

Study

How does the parable of the persistent widow relate to the previous passage on the Kingdom? Why should we continue to pray for justice in the world?

Exodus 17:8-16 - What does this story reveal to us about the nature of prayer?

1 Thes 5:16-18 - What does it mean "to pray continually"?

1 John 5:14-15 – Do we get whatever we pray for?

Living it out (Application):

What is God calling you to pray persistently?
What does persistence look like in

Coming Up at St Mark's

Christmas tree cards – remember you can send Christmas greetings, with a donation to **Tearfund**, on our board in the narthex....**Invitation cards** for Christmas services are available – please do take some and pass them round your friends and neighbours...

If you have any **questions about prayer/spiritual warfare**, please do put them in Guy's pigeonhole. I will try to do something like a video or write some further ideas in response.



Please pray for...

Pray for our two Christmas Collection causes: the work of **In2Out**, trying to provide a safe way of integrating ex-offenders back into the community on release, and **Mission Without Borders**, helping families in Eastern Europe become self-sufficient.

Give thanks for the great response to the St George's Crypt **appeal for toys!**

Pray for someone you know who is struggling this Christmas.

As we advertise the **new roles** in taking St Mark's plans forward, pray for the right people to come forward to be appointed.

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

Pray for the work of **Open Doors**, and for Christians in Syria.

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!



INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 15th December 2013

Worship/reflection:

When was a time you had to be persistent before you received what you wanted? Go through the alphabet from A to Z and ask the group to come up with an attribute of God to fit each letter!

The Way of Jesus 4: Prayer: Persistence

'I want it all, and I want it now' lyric by Queen and 'Impatience is a virtue', the advertising slogan of the new Samsung 'Jet' mobile – these two statements seem to encapsulate something which is at the very heart of our society: instant gratification. In the Western world of the twenty-first century we want it – and we are not prepared to wait for it. From entertainment, to customer service, to knowledge, to love – we believe it is our right to have immediately. Culture and society has developed to feed this insatiable hunger for instant pleasure and removed the need for waiting.

It is so easy to transfer this approach to our spiritual lives, to our understanding of who God is and how he relates to us. We pray for a new job but after a few weeks there appears to be no progress, we pray for a broken relationship but there is no reconciliation after a days. We might feel disillusioned, frustrated. We wonder if we are talking into a void, can God hear? Does he care? Am I not asking in the right way? I use to believe that the longer I prayed and the more faith I had the more likely my prayers were to be answered. The emphasis being on me, I had to work hard to have my prayer answered. There is no magic formula when it comes to prayer. God isn't a slot machine where you feed in your prayer and instantly get what you desire.

Early African converts to Christianity were earnest and regular in private devotions. Each one reportedly had a separate spot in the thicket where he would pour out his heart to God. Over time the paths to these places became well worn. As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to the others.

They would kindly remind the negligent one, "Brother, the grass grows on your path." How grows the grass on your path? Today, we will be talking about persistence in prayer. May God so inspire you that you wear down so much grass that you make a four-lane highway to his throne. Keep on praying and don't give up. There is a need for us to be persistent in our prayers otherwise Jesus would not have mentioned it.

A widow is looking for justice. We don't know what her case is. We don't know what justice means to her. She wants her case to be heard and fairness to be administered. That is a common prayer, is it not? How often have we prayed that life would simply be fair? How often have we prayed for the coming of God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven? How often have we prayed that God would administer justice upon the earth? At times the answers seems so slow in coming, if indeed at all.

Now a widow back in Jesus' time was not in a very good position. It was an extremely male dominated society. A woman without a husband, particularly a woman whose husband had died, was without any resources. You see, inheritances were passed through the male lines of the family. If there were no children, a man's inheritance would go to his brother or perhaps nephew, but never to his wife or daughter. Likewise, the husband was the voice of the family. If the husband died, the woman had no way to be represented in her community. Without a husband to represent her in court, she would be lucky to get her case heard, never mind be able to win the case. Her odds for getting justice were very small. This doesn't deter the widow. She becomes the squeaky wheel, the fly in the ointment. She pesters him until he finally hears her case just to get rid of her. That sounds like God doesn't it? I don't think so. And Jesus makes that clear at the end of this parable. Because he says, "Listen to what the crooked judge says." Will not God bring about justice for his children if this crooked judge brings justice for a woman just to get her off his back?

Jesus is using an unrighteous man as His example in this story. He stresses twice that this judge "did not fear God nor respect man." He wasn't a loving, caring man at all. He was indifferent to the needs of the woman and had to be worn down by persistent begging. The truth Jesus wants us to see is that we are not to think of God in that way! In this story Jesus was doing what He did so many other times, and that is to make an argument through contrast. We are missing the point if we think God is like that judge, unconcerned with people's needs and only responding if we badger Him into it. No, Jesus' point is, "If even an unrighteous, uncaring judge can be persuaded to act for you, how much more will the perfectly loving and good God respond to our heartfelt cries!" He isn't telling us that we have to pray for tremendous lengths of time to persuade our Father. What He is saying is that anytime and every time you pray, you can have confidence that He hears and will answer. All the time you can pray knowing that He loves. God isn't holding out on you until you prove your sincerity by time and effort in prayer. God isn't a judge who needs to be persuaded. He is a Father who is eager to answer you and to show you His love! So often we reverse it in our minds sometimes, and believe that God doesn't care.

We think, "If we can just get enough people praying, and can log enough time in prayer, then maybe we can cause God to do something He really isn't interested in doing. If He's not now on our side, maybe we can win Him over through sheer effort and persistence." He is our father and he desires to give his children good gifts.

The widow in the story was entirely helpless in her situation, she had nowhere to go, no other source of hope or help. She was desperate. Her only option was to keep asking the judge for justice. She had no other plan, no other option. She persisted until she was successful. Perhaps we need to get to a place like Jacob the patriarch did, when he wrestled with God. When his hip was dislocated, he had no leg to stand on, no strength of his own; all his self-reliance was gone, much like the widow. It was then that he held onto God until he got his blessing. In his weakness he knew that perseverance was essential.

In the reading from Exodus 17, Moses and Joshua took on the Amalekites. The fight may have taken place in the valley but the victory was won high up on the mountain top. Joshua and his army did the fighting and conquered the enemy. But it was Moses who won the battle. The Israelites victory was dependant on Moses uplifted hands. Throughout the Old Testament the customary pose when praying was to stand with hands held up to heaven. It was the persistent prayer of Moses that was the key to Joshua's victory. It was an expression of their need of God of their total dependence on him. How often are our prayers shaped by recognition of our utter helplessness and complete dependence on God? An understanding that he is our only hope! Do we pray as if everything depends on God, as if He is the only one that can make a difference?

On the 1st July 1937, the Gestapo arrested Pastor Martin Niemoller, one of the Leaders of the Confessing Church, which opposed the Nazi Regime. The men arrived at 8:30am, telling Niemoller that he was to go with them for questioning. By this time he was used to such interrogation sessions, and he went expecting to be back with his family by nightfall. But this time was different. The pastor was put in a cell, and although he waited and waited to be called for questioning, the summons never came. He was to remain a prisoner of the Nazis for the next eight years. During this time the Church never forgot him. In the little mission church of St. Anne's, which was attached to his own parish church, services of intercession were held for him from the day of his arrest until the end of the war, at first twice a week, and then daily. The meetings were always well attended, despite repeated attempts by the Gestapo to close them down. During the summer of 1937 they decided to arrest everyone who turned up. But to their annoyance and frustration, they found that the more people they arrested, the more came to the next service. So in the end they gave up and allowed gatherings to go ahead unhindered. As more Christian leaders were arrested, so their names were added to the list of those being prayed for, and the meetings became a vital focus of prayer for the growing number of martyrs of the confessing church.

'Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking. The way to trouble God is not to come at all.' D L Moody. What is it that you need to be persistent in asking God for?