

One of the best ways to learn how to pray is by watching other people pray. Specifically watching someone else pray who's prayer life you want to imitate. I can remember a youth leader in my life who I love listening to them pray. I would hang on there every word and wish that I could pray like they did. I remember one professor whose prayers that I would listen to and you could feel his love for God come through in every word that he said. And so I remember trying to learn from them as they prayed. I wanted to write down words and phrases that they would use that I hadn't heard others say. I would pay attention to the way that they would pray scripture or quote scripture in their prayers. I would note and watch their physical posture as they would move and change or even physically get on their knees as they prayed. And I didn't watch them so that I could copy them or do exactly what they were doing. But I wanted to learn from those who prayed well so that I could learn how to pray well too.

This morning as we read Luke 18:1-14 we are going to see two people whose prayer life is something that we need to emulate. And so as we read and as we study the prayers of a widow and the prayers of a tax collector I want you to listen and look. Pay attention to the words that they use and how they pray so that we can learn to pray like them.

**Point 1: Pray without losing heart (v. 1-8).**

Christians often hear the phrase that we are to pray "without ceasing." It creates the image and idea that our lives are always to be spent in prayer.

We think about it like Jesus is trying to fill up our calendar and our spare time.

But here when Jesus tells to always pray, He means something slightly different.

Otherwise we start to beat ourselves up because we dozed off and haven't prayed in ten minutes.

The point is not that we are to pray every single waking moment.

The point is that we are not to quit praying because we are discouraged.

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

We should continue praying without losing heart and giving up.

There is a difference in prayers interrupted by our work, our children, or physical needs,

And those prayers that are interrupted because we decide it isn't worth it anymore.

Or prayers that cease because we can't bear to pray about this thing again.

Jesus tells us to not stop praying because we have lost heart.

Do not quit because the night continues to get dark.

Do not stop praying because you have asked for the same thing for months.

Pray without losing heart.

Jesus tells us a parable about a judge and widow.

And these two are to teach us how to pray without losing heart.

Verse 2, **"He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man."**

This judge is the antithesis of everything a judge should be.

He is the kind of judge you would dread having to stand before.

He is the judge rumors around the village spread about.

Because this judge does not fear God.

He is not a follower of God.

He is not righteous at all.

He does not care about God or God's laws.

He behaves as if there is no ultimate judge and no God.

Not only does he not care about God, he doesn't care about people either.

Some people try to say that fearing God does not mean someone cannot be moral.

Well, you can't make that argument with this man.  
This judge does not care about God or people.  
He does not view them as anything other than pawns he can use.  
There is nothing admirable in this judge at all.  
He has no redeeming qualities.

He is our first character, now look to the widow.

Verse 3, **"And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'"**

There is a widow who needs justice.

We do not get all of the details of her case because they are not important in the story

The main idea is that someone is wronging her.

They are taking advantage of her situation.

They are oppressing her.

Widows, especially at this time period, are vulnerable.

They do not have any way to provide for themselves other than to beg.

If they do not have family, then no one is looking out for them.

Someone could have been taking all of her husbands property and money.

Someone could have been cheating her or abusing her.

There is no end to the way widows could be taken advantage of.

She clearly has no one else that she can run to.

Her only hope for justice is this corrupt judge.

That should tell you how desperate her situation is.

Predictably, the judge says no.

He does not care at all for her plight.

He does not want to help her in her suffering.

Yet, how does she respond?

She does not give up. She does not lose heart.

She continues coming up to that same judge.

Over and over asking for justice.

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 judge gives in.

He answers the widows cry and prayer.

He does not do so because she has convinced him of her cause.

He does not do so because he has had a change of heart.

He does not do so because he has come to like and respect this widow.

He does so for one reason.

**"I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming."**

He just wants to be left alone.

Listening to her prayers feels like getting beat up.

The word he uses has the connotations of getting a black eye from a punch or a boxing match.

He doesn't care about her.

He is just annoyed and never wants to see her again.

Her cause doesn't matter at all.

But her prayers get answered by the unrighteous judge.

If the ungodly and unrighteous act this way, how much more will God?

Verse 6, **"And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?'"**

Is God not more righteous than this judge?

Is our God not a God of justice?

Is our God not a fair judge?

And we mean so much more to God than this widow meant to the judge.

This is why 7 says, **"will not God give justice to His elect."**

Jesus intentionally refers to believers as "elect."

Scripture often calls believers "the elect."

The elect are those chosen by God.  
Not based on how awesome we are.  
Not because we are so worthy or deserving.  
Not because God flipped a coin and we got lucky.  
But because of God's love for us.

Now every time the Scriptures say, "elect" people want to debate why God elects some and not others.  
None of that is Jesus' point.

His point is that we are not nobodies to God.  
We are not an annoyance.  
We have been chosen by God.  
He wanted us in His family.  
We have been adopted as sons and daughters of the King.

And if God wants us in His family,  
If God has chosen you to be His, does He not want you to pray?  
Is He not disposed to listen to your cry?  
So pray without losing heart, because God loves you.  
He chose you as His, He wants to listen to you pray.

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?"**

What says that He will give just a speedily doesn't mean that He's going to give it to us as soon as we ask.  
It doesn't mean that your prayer not being answered means that you haven't figured out how to pray the correct way.

It means that God's response is not going to be delayed because He doesn't care.  
The judge does not answer the widow's prayer because he doesn't care about anybody.  
It is only after being worn down that he decides to answer.

But God will respond.  
And God is listening to your voice the first time that you speak.  
One day when Jesus returns that answer will come and it will come all at once when true justice will reign.

But practically how can we pray without losing heart?  
I think we have to keep praying like the widow, every single day.  
Even when we do not feel like it.  
How did this widow feel everyday?  
Do you think she was losing faith?  
Do you think every day she was sure that this would be the time he would answer.  
I am sure there were days she doubted.  
There were days it felt like a waste of time.  
But each day she came and she knocked.

So it should be with our prayers.  
You pray without giving up by praying over and over.  
Not losing heart is not about our emotions or feelings.  
It is not about never doubting.  
It is about every day getting on our knees to ask again.  
Asking on the days we are angry.  
Asking on the days we don't even know if God is real.  
Asking when it feels like pulling teeth and our heart isn't in it.  
Pray with an empty heart.  
Pray with a heart that feels cold.  
Just don't stop.  
Keep going.

**"When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"**

When Jesus returns, will you still be praying?  
Will you still be asking Him for justice?  
Or will you have given up?  
Will you have stopped praying because you aren't sure it is worth it?

We all know how good it feels when something you've been praying for finally gets answered.

Just imagine how good it will feel to see Jesus return and your prayers answered when you have been praying for that day continually.

We should strive to be faithful so when He returns He will find us continually praying that He would come.

Pray without losing heart.

So that when Jesus returns He will see your faith.

Point 2: **Pray without pride (v. 9-14).**

Our prayers not only need to be continuous and prayed without giving up or without losing heart.

We also need to pray without pride.

Our prayers need to be focused on how they sound to God not how they sound to the people around us.

Because this is a trap we can all fall into, isn't it?

Just ask somebody to pray out in front of everybody.

And suddenly you will discover how much you do care what people around you think.

That you aren't so sure your prayers are good enough to be heard by other people.

Their eyes will get really big.

They might get nervous and say oh no I couldn't pray in front of other people.

And I understand being nervous to speak in front of people believe me.

But I think there is at least part of our hesitancy that is pride.

That's part of our hesitation is wondering what others will think.

But our focus shouldn't be on what other people think it should be on what will God think.

Jesus going to tell us a parable about two people whose prayers are made in public where everyone can hear.

And the person whose prayers are more acceptable to God is not the religious leader but the dirty sinner.

Verse 9, **"He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:"**

Some of these people really think they have it all together.

There's some people listening to Jesus who think that they are the righteous followers of God and as the whole world that's going crazy. It's the people out there that are really sinful and not being obedient and not doing the right things but they are they have the right values.

And so to them Jesus tells the story of the two men who pray

Verse 10, **"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector."**

Two men are going to the temple.

They are going into God's house to pray and make petitions before Him. This is not just their private prayers at home but this is their prayers in the corporate gathering of God's people.

There are the prayers that you would overhear at church.

And one of them is a Pharisee and the other is a tax collector.

Now is Christians we view the Pharisees and the negative light but the Jews and the people would have viewed the Pharisees as their Heroes.

The Pharisees were like their celebrity preachers.

They were the most righteous people in town.

They were who you would expect to have incredible prayers.

And tax collectors were considered evil people because of how they stole.

They were the lowest of the lows

Instead of a tax collector you might picture somebody who owns a brothel or is a drug dealer.

Verse 11, **"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'"**



First, we get to see the prayer of the Pharisee.  
We get to see the pastor's prayer.  
Normally his prayers would be the ones we are to emulate.  
Immediately, you notice he's standing by himself.  
He wants everyone to see and to know that these are his words and his prayer.  
He has removed from everybody because he's not praying with them he's praying by himself.  
The Pharisee's actions and other of Jesus's stories would lead us to believe that he might even be trying to stand in a place of honor.

His prayer starts good.  
He prays to thank God.  
Thankfulness is always a good thing to begin your prayers with.  
Before you ask God for anything thank Him for how He has blessed you.  
But then it quickly goes downhill.  
His prayer is thanking God for how awesome and righteous and amazing he is.  
He thanks God that he is so much better than the other people around.  
And even points to the tax collector who's praying nearby and says thank God I'm not like him.

And then he thanks God for all of his righteous actions.  
Thanks God for the extra fasting that he does during the week. And thanks God for giving him stuff because he tithes with everything that God gives him.

Thank God we would never pray like that.  
I am so glad we are not like this Pharisee at all.  
Praise God we are so humble.

You see how easy it is to let pride slip in?  
As soon as we shake our head at this foolish Pharisee we are committing the same sin as he was.

I think we can tend to pray this way as well.

Our prayers might sound a little different, but they have the same pride.

When we pray things like, "Lord help our nation and our leaders. Our world is just so lost and we need better leaders that are Christians like me."

"God, please help my sister because she is so lost. She needs your help because she has made such bad choices in life, not like me of course."

Or we can just pray pridefully when we want to impress others.

When we pray with big words to show others what we know.

When we pray Scriptures just to show we have memorized them.

Or when we pray longer because we are worried our prayer might be too short.

Whenever we are praying, with other people in mind.

Whenever we are trying to impress them with how spiritual we are, that is prideful prayer.

Instead, we are to pray like the tax collector.

Verse 13, **"But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'"**

Before we even get to the words of his prayer. We see his posture.

We see a significant difference in the way that they stand.

For the Pharisee was trying to stand alone in a place of honor and prominence.

The tax collector is standing far off removed from everybody out of shame. It is almost like he's trying to stay out of sight.

And his eyes aren't in the right place.

It's not just showing his humility and that he can't lift his eyes up.

Normally you're supposed to lift your eyes to the Heavens to acknowledge that you are looking at God as you pray to him.

And if you're somewhere else you're supposed to lift your eyes towards the temple.

But the tax collector can't do that.

He's barely bringing himself to the right place.

We also see that he is beating his breast.

A physical action showing his lament and his agony.

Now this might not seem abnormal to you it would have been very strange to those in the temple.

This is not how people normally pray.

It is an action meant to show extreme grief.

It is what the crowds will do after Jesus's death in Luke 23.

Would be a strange if an Elder coming up to lead the prayer after a call to worship and they started weeping.

It isn't normal and it might make us all uncomfortable.

But the tax collector does not care what people think.

He does not care if anyone sees him.

Because he isn't looking at them.

He is praying to God.

We need to be like that as well.

We need to pray without worrying about others.

Without worrying how our prayers might sound.

We should pray as if God is the only one who hears us.

And he just asks for mercy.

He acknowledges his state.

**"I am a sinner."**

He does not try to justify himself.

He does not make excuses.

He does not point to others who made him sin or his circumstances.

He just acknowledges his own sin.

And he asks for God's mercy.  
He does not ask for justice as if he deserves something.  
He knows that he does not deserve anything but punishment.  
So he begs for mercy.  
And he finds it.

If you have ever heard someone pray and thought you can't pray that good.  
That compared to them your prayers are pathetic and empathy.  
The tax collector's prayer is for you.  
He is a reminder that God wants a humble heart.  
And He hears prayers other people might not be impressed with when they are humble.

Verse 14, **"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."**

God hears the tax collector's prayer and answers it.  
He receives mercy and is justified.  
He is made and declared righteous before God.  
Not because of how much money he has donated to the temple.  
Not because of his bi weekly fasts.  
But because he prayed humbly, asking for mercy.

Then Jesus gives us the principle that when we try to exalt ourselves we will be humbled, but those who pray humble prayers will be exalted.  
We must pray humble prayers.

Now this does not mean that our words do not matter.  
Praying the right words matters a great deal.  
But the heart behind our prayers matters more.  
It is better to pray a bad prayer humbly and sincerely than a theologically rich prayer with a prideful heart.

One of the best ways that we can practice to be humble in our prayers is to force ourselves to pray in front of other people.

Not because public prayer is better than private prayer but because when we pray in public it forces us to realize how much we really do care what other people think.

We have a lot of opportunities to practice humble prayer.

Every single Wednesday we gather together and we share our prayer requests and then we pray for one another.

And anybody who wants can pray.

I don't know it can be nerve-racking your first time but I promise you we are not sitting there to judge each other's prayers.

I don't get together with the elders and grade their prayers on how good they are.

As if we'll sit afterwards and say you know that prayer was good but you really said Jesus's name six times too many.

I'm not going to tell you you know you haven't quoted enough scripture you really need to use more verses or different names of God in your prayers that's going to take it to the next level.

We just need to pray.

Because genuine humble prayers are not just good for ourselves they are also good for us as a body.

As a church when we can pray together out loud and encourages our faith.

When I hear you pray and encourages me.

Now we also have to be careful we're praying publicly that we're not just praying to impress one another.

Because that's the version of pride that the Pharisee falls into.

Another version of pride would have been the tax collector refusing to pray because of how it might have looked at others.

That's not humility either that's pride.

The refusal to humble yourself is just as prideful.

These prayers also shows us The Gospel.

What it means to be a follower of Jesus is that the only people who experience salvation are the humble.

It is not the people who have a long resume of their spiritual accomplishments.

It is the people who come to God with their long list of sins and just say forgive me have mercy.

Our salvation and our deliverance comes by the grace of Jesus when we pray humble prayers.

Maybe you're like the tax collector this morning.

You know how to pray maybe you've never even done it.

Just come to Jesus honestly with your imperfect stumbling words.

Ask Him for mercy and you will find.

Because all of us have.

And those of us who are Christians.

Remember that you are a Christian not because of your accomplishments or because of your works but because of your faith.

And so when you pray don't come to Jesus with all the reasons he needs to answer your prayers because you are so awesome.

Just come humbly and ask for more grace from the god who's Grace is never ending.

And the God who loves to show grace to all who asked when they has humbly.

This morning we have seen that we need to pray without losing heart and without pride.

And when we pray like the widow and the tax collector, our prayers will be heard by God.

As you go into the rest of your week, pray.

Don't give up and don't stop.

Because God hears and He will act.