

# 2022.06.12 - Parables Of Jesus - Persistent Humility

**So What?** Jesus calls us to persistence and humility in prayer.

**Feel What?** Humility

**Now What?** How is God working to form persistence and humility in my life? How can embrace these two things together?

## VISION CASTING

**The purpose of Tallgrass at The Well is to create community together by inviting everyone into the Way of Jesus.**

## INTRODUCTION

This week, we're beginning a new series for the summer through the Parables of Jesus. Today, we're going to cover two stories today, both from Luke 18, which both deal with the subject of prayer. Jesus spoke often of prayer and, in fact, it's the one thing we know of where his apprentices specifically asked him to teach them.

But before we dig deeper, as we all know recently our nation experienced another tragedy due to the school shooting in Texas. We're all understandably heartbroken, angry, and confused. We want answers. We want to see things change. And I don't think any of us know exactly what to do that would bring healing and results. For some of us, talking about prayer can be of great comfort in a time like these. But there can also be the feeling where we think, "Yeah, great, another time where we talk about sending thoughts and prayers, but nothing really changes." I get that, I do. I recently finished a book about a shooting survivor's journey of healing and advocacy.

Taylor Schumann was just weeks away from her wedding when a student at the college she worked at charged into the office and targeted the first person he saw. She sustained significant injury to her face, left arm, and hand. But, thankfully, she survived. The pain of that day continued to follow her, not just in the mental or physical damage she endured, but also the relational damage that unfolded. While many friends and family were supportive, some send conflicting messages of support mixed with an apathy for seeing any meaningful change in violence in our country.

**Taylor Schumann, *When Thoughts And Prayers Aren't Enough*: "Seeing my fellow Christians remain silent as violence ripped at the fabric of our communities and survivors were wielded as political footballs increased my pain exponentially. To those who should have seen me most deeply, I felt invisible. That's why I don't want to look away from the pain of other victims, survivors, and families. This pain deserves to be seen. Someone has to look and really see. Someone has to remember because no one should feel forgotten. Someone has to decide that enough is enough. This pain has to be used to propel us to a better future."**

When tragedy happens, we want to say something that articulates our shock and sorrow, but we're often at a loss. So we post something on social media like, "Thoughts and prayers," of course meaning well. But when our prayers aren't followed through with action, people notice. Victims, like Taylor Schumann, see and grow frustrated. Our culture see and dismisses us and our faith as all talk.

700 years before Jesus' ministry, the Prophet Isaiah thundered to the nation about thinking their piety shielded them from working towards justice. They wondered, "Hey, God, aren't we praying and fasting in all the right ways? So why don't you answer us with blessings?" And he replied,

**Isaiah 58:6-7 (NIV): "Isn't this the fast that I have chosen: to break the chains of wickedness, to untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and tear off every yoke? Isn't it to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your home, to clothe the naked when you see him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"**

This is serious business to God. So we need to take action and show support.

But, we also don't want to give in to our culture's cynicism towards faith. If we allow it, we will fall sway to the influence that says talking with God doesn't matter; all that matters is the action you take—especially the action that's posted on social media for all to see. But what we'll see today is that prayer really does matter. It matters to God. It matters to us as it can be an outlet for grief and a show of solidarity towards the suffering.

**Transition:** As followers of Jesus, we want to hold the tension of prayer and action together. And Jesus shows us how to do that.

## **SOLUTION**

The parables are the stories Jesus told in the four Gospels to illustrate a deeper truth. Parables help us put ourselves in the shoes of the characters to learn how to think and feel toward God, ourselves, and others. Jesus was a master storyteller, and he has much to teach us about prayer.

**Luke 18:1-8 (NIV): Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”**

Luke, the writer of this Gospel, tells us Jesus’ intention in telling this story to his followers: To teach them to persist in prayer. This is only necessary if the conditions of their life need changing and, yet, they’re not seeing God act according to their expectations. Israel in the time of Jesus had long been a conquered people. Their nation was ruled by the Roman Empire who taxed them relentlessly. Scarcity and disease were common and life was difficult for many. It comes as no surprise, then, that wondered where God was in the midst of this. They set their sights on a prophesied king they called the Messiah, but faith in God’s word was running thing as many had arrived on the scene to claim that title, only soon to be defeated and forgotten.

Jesus steps right into these dashed hopes and tells a story of widow to demonstrate how they are to seek God in the place of prayer. Widows had no rights in the first century near East. If they didn’t have a family to help care for their needs, they are at the mercy of those around them when they were wronged. And in this story, in the face of an evil judge, all this widow had was her voice. So, she uses it—repeatedly.

I can see her at first, being polite and relatively docile. That’s the way to get what you want, right? Kindly and quietly ask whoever is in charge, “Excuse me, you brought me the wrong meal.” Then, over time, she, just like we would, becomes bolder and she increases the frequency of her visits to him. And it works. He says to himself, “Hey, I

don't really care what happens to her. But she's going to drive me nuts, so I'll do whatever she wants."

If you're a parent, you've lived this parable in the story of the Innocent Toddler and the Frustrated Parent!

And, yet, there is a subtle twist with this story: God is not like this unjust judge. The judge doesn't care about right or wrong. But God sees and God cares. We have been invited to have an audience with the Creator of the cosmos, and the good news that Jesus shares with us is that he really does care about justice and he really does care about you.

Jesus said in the Gospel of John, "When you've seen me, you've seen the Father," which means when we see Jesus act in solidarity with the broken hearted and the sick, it's the Father himself caring as well. When Jesus gets angry at injustice and the lack of mercy, it's the Father also caring about that, too. Jesus is perfect theology about God revealed for us to see.

Jesus ends the story by asking two questions. The first is rhetorical: "Because God is good, will he not bring about justice of his people?" The answer is, of course he will. God cares for us, and he is sure to act.

And then he asks another question, which is meant to be wrestled with: "When I return, will I find faith in my people?" In other words, will you remain persistent in prayer, not just when it's convenient and life is comfortable. But when the world is falling apart and people are being their worst selves, will you remain faithful and continue pressing into me to see results? Will you adjust your expectations and your timeline to fit my agenda? Or will you give up?

**Transition:** There is another story Jesus tells to help us understand prayer.

**Luke 18:9-14 (NIV): To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For**

**all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”**

This second story is also about prayer, but it also encompasses how we carry ourselves before God and others. The Pharisee in the story has a performative faith—he does things for show and it’s quite shallow. He’s respected as a spiritual leader, but he compares himself to others and feels important that he’s at the top of the pyramid.

The tax collector, on the other hand, knew that he wasn’t respected in the culture. He was seen as a sellout to the Roman Empire, collecting money and steal from his Jewish brothers and sisters. In the story, he carries his shame and places it in God’s hands. His heart is one of humility.

And Jesus says it’s not the man born into privilege, not the one with the right pedigree, the right phraseology to his prayers that is in the right standing before God. It’s the one who has come into contact with his own brokenness and refuses to judge anyone other than himself. The man who is made righteous before God is the one who knows he needs God to meet him in his mess and to give him grace.

And this is exactly what Jesus promises: Those who humble themselves will be lifted up by God.

**Transition:** What could God be saying to us right now about persistence and humility?

## **APPLICATION**

Well, at first, persistence and humility seem, on the surface, like they’re at odds with one another. Persistence is about not taking no for an answer. It’s about pushing through and getting to the yes. And humility is about embracing circumstances as they come and not putting a veneer on things, namely ourselves.

So, which is it? Do we charge ahead, certain of the outcome? Or do we surrender ourselves to whatever God wants? As it often is in the kingdom of God, both are needed.

We need persistence, because following Jesus isn’t a picnic. It’s not a five-step program to make your life better. We need to make sure our idea of the kingdom of God is a cross-shaped one. Jesus told us, “In this life, you will have trouble.” The way of Jesus is the way of the cross, and bearing our cross will often mean that we encounter setback after setback, trial after trial. And while we may pray, “God help me get around these trials,” his plan may actually be to take you through them because he is more invested

in who you are becoming than in your comfort. He is committed to forming the character of Jesus in you, and that will take a persistent pressing through to cling to him in the face of what our world is telling us life should be like.

In fact, everyday we're bombarded with messages that tell us everything is for and about us. If you're a regular phone user, meaning you browse the internet and hop on social media every once in a while, you see at least 4,000 advertisements everyday. Heavy users may see 10,000 ads. While you're scrolling on Instagram to see what your friends are eating or where they're traveling for the summer, you're scrolling past ad after ad telling you that you deserve to be happy and if you would wear their clothes, order their food, or drive their car, you can have the life you've always wanted.

All of this develops a kind of selfishness and then resentment that we're not living according to the standards we desire. And this takes us away from God—it robs us of our relationship to him, and steals our joy. When we work counter to how God is working, we're misaligned because we've placed ourself at the center of the universe wanting our will to be accomplished.

I'm reminded of something C.S. Lewis said:

**C.S. Lewis: “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.”**

God's goal in developing humility in us is not that we become more self-deprecating or that we never accept accolades that we deserve. Instead, it's place God first and at the center, and putting our focus and attention on him so we can surrender and realign our heart to what he wants to do, in us and in the world.

So, this bombardment with messaging that says life should be easy, fun, and about fulfilling your every desire runs exactly counter to Jesus' message that we can expect difficulty and the point of life is finding fulfillment in God. But—and here's the good news—when we find our fulfillment in our Creator, we will work according to our design and find the fulfillment and flourishing we so desire.

Persistence and humility actually work in tandem to bring us closer to God and the fulfillment we want. When we work through and persist in the issues of life, God forms the character of Jesus in us. We become more kind, more loving, more humble. And when we have more humility, we lean into God more and more for his grace, particularly in praying for his will to be done.

**Transition:** Though I'm sure that at least some of us, at this point, are wondering: But what of unanswered prayer?

## OBJECTIONS

One of the most effective apologetics for people *against* God's goodness, or his being all-powerful and so on, is the lack of answered prayer, specifically in the face of suffering. What are we to do with suffering in our lives?

In his novel, *Silence*, Japanese writer Shusaku Endo addresses this question. The story is about a 17th Century Portuguese priest named Father Rodrigues who travels to Japan to support the few remaining believers in the country after all the priests have been expelled. He is also searching for his former mentor, Father Ferreira, who is rumored to have renounced his faith after heavy persecution.

Throughout the novel, Father Rodrigues struggles with his belief in God's goodness as he sees fellow believers brutalized. He prays aware of his weak prayers, wrestling with God's silence in the conditions they endure. And as he slowly realizes his own capture is imminent, he makes his own peace with silence and suffering. And in that moment of greatest doubt, he finds that God meets him there most meaningfully.

Jesus makes suffering meaningful. We're not masochists—we don't love suffering for its own sake. But we embrace it as we identify with the Man of the cross. And we look past it for what it is forming in us, to make us more like Jesus.

Suffering, then, becomes a powerful testimony in the face of the opulence of our world. It is confounded to a world system that exist a people who say, "As good as this world is, there is something better and more beautiful that I'm looking forward to as a reward. His name is Jesus and his kingdom is coming with him."

## INSPIRATION

What I want for all of us is to become the kind of people who look at the world and all its brokenness, and we don't throw our hands up in defeat or shake our heads with cynicism. No, Jesus invites us into a life where we are persistent as we ask him for change and we ask him for breakthrough. And we have the humility to be a part of the solution, in his timing and in his way.

**Transition:** So, I invite you to ask yourself this:

## CONCLUSION

**Next Step:**

- How is God working to form persistence and humility in my life? How can embrace these two things together?

**Prayer**