

Text: Luke 18:1

Theme: I'm Not Giving Up

October 16, 2016

"I've had it. I'm not doing it any more. I give up!" Sound even the least bit familiar? Have you ever used those statements or something similar? Unless you are outside of the human race or live in an uninhabited location that most of us would like to move to, you, too, have had those moments when you said out loud or, at the very least, to yourself, "I give up." As Jesus begins His parable in our text, His intention is for each one of us to say, "I'm not giving up. I will remain fervent in prayer!"

I. Our God expects persistence in prayer. A. However, we sometimes lose heart. 1. We lose heart because it appears God isn't listening. How many times have you prayed the same prayer and never seen a response or prayed regarding the same topic and God appeared silent? We've all been there and we don't like it one bit! When we pray, we want answers immediately. Not next week, next year, or ten years from now. If we had our choice, we'd install a drive up prayer window where we'd order our prayer requests at window one and pick up the answer at window two after waiting in line about forty-two seconds. We might laugh at the idea, but we'd all like it to come true.

2. We lose heart because we fail to realize God has a bigger plan. In Jeremiah, we find probably the only familiar words from the entire book as it says, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future." Do those words sound ambiguous, unclear, or difficult to understand? God has plans for your life, great plans, but too often, we fail to realize His plans because we're too busy with our plans. We pray expecting God to fulfill our plans and when that doesn't happen, we give up because we've forgotten that God also has plans, better plans than our plans.

3. We lose heart because we think we've prayed long enough. Those of you who are kids that still live at home, how many times do you ask for the same thing before you realize it's time to stop asking? Too often, we treat God in the same way. We ask a few times and God seems silent. So we ask a couple more times and then we stop asking because we've decided God isn't going to answer. But who are we to decide what God is going to do or not do? Since when have we, as mere humans, been given access to the mind of God? We may know when enough is enough with our parents, but with God, enough is always one more time than you think is enough.

B. So what leads us to say, "I'm not giving up?" 1. We refuse to give up because God has promised to answer. Do we need a better reason? Can we find a better reason to keep on praying? When we pray, God has promised to answer, period. There are no maybes, no "I'll think about it," or "I'll get around to your request when I have the time." When God makes a promise, God keeps His promise and God has promised to answer your prayers. Convinced that God will answer, what do we do? We keep praying, right? When we know God will answer, we have every reason to say, "I'm not giving up. I will be persistent until God answers!"

2. We refuse to give up because if prayer is useless so is the cross. How important is the cross to your Christian faith? Would it be okay with you if we just removed the cross and Christ's work on the cross from the Christian faith because we decided it was unimportant? Absolutely not! The cross is the center of our faith.

Likewise, prayer is central to our communication with God. It's our only means of talking to God. God may not answer as we prefer, but we will not stop praying because prayer is our lifeblood, our connection to Jesus who died on that cross. We cannot lose heart because if we give up on prayer, we, likewise, are giving up on our entire Christian faith.

3. We refuse to give up on prayer because God is still at work. How many things occur every day without you realizing what has gone on behind the scenes? All day every day, things are happening behind the scenes. Twenty-four hours a day, God is at work in our world, in this community, in this church, in your home. Convinced God is at work, we refuse to give up on our prayers because we don't know what God is doing behind the scenes or what He has planned that we aren't aware of. Because God is at work, prayer works and because prayer works, we keep on praying, even when answers don't occur in forty-two second or less.

4. We refuse to give up because we know God will unveil His plan in His time. Jeremiah said, "For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord." What does God know that we don't know? God knows the plans He has for you. There are over seven billion people in the world living on multiple planets and God knows the specific plan He has for you? Amazingly, He knows every detail of that plan and, every morning, He makes the necessary provisions to see that each piece of that plan occurs precisely at the right time. Would you give up on a God who knows that much about you and goes to that much effort just for you?

5. We refuse to give up because persistence always wins. In my office hangs a large photo of a stream rushing through the rocks on either side. The caption beneath the photo reads, "In the confrontation between the stream and the rock, the stream always wins, not through strength but through persistence." You and I, we have no power to influence the mind of God. All we have at our fingertips is the persistence He has instructed us to leverage for our benefit. It may look easier to give up, to stop praying, to stop waiting, but God Himself speaks as He says, "Persistence always wins. Don't lose heart. Don't stop praying. I will answer when the time is right!"

6. We refuse to give up on prayer because God is our only hope. If not God, then what or who? Turn your back on God and you will find out what absolute hopelessness feels like. We remain fervent in prayer, we continue to ask the same prayers repeatedly because we have everything to gain and, if we stop, we have everything to lose. No one out there can do what God can do. No one out there has the answers God has. No one out there can give you the strength He gives in the midst of your crises. No one out there has the power, the wisdom, the knowledge, or the ability to do whatever God wants done. Prayer is our connection to the only hope found in this world.

7. "I've had it. I give up. I quit!" We know those statements all too well. Yet, as we find ourselves in the stillness of God's presence, we must and we will continue to say, "I'm not giving up! God will come through for me!" Amen.