

## L 12 ... Why Does God Delay Answering My Prayers

Luke 18:1-8

Have you ever prayed about something and it seemed God was in no hurry to answer? Some people mistakenly believe, if they just pray the prayer of faith, the answer will come instantly, or at least in a matter of days. However, kingdom living requires understanding that often God's answers are delayed. What does Jesus teach about prayer in the parable of the persistent widow ([Luke 18:1](#))?

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Understanding why God sometimes delays answers to prayers requires **two** actions.

### Read the Parable About Persistent Prayer (18:2-8)

This parable is about a judge who lived in a certain city and neither feared God nor respected or cared about people. Jesus says there was a *widow* in the town who kept saying to him, *Avenge me of mine adversary* ([18:2-3](#)). In Bible times, widows were often the most helpless and vulnerable of all people. It is still true today. I saw a report about rip-offs by businesses, such as overcharging and other forms of financial deception. The top two groups swindled were widows and single mothers.

However, what does God command in [Exodus 22:22](#)?

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In this parable, the judge has no concern for the plight of this poor widow and repeatedly refuses to render her justice ([18:4](#)). However, the widow refuses to give up because persistence is her only resource. The judge realizes the widow will not leave him alone. Therefore, he says to himself that because the widow keeps bothering him, he will give her justice. He doesn't want to be worn out with her constant requests ([18:5](#)).

The point of the parable is **not** that God has the same attitude toward us as this judge toward the widow. This is a parable of contrasts. The point of this parable is, if persistence is effective with an unjust judge, how much more will it be effective with God, the righteous Judge?

Jesus says we should learn a lesson from the unrighteous judge ([18:6](#)). Even the unjust judge rendered a just decision because of persistence. Therefore, Jesus says, *And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?*<sup>8</sup> *I tell you that he will avenge them speedily* ([18:7-8a](#)). From God's perspective, His justice will come *speedily*. From our perspective, it may seem a long time coming.

How does [Psalm 90:4](#) describe God's perspective?

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The Jews had three, four-hour night watches: the beginning watch ([Lam. 2:19](#)) from sunset till 10 p.m., the middle watch ([Judg. 7:19](#)) from 10 p.m. till 2 a.m., and the morning watch ([Ex 14:24](#)) from 2 a.m. till sunrise. With God, a thousand years is not even four hours.

Since time is not an issue with God, we must be persistent in prayer. This requires faith because faith waits. That's why Jesus says, *Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?* ([18:8b](#)). Our faith is revealed when we are persistent in prayer and continue to have faith even when God delays the answer.

This parable seems to contradict what promise in [Isaiah 65:24](#)?

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God's answers are always immediate but receiving them is sometimes delayed, as we shall see in the next point. Yet, we still wonder, if God is as anxious to answer our prayers as He promises, why is persistent prayer necessary? Even when we **read the parable about persistent prayer**, that question isn't answered. Therefore, we must look elsewhere in the Bible, and...

### **Research the Purpose of Persistent Prayer**

There are at least **two** reasons God delays answering our prayers.

#### **1. It Refines Our Prayers**

Sometimes we pray for something we don't really need, even though we may think we do at the time. The late Ruth Graham, wife of Billy Graham, said she was very thankful God didn't answer all her prayers or she would have married the wrong man six times.

God delays answering our prayers to give us time to refine our prayers. For example, the prophet Elijah powerfully prays and calls down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel. Then, he flees in terror from the wicked, vindictive queen, Jezebel, who had killed hundreds of God's prophets.

Tired and discouraged, what does Elijah pray in the last sentence of [1 Kings 19:4](#)?

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Don't you think Elijah's prayer needs a little refinement? Absolutely! Elijah didn't really want to die. If he did, he could have just stayed at Mount Carmel. Jezebel would have been delighted to oblige him. Elijah was just tired, discouraged and looking for a simple, quick way out of his problems.

If God answered all our prayers immediately, we, like Elijah, would self-destruct when we are tired and depressed. Therefore, God wants us to be persistent in our prayers because **it refines our prayers** and...

#### **2. It Redirects Our Plans**

An excellent example of this is found in the life of a New Testament couple named Zecharias and Elisabeth. One day while Zecharias, a priest, is burning incense in the temple, an angel appears to him and

tells him not to be afraid because his *prayer is heard*. His wife Elisabeth is going to have a son. The angel also tells Zecharias what to name the baby ([Lk 1:5-13](#)). Zecharias and Elisabeth had been praying for a son for decades.

Therefore, what does Zecharias, who is probably in his sixties, ask the angel ([1:18](#))?

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After years of what seem to be unanswered prayers, Zecharias was slow to believe God would answer. Persistent prayer gives God time to answer in His way and in His own time. As missionary Jim Elliot once said, “God always gives the best to those who leave the choice with Him.”

How does [Psalm 84:11c](#) verify that statement?

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God sometimes delays answering our prayers because He has something much better in mind. Suppose God had answered Zecharias and Elisabeth’s prayers with a son years earlier. He would have just been another baby boy and just another man. They would have been just another couple, of whom we have never heard. They just wanted a son like everyone else.

But God had something much better in mind. He wanted to give them a son who would be the last of the Old Testament prophets, the only prophet who lived to see the Messiah.

However, most importantly, what does Jesus say about their son, John the Baptist, in [Luke 7:28a](#)?

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God has a very good reason for every delayed answer to our prayers. Jesus told this parable of the persistent widow to teach us *always to pray, and not to faint* ([Lk 18:1](#)).

How does Jesus also emphasize the importance of persistent prayer in [Luke 11:9](#)?

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The key to understanding any biblical command is the verbs. The verbs in that verse are *ask, seek, and knock*. They are all present tense, which means continuous action. Therefore, they could be translated, “keep on asking,” “keep on seeking,” and “keep on knocking.”

Praying in faith doesn’t mean we get the answer immediately. Praying in faith is really persistent prayer, which means trusting God with the best answer and leaving the timing to Him.

How does [Psalm 130:5](#) express this principle?

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When the answers to your prayers are delayed, remember to

**READ THE PARABLE ABOUT PERSISTENT PRAYER AND**

**RESEARCH THE PURPOSE OF PERSISTENT PRAYER.**