

Him. He delights in answering our specific prayers but in doing it in a way that demonstrates His creative Sovereignty. Through prayer we are learning how to trust Him more.

It is not acceptable to simply say, "Well I asked God once for this and if He wants to accomplish it, He will do it." Prayer does not operate in that way. God wants to be WITH us. He delights in hearing our prayers and He loves to give us good gifts. The key is fervent, focused and consistent prayer, coming back again and again, circling our prayers over and over until we see His hand of blessing.

It takes time for a seed to mature into a crop that can be harvested. It takes time for a tree to bear fruit. It takes months for a child to form and be born. This is the way of the natural world where the Creator God has placed us. The best things seem to take time, we are on God's timetable and not our own. We need to watch and pray, to circle our prayers and in faith, believing the outcome will appear.

Disclaimer: This booklet came out of reading, "The Circle Maker" by Pastor Mark Batterson. If you are interested in the book or the supplementary curriculum resource, please understand that some of the material is highly controversial. It is an interesting and fun book to read but it is largely extra-Biblical and as such, needs to be read carefully and critically.



## Jovita Baptist Church

*Edgewood, WA*



*Learning Persistence in Prayer*

*- A Concert of Prayer -*

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## Praying In Circles, Learning Persistence in Prayer

Do you ever get the feeling that you are just going around in circles? You don't seem to get anywhere, but you are making good time doing it! For many Christians, prayer is one of those disciplines that seem like an endless treadmill. We are overwhelmed at all the things for which we need to pray and we are often not seeing the answers to prayer that we had hoped. We feel like we have just been praying in circles.

Like any discipline, we need to find the fortitude or guts to stay with it all the way to the end. Unfortunately we often give up too soon and then miss out on the miracle that God is bringing our way. Scripture tells us to continue to be steadfast and wait for Him:

"Wait for the Lord; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the Lord." Psalm 27:14

"Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth

Does not become weary or tired.

His understanding is inscrutable.

He gives strength to the weary,

And to *him who* lacks might He increases power.

Though youths grow weary and tired,

And vigorous young men stumble badly,

Yet those who wait for the Lord

Will gain new strength;

They will mount up *with* wings like eagles,

They will run and not get tired,

They will walk and not become weary." Isaiah 40: 28-31

*Praying in Circles* is not about going around and around, endlessly praying rote prayers and hoping we can hold on longer than God can. It is about praying with persistence, focus and conviction. It is waiting to see our prayers answered from the hand of the Lord in spite of every evidence to the contrary. It is having a single mindedness to pray through our prayers, to pray again and again until we see His provision.

The story of the persistent widow that Jesus told has been the source of confusion for many people unacquainted with the power of prayer. It is found in Luke 18:1-8:

"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?" (NIV)

I suppose some people even wonder why we should pray at all. After all, if God is all knowing, He is sovereign and knows the beginning from the end, what difference would our small prayers make? The Gospel writer, Dr. Luke, gives us an insight into the prayer life of the Son of God: we find Jesus over and over praying to the Father. He spends all night in prayer and He preaches on prayer to His followers.

In the parable Luke records about the persistent widow, he indicates his purpose in verse one: "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." We learn from Jesus that God is interested in our prayers, He is not a God that is absent or silent. He wants us to talk with Him, to bring our concerns and requests to Him and to not give up. We are to wait for His timing and His purposes, to believe in faith and to keep on praying. This is not because God is like the unconcerned Judge, because God is certainly concerned, it is more for our benefit, that we do not loose heart and give up and give in. We need to show conviction, patience and persistence in prayer.

In the parable, the judge is beaten down by the woman's relentless pleading for justice. Jesus is saying that if an unrighteous judge would bring justice to the persistent widow, how much more would the Righteous Judge of the Universe bring justice to His people who ask.

The question of God's apparent slowness is contrasted by the use of the term, "swiftly" and the mention of the

return of Christ. Since Christ has not yet returned, is God slow concerning His promises? Certainly not. 2 Peter 3:8-9 gives us this insight:

"But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. <sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

In other words, the Lord God is patiently waiting the final judgment because He is giving people more time to repent and come to Him.

In the closing verses of our passage, Jesus makes two important points: God is going to act swiftly and when the King returns, will there be faith on the earth? Jesus was not giving us a timeframe for the second coming as much as He was giving us the sequence. When Jesus does return, the judgment will be swift. The next item on God's agenda will be the return of Christ. We are told repeatedly that it will come suddenly and unexpectedly when it does come. Until that time, however, we are told to keep praying and persevere under trial. God is going to vindicate His children, justice will prevail. We must keep on praying and believing until He comes again. It is our faith that is being refined when we persist in prayer.

To recap this parable, please consider the following points:

1. Jesus teaches us that as God's people we must keep praying and not faint or loose heart even when we don't see the

answer immediately.

2. We know that in this world we will suffer persecution, trials and temptations but we are the people of God and we are not strangers appealing to an unrighteous judge who does not know us or care for us. We are His Elect, His chosen choice ones, He delights in preserving and protecting us.

3. It is our privilege, honor and duty to pray in faith, believing in God's righteous vindication. He has promised us mercy but He requires that we pray. Isaiah 62:6 says that there should be no rest in calling on the Lord day or night.

4. The persistent widow was kept at arm's length by the judge, in contrast, we are to come boldly before the throne of Grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16

5. The widow had no one to plead her case, but we have an advocate and High Priest, Jesus Christ the Righteous who was tempted as we are, yet without sin. He ever lives to make intercession for us. Romans 8:34

6. The widow had little hope that she would be heard or that her plight would be resolved, but we know that the Lord hears the prayer of the righteous; Proverbs 15:29, and that the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective; James 5:16.

7. Jesus is going to return at the exact moment God has established. He will come, looking for people of faith, people of prayer. It will likely get very difficult for the church and the child of God in the last days. People will be asking, "Where is the hope of his coming?" 2 Peter 3:4 When the trumpet sounds, the people of God will know for certain that the unbelief of man has not made void the promises of God.

In light of this parable of Jesus, we realize that we must be persistent, focused and pray with conviction and faith. What would that look like for you and me?

In the book of Joshua, God is giving His general marching orders. First, He makes a startling promise to Joshua; "See I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men." Joshua 6:2 Then God unveils the strategy; the children of Israel are to march around Jericho once a day for six days and on the seventh day to march seven times around the city. Joshua 6:3-5

God had already delivered Jericho into the hands of His people, but in order for the promise to be realized, the entire army and the priests had to march. They literally had to put feet to their faith.

When we circle our prayers, whether literally or figuratively, we are walking in the footsteps of those who have gone before us. Our persistent offering of prayer and waiting for the Lord is a sign of faith and a requirement for effective outcomes through our prayers.

When we keep a prayer journal and pray over and over for the same issues or persons as we plead in intercession for the lives of those we know and love, we are circling our prayers.

Persistence in prayer isn't about pushing God, but learning to wait for His perfect timing and His unique answers. Perhaps you have had the same experience I have had in praying for something specific and having a plan for God, a blueprint for