

Luke 18

Principles for Pursuing God

I'm thankful you don't have to see the Mailers and phone calls we get – marketing schemes
How to pitch something to your church, how to get people excited, or try this Bible study for 30 days, if you like there's an invoice enclosed, if not, send it back.

We are not looking for church growth, we are looking for individual growth. I operate from the basic assumption that you all want to be here, you want to know more about God, you want to worship Him, and I work from there.

Trying to make people want to come to church is like trying to make a little kid eat when they don't want to – you can't really do it. Unless you offer them something they really like, but then you have to keep serving that because they won't eat anything else.

We adopt a different attitude here - that if you are hungry, you will want to eat. Our job is to make sure there is good food on the table, but if you aren't hungry, I don't know how to make you want to eat.

So we don't have a lot of programs, we just encourage individual service. We don't do marketing or slick graphics, we count on the fact that God is at work within you, stirring and calling you to do something. And I believe that a natural side effect of that is that as others see the work that He is doing in you, they will crave that for themselves and that will draw people to God and church. But even if it doesn't, you will at least have grown yourselves and that's a worthy thing on its own.

So this morning we look at Four Principles for Pursuing God, for growing in your own walk with Him, to see what is involved in a life lived for Him:

- Persist in Faithful Prayer
- Humble Yourself and Esteem Others
- Possess Simple Faith
- Put Jesus First

1And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.2He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.3And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'4For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man,5yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" 6And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says.7And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?8I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

First Principle: Persistent Faithful Prayer

The immediate context is regarding the second coming of Christ and the justice that the saints will receive when He returns. Just like Jesus, some Christians have, are, and will suffer horrendous persecution before Jesus returns, but in God's perfect timing He will give them justice, and when it is time to move, He will move swiftly and decisively.

That's the context, but the underlying principle, as verse one states, is that we, as Christians ought always to **pray and not lose heart**. And so He tells the story of this widow seeking justice and the judge who she finally wore down.

The comparison here is from lesser to greater – Jesus is pointing out that if an unrighteous, self-interested judge can be persuaded to do the right thing, how much more our Heavenly Father who loves us and wants what He has determined to be best for us? The Scriptures tell us that He doesn't withhold any good thing from us; instead, according to **Romans 8:28**, He is working all things together for good for those that love Him and are called according to His purpose.

OK, you say, then why am I not receiving the things I am praying for?

There are many answers to that question, but let's just deal with two that are related to this passage:

1. The widow was asking for the right thing – she was asking for justice to be done. You have to consider, are you asking for the right thing? James (4:2-3) says “You do not have, because you do not ask.³ You ask and do not receive, **because you ask wrongly**, to spend it on your passions.”
2. You need God's timing, not just His will – Spurgeon “If the ship bearing the answer to your prayer is late coming into the harbor, it is only because it is more heavily laden with blessing.”

Which brings us back to the principle: we “ought always to **pray and not lose heart**.” When the answer to your prayer is slow in coming, or comes in a different form than you desired – how to do you react? Do you lose heart or do you lean harder on God?

God wants us to trust Him, but as we have said, it's not a blind trust – He wants you to look back on His track record in history and in your own life and determine for yourself – is He the kind of God you can trust? If so, keep praying, and do not lose heart, when the timing is right, He will answer!

Let's look at the **second principle** which gives us a more little instruction on prayer:

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:¹⁰“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed [\[fn1\]](#) thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’¹³But 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!’ [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.”

Second Principle: Humble Yourself, Esteem Others

Here’s a truth for you to consider: The way you view yourself affects how you perceive and treat others. If you have a low opinion of yourself, you will look up to others. Now in this case that turns out well for the tax collector, because he has an accurate understanding of himself before God, but many people look up to others instead, trying to find acceptance by a boyfriend or girlfriend or a group of friends, or a boss – anyone who they can please and be accepted by.

If you think too **much** of yourself, you will think too **little** of others and that is what the Pharisee here is guilty of. The apostle Paul probably had the best response to this, when he wrote about his own pedigree in Philippians 3:

[2](#)Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.[3](#)For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God [\[fn2\]](#) and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—[4](#)though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:[5](#)circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;[6](#)as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law [\[fn3\]](#) blameless.[7](#)But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.[8](#)Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ^{[9](#)}and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—[10](#)that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,[11](#)that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

In order for you to walk in humility and esteem others, you need to know how bad you really are. You need to see the sin in your life the way God does. As you get a better understanding of that you will also develop a greater appreciation for just how far down God has to reach to pick you up. And as your view of self diminishes and your view of God increases, you will eventually find yourself becoming much more charitable toward others because you know they’re really only as bad as you are, just perhaps struggling with different things.

Let’s move on to principle 3:

[15](#)Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them.[16](#)But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God.[17](#)Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

Principle 3: Possess a simple faith

The parents had a simple faith in bringing their children to Jesus asking for a blessing on them. Mom and Dad, do you do that? Do you regularly bring your children to Jesus and ask Him to bless them? Job did it daily, and there is certainly something to be said for that kind of regularity, persistently asking God to pour out his mercies on your children – mercies which are new every morning.

But also Jesus speaks of the simple faith of children in receiving the kingdom of God and says we need to have the same kind of faith which we demonstrate in part, through the next principle:

[18](#)And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” [19](#)And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. [20](#)You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” [21](#)And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” [22](#)When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” [23](#)But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich.

The Fourth principle is to: Put Jesus First

Jesus has this incredible way of cutting right to the heart of a matter and getting at the underlying motives behind an action. This young man who approached him was, by all accounts, a good man, living a good life, we don't see that he was out using his money to buy parties and women like the prodigal son, in fact, when questioned about his adherence to the law, he tells Jesus he has lived righteously.

So Jesus tells him, well, if you really want to grow, sell all your stuff and come follow me. It's alright to live a morally righteous life, but it's not really worth anything without Me.

And the guy gets tripped up by that because he had a lot of stuff, he was **extremely** rich, and it was hard to let go of it all.

1900 years later though, a similar circumstance unfolded with a much different outcome.

Borden, Inc. was, at one time, the largest American producer of dairy and pasta products known for their Meadow Gold milk and Borden Condensed Milk but also for making [Elmer's Glue](#) and Krazy Glue.

In 1904 William Borden graduated from high school in Chicago and as heir to the family fortune, at 16 he was already quite wealthy. For his high school graduation present, his parents gave him a trip around the world. He traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, but while on that trip he developed a growing burden for people who were hurting and lost.

On his way home he stopped in London where he heard the preaching of an evangelist named R.A. Torrey. As Borden listened to Torrey his purpose and motivation in life began to solidify.

He returned home and enrolled at Yale where he was active in starting prayer groups among the students and led local outreaches. After graduation he went to Princeton for further Bible training and then set off for the mission field at the age of 25.

Because he was hoping to work among the Chinese Muslims, he stopped first in Egypt to study Arabic. While there, he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead.

Randy Alcorn talks of visiting Borden's grave recently in Cairo, "I dusted off the epitaph on Borden's grave. After describing his love and sacrifices for the kingdom of God and for Muslim people, the inscription ended with a phrase I've never forgotten: "Apart from faith in Christ, there is no explanation for such a life."

In his Bible, which was found after his death, the young man who had given up a life of privilege and luxury for the sake of ministry had written the following three lines: "No reserves," "No retreats," "No regrets."

Not only had Borden given his life, he had also given his wealth – somewhere in the ballpark of \$1 million to Christian missions everywhere from the East Coast of the US to China.

Now you have to understand something – by any standard we in this room are rich. Compare what you make with 90% of the world's population and you are rich. That means to some degree we are held down by our stuff.

But God doesn't call all people to sell everything they have and follow Him. In fact, as we will see next week – Zaccheus claimed he was going to give away **half** of his money and repay the people he had taken advantage of and Jesus praised him for that.

So, the question is not how much do you have to give, but "*what is my greatest priority?*" **Do you value your money or your stuff more than Jesus?**

At some point, Jesus is going to make similar demands on you – there is something that He will ask you to give up for the sake of following Him – and you will have to determine, *how will I respond*, **what do I value?**

But, as Jesus is about to point out, if you put Him first, you won't miss what you left behind:

[24](#)Jesus, looking at him with sadness, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God![25](#)For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."[26](#)Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"[27](#)But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."[28](#)And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you."[29](#)And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers [\[fn2\]](#) or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God,[30](#)who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."

Now, Jesus takes a minute to remind everyone of where all this is leading – great things are ahead, but to open that door He must first walk through a hallway of violence and agony:

[31](#)And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished.[32](#)For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon.[33](#)And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.”[34](#)But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.

Now, as we close out the chapter, we see the four Principles brought together in a single incident and we are reminded of the outcome of a life lived with Jesus at the center:

[35](#)As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging.[36](#)And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant.[37](#)They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.”[38](#)And he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”[39](#)And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”[40](#)And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him,[41](#)“What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.”[42](#)And Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.”[43](#)And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

The Beggar cries out like the widow
 He humbles himself and begs for mercy like the tax-collector
 He is brought to Jesus like the children
 After his healing, He follows Jesus like the Rich Young Ruler was told to do.

And, as a result of it all, not only did he worship personally, but “all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.”

This is exactly the way I want to see this church grow.

I want to see each of you responding to the call of God on your lives,

I want to see you **persisting in the faith** – praying at all times and not losing heart,

I want to see you **humbling yourselves and esteeming others**,

I want to see you living with a **childlike faith** and bringing your children to Jesus,
 and I want to see you **putting Jesus first** in all you do.

I want to see you grow in your walk and I want to see others drawn to Jesus, worshipping Him because of what they see in you.

That’s my heart’s desire.