

“Pray Always!”

James Merritt reported, “I heard a pastor tell a story one time of something he saw back in the days of World War II. He was somewhere over in France, and he and a buddy of his were in a house. They happened to be cleaning that house. All of a sudden, the bombs started to fall just as they had begun to mop the kitchen floor.”

Merritt stated, “He said he had a friend with him, a G.I., who was helping him to mop the floor. The floor was just covered with soap and water. When the bombs started to fall, this man tried to run. But the floor was so slippery he couldn’t run. He kept falling down. Finally, he got his footing, and when he got to take a first real step, he stepped in the pail and got it stuck on his foot. That caused him to fall again. When he stood back up, he stepped on the mop, it flew up and hit him in the face and knocked him under the stairs. All the time the bombs are falling on that house.”

Merritt continued, “He said this man was just struggling just to get out of that house and get to safety. In all of that bombing and chaos, he prayed and said, ‘O God, if you will just help me get out of this mess, I will get out of the next one all by myself.’”

Merritt noted, “Well, that soldier was right to pray in that situation, but he was wrong to say he wouldn’t pray in the next one.” Merritt shared this insight, “You see, we are to turn every care into a prayer, every aggravation into a supplication, and every irritation into an invocation.”

Merritt concluded, **“We are to pray when we are in trouble, but we are to pray when we are not in trouble. As a matter of fact, if we would give ourselves to more prayer we would get ourselves in less trouble.”** (James Merritt, Collected Sermons, Christian Globe Networks, Inc. at sermons.com)

The subject of Prayer is very important. Jesus saw it as crucial for his own life. He not only taught this parable about prayer but he also frequently prayed. Why did he pray so often and what is the purpose and value for you and me to pray always?

Brian P. Stoffregen shared some important information about prayer as it is found in the Gospel of Luke. He explained, “This parable is unique to Luke ... Luke has a greater emphasis on prayer than the other gospels. In the following five synoptic events, Luke adds a comment that Jesus is praying that is not found in the other gospels:”

“Jesus is praying at his baptism before heavens open (3:21)

•Jesus spends the night praying to God before selecting the twelve (6:12)

•Jesus is praying before he asks the disciples, ‘Who do the crowds/you say that I am?’ (9:18)

•Jesus is praying on the mountain before the transfiguration. (9:28, 29)

•Jesus is praying before the disciples ask him to teach them to pray. (11:1)”

Stoffregen continued, “The following parables about prayer are unique to Luke:”

“The Friend at Midnight (11:5-8 – following the Lord’s Prayer)

•The Widow and the Judge (18:1-8)

•The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14)” (Exegetical Notes at Luke 18.1-8 by Brian P. Stoffregen)

At least, from the way Luke reported Jesus’ prayer life, it was extremely valuable to him. Indeed, prayer seems to have been so natural for him that it was more like a conversation between an adult child with his or her parent. In fact, the Gospel of John reported in 12:27-28 a heavenly voice was heard to respond during one of his prayers! So, prayer was so important to Jesus, it should not have surprised the first disciples nor us that Luke started our Reading by reporting in **verse 1, “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to teach them that they should always pray and never become discouraged.”** Luke was very helpful by his informing us of Jesus’ purpose for teaching the Parable of the Widow and the Judge. However, his report did something a bit strange. He tied praying and preventing discouragement together! How did Jesus’ teaching of this parable do that?

We are provided helpful insight into the process of prayer by Barbara Brown Taylor, who said, “You are going to trust the process, regardless of what comes of it, because the process itself gives you life. The process keeps you engaged with what matters most to you, so you do not lose heart.” (“To Speak and Be Heard” by Kathryn Matthews on Weekly Seeds) So, the purpose for the teaching in our Scripture is very much connected to the

concluding thought found at the end of the Reading when **Jesus said in verse 8b, “But will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes?”**

Now, that may be a bit confusing, since our culture and society usually think of faith or belief as a cognitive process, which affirms certain propositions about God. How does one come to know such propositions better – to the point of affirmation through prayer? Kathryn Matthews answers, “Some years ago, however, I came to understand faith in a very different way: as trust. In his book, The Heart of Christianity, Marcus Borg speaks of faith as much more than just believing the correct things in our head. As he says, ‘you can believe all the right things and still be miserable. You can believe all the right things and still be relatively unchanged. Believing a set of claims to be true has very little transforming power.’”

Matthews continued, **“Instead, Borg speaks of faith as having to do with relationship, with giving your heart and your trust, your radical trust, to God.”** He draws on the work of Soren Kierkegaard, the great Danish philosopher, who says that ‘faith as trust is like floating on a deep ocean. Faith is like floating in seventy thousand fathoms of water. If you struggle, if you tense up and thrash about, you will eventually sink. But if you relax and trust, you will float.’ He even uses the example of teaching a child to swim and trying to get the child to relax in the water: ‘It’s okay, just relax. You’ll float, it’s okay.’” Matthews concluded, **“Borg describes faith as ‘trusting in the buoyancy of God. Faith is trusting in the sea of being in which we live and move and have our being.’”** (“To Speak and Be Heard” by Kathryn Matthews on Weekly Seeds)

Praying always enhances or deepens our Relationship with God – our Trust in God’s Agape Loving Care for us and all people. Further, frequent prayer enables one to become more open to new insight about a problem or concern and, to thus, respond more appropriately and effectively. – in my trust in God’s Love and Care for me during difficult times through frequent and substantial prayer. Yes, I have received a clearer and better understanding, which resulted in a more appropriate response because I went through significant and intense prayer.

Let’s examine the parable Jesus taught to lead his followers to always pray and never become discouraged. Luke told us Jesus’ parable in **verses 2-3, “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. And there was a widow in that same town who kept coming to him and pleading for her rights, saying, ‘Help me against my opponent!’”** Thus far, the widow seemed to be like any other person seeking a judgment against a foe. However, throughout the Old and New Testaments, it is clear the widows and orphans were among the most vulnerable and powerless of Jewish Society. The Hebrew word for “widow” literally means “silent one” or “one unable to speak”. It was no coincidence that word was the one used to refer to the weakest and most desperate of Jewish culture.

With that understanding, let’s finish with Jesus’ telling of the parable in **verses 4-5, “For a long time the judge refused to act, but at last he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or respect people, yet because of all the trouble this widow is giving me, I will see to it that she gets her rights. If I don’t, she will keep on coming and finally wear me out!’”** Now, some folks have been tempted to jump to the conclusion Jesus’ point was we should pester God with our constant prayers as did the widow of the judge. However, that really misses the point. Instead, Jesus pointed toward his focus in **verses 6-8a, “And the Lord continued, ‘Listen to what that corrupt judge said. Now, will God not judge in favor of His own people who cry to Him day and night for help? Will He be slow to help them?’ I tell you, He will judge in their favor and do it quickly.”** God will judge in favor of the people of God! Our praying always enables us to internalize that Faith or Trust in the promise of our Divine Parent judging in our favor – making sure our ultimate welfare is fulfilled! We, therefore, really have no reason to lose hope – no reason to become discouraged. We are called to pray always and never become discouraged!

Now, this message could have concluded with the previous sentence, however, there is also an implied additional call. Remember, in the parable the Judge said he agreed to see to it that the widow get her rights? Further, Jesus promised God Judges in our favor. Since Jesus used the subject matter of the vulnerable woman receiving Justice – her rights from the Judge in the parable, he then indicated God would be quick to provide us the judgment we need. He implied we are to follow our Divine Parent’s example of bringing or seeking Justice for those, who face injustice. We are not to merely pray for someone to receive Justice but to actually take steps to be supportive of Justice being obtained. **So, yes, you and I are called to pray always, deepen our faith – never become discouraged, and seek justice!** Amen.