

Faith and Persevering Prayer

By Linda Rex

October 16, 2022, PROPER 24—Lately I've been thinking a lot about what it is that I really believe about God and his attitude towards me as one of his creatures. On a good day I believe God is loving, compassionate and kind, but on other days, I find myself responding to life and circumstances as though God is grumpy and wishes he hadn't bothered with creating these annoying creatures, of which I am one.

Granted, when life isn't going well and it seems as though my prayers are hitting the ceiling, it is easy to project onto God the face of the people in my life who have rejected or hurt me when I failed to measure up to their expectations. When God doesn't answer my prayers in the way I expect, or doesn't seem to care when I am struggling and barely getting by, it's very easy to believe that God is indifferent or even angry with me for some reason.

As I was putting together the study questions for this Sunday, I was reminded that my inner view of God and his attitude toward me directly impacts how I pray to him, or if I even pray to him at all. Of course, I wouldn't pray at all if I didn't believe there was a God to pray to. And I wouldn't even try to pray to the God there is, if I believed he didn't want to hear what I had to say. What would be the point?

But there are times when what's in my heart, what I'd really like to say to him, I'm really not sure he would want to hear. What if all I want to do is yell at him and tell him how disappointed I am in him? Would that even be appropriate? Actually, I know that it is—I know that God wants to hear my all prayers, and treasures and protects my heart, but at times it's just easy to question whether I can simply be real with God and to not be open with him.

Right before the passage for today in Luke 18:1-8, Jesus was talking with his disciples about things having to do with his death and resurrection, and with his second coming. He began to tell a story to help them be encouraged to always pray and to not lose heart. Like when he told the story of the dishonest manager, Jesus used a negative character, an unrighteous judge.

A widow, someone who would have been considered vulnerable and helpless, approached the judge and asked him to defend her against her opponent, who apparently was taking advantage of her. The judge, being a godless and irreverent man, refused to help her. The widow in Jesus' story continued to go back to the judge and plead for him to assist her. Eventually the judge said to himself, "I could care less about what God or anyone else thinks, but if I don't do something soon, she's might give me a black eye!" So, he interceded on her behalf, simply to avoid any more harassment from her.

In contrast to the unrighteous judge in this story, Jesus said that his Father would "bring about justice for his elect who cry to Him day and night." He said that God's intent was to help right away and not to delay his response. God isn't indifferent or insensitive to what is going on in our lives. But then Jesus said, "when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

At first glance, it may seem a little off for Jesus to ask this question. But really, it goes back to story and the point he had been trying to make. What we believe about who God is does affect how we approach him in prayer. Do we believe God is listening and wants to hear what we have to say? Do we believe God has our best interests in mind? Do we believe that when God doesn't seem to answer that there may be a good reason for it, and that it's not because he doesn't care or that he's condemning us? In Christ, our relationship with God is secure enough that we can be frank and real and open with him. But are we?

Who is this Son of Man who is coming again one day? And what kind of God is this that will be intervening in human affairs when Jesus returns? These are critical thoughts we need to wrestle with—is the God who will return to restore all things when Jesus returns a punitive, indifferent God or is he a God who bears our flawed human flesh which he himself took through death into resurrection and ascension? Is this Son of Man a God who is only interested in destroying “bad” people or is he the God who is once and for all removing from our total human existence all evil, sin, and death, and making everything right?

God’s intent and purpose in Christ is to renew all things and to bring all of us into right relationship with himself. If God is for us, who can be against us? He loves us and wants us to participate with him in this process, and one of the ways we do that is in prayer. Effective prayer doesn’t begin with us, but within the inner life of loving relationship between the Father and the Son in the Spirit. By the Spirit, Jesus shares with us the heart of the Father, then we are moved to pray, and our prayers back to God are lifted by Jesus in the Spirit to the Father, made exactly what they need to be in each moment.

As we participate with the Father and Son in the Spirit in what they are up to in the world, we pray. We may not see the results we think need to be happening, but realizing that prayer is birthed within the Trinity, we can trust that God is still at work in the situation and is bringing about what is best for all involved. So, we continue to pray—persevere—having faith that our trustworthy God isn’t going to let us down. We keep in close relationship with God because he loves us and is including us in what he is doing in the world, and we want to see things from his point of view and have his heart about it all. Jesus is entirely sure the Father will do what is needed and his faith poured into our hearts by the Spirit enables us to trust the Father as well, and encourages us to keep praying.

Jesus sent the Spirit from the Father so that each of us can experience life in relationship with God and be a part of what God is doing in this world. When we need faith and we need the ability to endure or persevere, we look to Jesus, who is the source of everything we need for life and godliness. Jesus himself is the source of the faith he is looking for—a gift which comes to each of us in the Spirit. Prayer is one way in which we actively participate in the wonderful relationship God has given us through Jesus in the Spirit. And faith in our trustworthy God is a gift Jesus gives us to enable us to persevere when it seems that no answer is coming.

Thank you, heavenly Father, for including us in your inner relationship with Jesus in the Spirit. Thank you for your gift of faith and enabling us to participate in all you are doing through prayer. Grant us the grace to persevere in prayer, especially when there seems to be no hope. Our hope and faith are in you alone, through Jesus and by your Spirit. Amen.

“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, “Give me legal protection from my opponent.” For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, “Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.” ’ And the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?’ ” Luke 18:1–8 NASB