

Title: “We Pray”

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Luke 18:1–8

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Overview:

In a world full of conflict and uncertainty, we are called into constant prayer.

Lesson:

Pray boldly, unceasingly, and confident that our God hears and answers us, always.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Today’s passage starts with a directive from Jesus to his disciples and to us: always pray and not lose heart, and without context it is hard to discern what, exactly He was concerned about and so I would like to start in chapter 17 in search of a little more clarity for His statement.

Starting in verse 26, Luke records the words of Jesus:

²⁶“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.²⁷ People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

And He continues:

²⁸“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. ²⁹But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

Christ continues with yet another and then chapter 18 opens with this:

¹And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Pray and not lose heart. For many Christians, this seems intuitive and is usually our natural response when confronted with a struggle or a pain, but for the rest of the world it is a foreign concept and sometimes even the mention of prayer elicits an aggressive response. For example, I’m sure many of you can recall public figures who have sent prayers to victims of violence only to find themselves targets of ridicule from those who find no value in prayer, but demand action instead.

They demand action because the events themselves demand a response. The growing population of the Earth, the millions of abortions each year, the depletion of critical resources, the violence throughout the world, everything! These demand a response.

And you know what? These people are right. We **do** need action. We do need to respond. We need to address the Earth's population, eliminate abortions, and reduce violence. I agree with them.

But here's the thing. I believe that prayer *is* the answer. Strike that. I believe that prayer is the *only* answer; that there is no other solution aside from it. Whatever the problem in the world, in our families, and in our individual lives, prayer is the answer. And I believe this because of how we as Christians, define and approach prayer.

Here is what I mean: if you were to ask a non-Christian to describe prayer, they would probably respond that it is asking God to intervene in a situation. Then they might follow with an example of how their prayer went unanswered or, worse yet, how the churches' prayers continue to go unanswered and conclude definitively that prayer is less than useful today.

And if we are not careful, we fall into the trap of excusing God for prayers that seem unanswered and defending Him against Science for the ones that are. But that's the wrong response. We shouldn't direct our reply to the prayer *itself* but to the foundational belief of what prayer itself *is*. To a non-Christian prayer doesn't relinquish control to God but to a Christian prayer is *all about* relinquishing control. It is about asking God what He wants to give as a response to our need. It is about seeking out His will, not ours and then acting on that will. Prayer is the recognition that we are not in control but finding strength in the knowledge that our God is the one in full control.

In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Three times He asked and three times He modeled for us the perfect attitude that we are to have when we approach God. "Not my will, but yours, be done." And God heard Him, just as He hears us. And God sent down an angel to strengthen Him as He began His final steps to the cross.

For us, that strength may be hard to find beside the death bed of a loved one or the economic uncertainty after a job, but God provides the strength that we need. As Paul writes in Romans, even "[i]n our weakness, when we do not know what we ought to pray for, the Holy Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." But it is not an angel that God sends, but He, Himself. And He brings with Him the omniscience and the omnipotence, the perfect knowledge and perfect power, to perfectly answer our prayers. But as we raise our voice to God and say, "remove this cup from me," how will we end this request? Will it mimic the words of Jesus?

And if we pray for God's will instead of our own, will we find the strength to continue to do so regardless of where it leads? Jesus followed it to Pontius Pilot where he was whipped and beaten nearly to death. He followed it to His crucifixion where he was pierced by man and forsaken by God. And He followed it to his death.

He was God! And on that night in the garden when He prayed, He had the power to remain in control, to force His will, to pass the cup. But He didn't.

Let me present it from a different perspective:

In the garden of Eden man retained control when faced with a potentially catastrophic decision; With parallels to society's approach today, they acted without prayer and without consideration of God's will and the choice they made had an immeasurably negative impact on the entire universe.

In contrast, in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus, fully God, but also fully man, relinquished control when faced with a potentially catastrophic decision; He placed His complete trust in God, His Father and the choice that He made had an immeasurably positive impact on the physical and eternal lives of every one of us.

So which model do you adopt when faced with your own challenges and decisions? Which do you choose as a response to the events of society today? Is it for your will or His?

And this is why I believe in the power of prayer as the solution for all things. Because when I am confronted with chaos of this world, or when I must react to the catastrophes in my life, I understand that at its core, at the root of the problem is the lack of control. Every catastrophe finds its roots there. If I had control, *this* would not have happened; or I could have prevented it, and so our initial reaction is to regain control. We reach for anything that will provide this to us: legislation, violence, and even prayer. But, in our haste we pray for control. We ask God to grant to us the resolution that we deem best. We declare our will to Him, not ask for His.

But even in these activities there is good to be found, for it is better for us to beat on the chest of Jesus with our wants, our desires, and our frustrations than turn and flee from Him. And as we request from Him the control that we so desperately seek He clings to us and holds us close. And He reminds us that we should instead release our troubles to Him - that we should instead turn our control over to Him.

And as we pour out our prayers and ask that His will be done, we do just that. And we wait with faith and confidence that He will answer us, because He always does. And from this response we take action. And it might be legislation or protest, but it might also be acceptance of the situation and patience, but whatever it is, it is the will of God.

And so we pray. Constantly. For everything and about everything. We pray boldly for the wants of our hearts. We pray for His healing hands on the sick. We pray for His mighty hand of justice on the evils of this world. And we pray for wisdom of our leaders that they would turn to Him in all their ways.

But we also pray humbly that His will be done. We pray that He help us release control and place it in His hands and that He speaks clearly His will into our hearts so that we act accordingly.

You see, prayer is everything.

Let's pray.

Lord,

We stand boldly before you as children of God and we pray. We pour our needs, our desires, and our thanksgivings and we place them at your feet. We understand how powerful prayer is and we ask you to renew in us the desire to be in constant communication with you. Place in us the courage to always turn to you in every situation, the patience to wait for your response, and the wisdom to see your hand in the decisions of our lives.

In your name we pray. Amen.