

kind of like putting a few more coins into a vending machine.

Since then I've realized that I misunderstood the parable,  
**for Jesus was not saying that God responds more favorably  
 if we pester him enough and are sufficiently annoying.**

The message of this parable that Jesus intends to convey,  
 is not to get what you want, pray like that persistent widow  
 browbeating and pressuring that wicked judge to relent.  
**Jesus is not equating the Lord God with that awful and unjust judge.**

The point is, that if **even that corrupt judge**  
 could be worn down enough to do right and grant justice,  
**then how much more so**  
 will the Lord God who created us and loves us  
 hear us when we pray, help us and answer our prayer.

Jesus told this parable when he was on his way to Jerusalem,  
 where four chapters later he will be betrayed and crucified.  
 This parable was to help prepare his disciples  
 for the terrible events and crisis ahead, vs. 1. **Jesus told them  
 a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.**

We also know that decades later, when Luke's gospel was written,  
 the church was under attack and suffering terrible persecution.  
 Christians had been waiting anxiously for Jesus  
 for many years, and still he had not yet returned.

**We can well imagine their discouragement & feelings of helplessness...  
 ... like the poor widow seeking justice from the corrupt judge.**

The author of Luke was reminding them of this parable from Jesus  
 that was about the character, faithfulness and promises of God,  
 and it was really a hopeful challenge to those readers,  
 to not let trouble, doubt and disappointment  
 cause you to falter or abandon your faith... vs. 8  
**when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"**

And yet,

The point is, if that horribly corrupt judge  
 who has no conscience and is impervious to shame  
 can ultimately be brought around by the persistence  
 of a powerless pestering widow who seeks justice,

**then how much more so will the God who loves us and cares for us,  
 surely provide whatever is best and beneficial for us. vs.7-8**  
 Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in  
 helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them.

In this context, looking at the word used in the original Greek,

instead of **quickly**, the word decisively is a better translation.  
Jesus isn't saying that our prayers are answered immediately,  
but that God acts decisively, providing whatever is best.

**The purpose of prayer isn't about us changing God's will & intention.**

God is in control, and God alone knows what we most need,  
**and so prayer remains a great and uncontrollable mystery.**

So we might ask then, what is the point of prayer? ...

... and why did Jesus command and instruct us to pray always? ...

**... if it is not to receive from God, whatever we ask?**

God's power in answer to prayer, is often not getting what we want,  
but it's the miracle of how God brings us through struggle and loss  
and that we experience God's blessings, in unexpected ways.

In my own life, God has often said "no" against my wisdom and wishes.

Years later, I can gratefully see that God had better plans for me.

**And sometimes through prayer I'll see a situation in a whole new way,  
other possibilities and that perhaps my priorities were misplaced.**

In addition, our prayers of gratitude, our efforts to thank God,  
can make us so much more aware of the rich fullness of God's love,  
as we increasingly notice God's power and presence,  
and God's hand at work in our world and in our lives.

Persistence in prayer is not about getting what you or I want.

Its purpose and goal, is that we should know, love and serve God,  
**by opening ourselves to the grace, plan & mission of the Lord.**

When Moses preached the words of the Deuteronomy 4 passage,  
the people were finally about to pass into the Promised Land  
after their long journey through the Sinai wilderness.

Their journey was far more than just going from one place to another,  
but rather had been a school and classroom for instruction,  
for learning about God & to grow that relationship with God.

All along the way, God taught by miraculously providing for them,  
as Moses describes God's purpose in the text, vs. 31, 37 and 39.

**Because the Lord your God is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you;  
... And because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants after them. He brought you out of  
Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, ... So acknowledge today and take to heart that the  
Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.**

**Our lives, especially prayer and Scripture are a journey of faith  
where we learn more about God & grow our relationship with God.**

God speaks to us in prayer changing our perspective on our lives,  
as we emerge more Christ-like, more thankful, trusting and hopeful,

more faithful, patient, gentle and wise **from our fervent prayer.**

Jesus call us to persist in prayer, **so to align ourselves with God,**  
to better hear God's voice helping us to live out our lives  
**increasingly in tandem** with God's will & purpose for our lives,  
while **savoring the wonder and delight of learning to walk with God.**

So when I pray these days, my focus is less on trying to suggest  
what God ought to enact and bring about, or even what I desire,  
because even more importantly, **I want to know God,**  
so that I will grow toward the Lord and God's purpose.

**It is by listening and trusting as we open ourselves up in prayer,**  
**that we become more useful in the work of God's Kingdom,**  
**knowing that in prayer, God reshapes the one who prays.**

And when we pray it really isn't to nudge God or to inform the Lord,  
but it's to enjoy, **savor the delight and thank God as we**  
**linger with our wise Lord who loves us beyond all measure,**  
and it is **recognition that the work and life we are called to live**  
**cannot be accomplished well apart from one who calls us to do it.**

The message of Jesus to his disciples was a reminder to pray, vs. 1,  
**Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.**

In our world it's easy to lose heart and hope, and to feel defeated.  
In prayer we proclaim boldly and declare in faith: **But God—**  
<sup>bG</sup>loves me, <sup>bG</sup>is in charge, <sup>bG</sup>will not be defeated, <sup>bG</sup>is on track,  
<sup>bG</sup>is up to something good and great, <sup>bG</sup>will not abandon me,  
and is never confused, upset or even surprised.

**Despite troubles and trials in the world around us, keep on praying.**

When fear grips our hearts, we are called to pray even more,  
never forsake us or let us down...

confident that God will

**... so let us speak of our desires, our longings and needs with the Lord.**

A college chaplain met with a young coed who called her mom every day.  
Supposing there might be over-dependency, or over-involvement,  
the chaplain asked her, "Why do you call your mother so much?"

She replied, "My Mom is the only person I know who always cares,  
really cares about what kind of day I've had or what I'm thinking.  
It's so encouraging to talk to somebody who cares that deeply."  
**That's why we keep praying and why we do not lose heart,**  
**for it helps us to talk with someone who really cares.**

As we get more comfortable with God, we can talk about anything at all  
about our fears and our concerns with life in the world around us.  
We can be authentic about our needs, weaknesses, confusion & our joy,  
**for nothing we say is ever inappropriate when we are praying to God.**

Prayer is open wondering and asking God about our inner longings,  
especially when our courage is stretched, or we are discouraged.

**Sometimes prayer help us refocus and see the difficulty differently.**

And when I pray, other people and situations may not change,  
but listening to God, **my attitude almost always does...**  
... as I see with more compassion, hope and forbearance.

In the parable that Jesus tells, and in his teachings about prayer,  
the issue at stake is never about the faithfulness of God,  
and it's never about the fulfillment of God's promises...  
... it's always our response to the graciousness of God.  
It's about the relationship that has the power to transform us.

As the writer of Ephesians describes it: Eph 3:16-20

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ... who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.