

Sermon 19 October 2025 Perseverance in Prayer

Ephesians 6:13-18 Luke 18:1-8

Our Gospel story is about a woman, a widow, who pesters a judge until she receives justice. She doesn't give up, she perseveres until he relents and gives her what she wants. Why does Jesus tell this story? I quote: *'One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up.'* Luke 18:1.

There wouldn't be an area in life where success is not invariably brought about through perseverance. Whether it's on the sports field, in the performing arts, in the classroom, in business, sweat and hard work, commitment and discipline are an essential ingredient in the recipe for success.

You may have heard of William Carey, known as 'The father of modern missions.' He became a Baptist minister after working as a cobbler, served in India in the 18th century, translating the Bible into several languages, and was a social reformer, urging the government to outlaw such practices as infanticide (the killing of babies for reasons such as gender or poverty), and *suttee* (in which Hindu widows sacrificed themselves on their husbands' funeral pyre). He founded the Serampore University, the first degree-awarding university in India. His achievements were legendary. He set in motion the modern missionary movement, and this was despite countless obstacles being put in his path.

When asked towards the end of his life how, in the midst of so much adversity, he could accomplish so much, he replied, 'I can plod. I can persevere in any pursuit. To this I owe everything. Few people know what can be done till they try and persevere in what they undertake.'

The same is applicable to prayer, and this is just the point Jesus is making in this short parable. So let us take a more detailed look at this story.

We get something of a peek at the judicial system of the time. Disputes were invariably taken directly to a magistrate or judge. This judge would have been appointed by the Romans and such judges were notorious. Unless plaintiffs had influence or money to bribe their way to a verdict, they had little hope of getting a settlement. This judge was no exception. He is motivated entirely by self-interest. He has no interest in either justice or the woman's rights.

On the other side, we have a widow who represents the poor and the defenceless. Not only is she a woman, who of course had very limited rights in the society of that time, but she is a widow. Women were very much defined by who their husband was, so to have no husband meant that she had virtually no standing or status in society. So she was very much up against it. She had little going for her, but the one thing she did have was determination and perseverance.

So against all odds, the woman does receive justice. She does this purely and simply through her perseverance. Jesus is making the point that our approach to prayer must be of a similar nature. It is a theme Paul takes up on more than one occasion. *'Keep on praying.'* 1 Thessalonians 5:17. And from our first reading, *'Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion.'* Ephesians 6:18.

So why do we need to persevere in prayer? Surely God hears us the first time and then can respond accordingly. I would like to make a couple of points. Firstly, perseverance shows that we are sincere, that we mean business. This is not just a request thrown out there in the hope that something might happen. This comes from the heart; this comes with conviction and a deep desire for a certain outcome. This is a genuine request.

Secondly, this is a genuine relationship. By speaking to God repeatedly and from the bottom of our heart, we are building and developing our relationship with God. This is not just a one-off approach to God, this is serious, this is meaningful. Most importantly, this shows we have faith. This expressed in the last verse of our Gospel reading: *'But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?'* Luke 18: 8.

Think about it, if we didn't have faith, if we didn't believe in what we were doing, would we really persist? I don't think so. Commitment to a cause is a sure sign of belief in a cause. Time and again we are urged in the Bible to pray and pray. The psalmist tells us, *'Evening and morning and at noon I will pray aloud, and He shall hear my voice.'* Psalm 55:7. Another example from Paul: *'Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything.'* Philippians 4:6. And of course Jesus himself spent many

hours in prayer: *'One day soon after Jesus went to a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night.'* Luke 6:12. To cement our relationship with God, we need to adhere to this commitment.

There's supposedly a true story of a Welsh woman who lived in a remote village in Wales. She went to a great deal of trouble and expense to have electricity installed in her home. However, after a couple of months the electrical company noticed that she didn't appear to be using much power at all. Thinking there might be a problem, they sent a meter reader to check on the matter.

The man came to the door and said, 'We have checked your meter and it doesn't seem that you are using much electricity. Is there a problem?' 'Oh no,' she said, 'We're quite satisfied. We turn the lights on every night to see how to light the lamps and then we switch them off again.'

Now, why didn't this woman make more use of her electricity? She believed in electricity. She believed the promises of the electricity company when they told her about it. She went to a great deal of trouble and expense to have her house wired for it. BUT she didn't understand the potential of electricity in her home. She didn't understand just what it could do for her. And so she used its power sparingly.

The question is, are we the same when it comes to prayer? We believe in prayer. We know of the promises God has made if we use prayer. We have heard amazing stories about prayer. But why do we continue to use prayers sparingly? Prayer works. Persevering with prayer makes it work even better! Prayer should be at the heart of everything we do.

We should be like the little boy who went to the supermarket with his mother. Before they entered the supermarket, she said to him, 'Now, you're not going to get any chocolate chip cookies, so don't even ask.' She put him in the child's seat in the trolley while she wheeled down the aisles.

He was doing fine until they came to the biscuit section. He saw the chocolate chip cookies, stood up in his seat and said, 'Mum, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?' She said, 'I told you not to even ask. No, you're not getting any at all.'

They continue down the aisles, but as she searched for what she wanted, they ended back in the biscuit aisle. 'Mum, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?' 'Absolutely not,' she said. 'I have already told you, you can't have any, so sit down and be quiet.'

Finally, they were approaching the checkout lane. The little boy sensed this might be his last chance. So just before they got to the line, he stood up and shouted, 'In the name of Jesus, can I have some chocolate chip cookies?'

Those around him applauded and guess what, the little boy and his mum left with several packets of chocolate chip cookies! The moral of the story is, persevere and Jesus will give you what you want.

I want to finish with another anecdote, a true story. Many of you will be familiar with the name, Winston Churchill. He was Britain's inspiring leader during the dark days of World War 2. Following the war, he was asked to give speech at the boys' school which he had attended. The headmaster got up to introduce him, and said, 'Boys, you're about to hear one of the world's great speakers. Listen carefully.'

Churchill stood behind the lectern, staring out at the assembled young men. And for a long time he was silent. Then he leaned forward and spoke quietly, 'Never give up.' There was a long pause, about a minute, and then he said it again, louder this time, 'Never give up!' Another long pause, again at least a minute. And then this man, who truly was one of the world's greatest orators, leaned forward and began to pound the lectern with his fist, and in a voice that got louder and louder until he was almost shouting, said, 'Never, never, never, never, never give up!' And then he sat down – end of speech. No one who was there, and even those who weren't there, would ever forget that speech.

Two points I make. Firstly, that message is pertinent and relevant to anything we do in life, and that goes for prayer. Secondly, an observation – the shorter the speech, the more likely we are to remember the message!

I finish with a quote from English religious writer, Hannah More: *'Prayer is not eloquence but earnestness.'*