

Confident Praying

Lawrence O. Harper, D.Min.

PART 5

Luke 18:1-8; 1 John 5:14-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

“Every time we pray, our horizon is altered, our attitude to things is altered, not sometimes, but every time and the amazing thing is that we don’t pray more.”

– Oswald Chambers

What would it take for us to have prayer confidence? How can we develop an unshakeable confidence as we pray? We have all felt the void in praying, wondering if our prayers get “beyond the ceiling.” There are also those moments when we wonder if our prayers will help us know the will of God. Often times, the will of God becomes both a vague idea and an infinite wisdom. We question if we will ever know it. How can we have the confidence that we will?

It is at these junctions in our lives that our prayer of faith grows cold and lifeless. We lose confidence in praying, and when we lose confidence we stop praying. When we stop praying, we stop our walk with God, and prayerlessness invites disaster.

There are three scripture passages that will help us to grow into prayer confidence. As the truth in these verses is accepted, we will see our praying becoming more enthusiastic, more serious, and more focused. We will find ourselves praying more and with greater confidence.

Confident Praying Has a Quick Result.

In the previous chapters of this series, we learned that continuous, confident prayer was encouraged by Jesus. “Keep on asking, keep on seeking, and keep on knocking” were His imperatives (Matthew 7:7). In order to make sure they understood, He told His disciples an interesting parable about a poor widow and a greedy judge.

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ ⁴ “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!’” ⁶ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ 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? ⁸ 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?” (Luke 18:1-8).

Widows were at the bottom of the economic ladder in Jesus’ day. If they did not have a family member that could see to their matters, they were quite honestly left out in the cold. To add to this widow’s misery was a dishonest judge. It was not uncommon in that day for judges and their officers to be so corrupt that bribes had to be paid in order for a case to be heard. ¹ Widows lacked the means

¹ Gilmour, S. MacLean, *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. VIII, (New York: Abingdon Press) 1952.

to be a part of this type of system. Our heroine of the parable, however, persists until the judge decides to hear her case, not out of a desire for justice but to simply get rid of her.

Is Jesus saying that to get what we want or need from God we should keep asking and asking like the widow until He finally gives in to hear and respond to our case? Like a child wanting something so badly that she keeps on begging, pestering her parents until they finally give in out of sheer annoyance of the repeated requests, are we to persist until God answers us? Are we to badger Him until He acts?

There is a strong tradition in the Christian faith that affirms this type of persistence in praying. Some Bible versions will have a subtitle for this parable called, "Persistency in Prayer," holding to this traditional interpretation of the parable. There is also the tradition that I call "volume praying." We produce prayer lists and put ourselves on them believing that the more people praying, and the more prayers offered the better off we'll be. What's behind that kind of thinking? Simply, the more people we have praying for us the greater the chance that the Lord will hear all those prayers and be convinced to respond because of the repeated, massive prayer assault.

Please do not read that I am opposed to "keep on asking" and sharing concerns onto prayer lists. These are a part of our prayer lives, petition and intercession. What I do place in question is the theological misunderstanding behind such traditions. We must remind ourselves that prayer is a spiritual, relational thing rather than a magical, manipulative one.

Look at the parable closely. Jesus is not comparing God to an unjust judge. He is *contrasting* the greedy judge with a gracious God. The judge did not want to be bothered where God welcomes His children. The judge responded in irritation to the widow where God responds as a father to a child. The judge put the widow off time and time again, but God will "quickly grant justice."

Also, notice the contrast between the widow and the child of God. The widow had no lawyer and had little hope where the children of God are welcomed to bring their petitions confident of His love and hope. The disciples were being told by their Master that they had a far greater status and far greater assurance in God's economy than they probably had realized.

For us today, we have a wonderful testimony from the Scriptures in this regard; namely, we have a High Priest, Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us as we come to God in prayer (Hebrews 7:25). The widow had no one to represent her case before the judge, but we have Jesus Christ to represent us before the Heavenly Father.

The message of the parable is God is willing to answer. If the judge in the parable finally meets the needs of a poor widow, how much more will the Heavenly Father be willing to meet the needs of His own children when they cry to Him? Confident prayer celebrates the contrasts between how the earth does business and how the Heavenly Father responds to His children.

Dennis the Menace is often pictured praying in the comic strip. One time he is praying, "In case the reception was bad during the storm last night, I'll do a recap of my prayers." For certain, there is no reception problem when God's children pray. We can take great confidence that we are heard by our Heavenly Father who is willing to respond whether or not we are persistent and whether or not there is a great volume of praying going on. Herein, we may be confident.

Confident Praying Has a Guiding Principle.

John also reiterates the confidence that God will hear and respond to His children; however, there is one condition. We must ask according to His will. This is the guiding principle of confident prayer.

¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 John 5:14-15).

Praying according to the will of God is not an effort to know necessarily the specific details of situations but to pray with the right heart. In other words, we are praying wanting what God wants. This principle is implied as you study the prayer life of Jesus. He modeled an identification with God's will rather than an intent to persuade God's will to fulfill His desires. For Him prayer was a way of life, guided by the principle of wanting what God wanted.

If we are praying as a dependent humble child rather than as a selfish, demanding creature, we are praying according to the will of God. If we are asking, seeking, and knocking as a response to the lovingkindness of God, we are praying according to His will. If we are praying with our minds made up about God's sovereign character and promises, we are praying according to His will. If we are praying for God to be glorified in His Son, we are praying according to His will.

Therefore, if you are petitioning God in prayer and wondering whether or not it is according to His will, remove the particulars of place, time, money, and any other physical criteria and ask yourself, "Are my intentions in praying aligned with the desires of my heavenly Father. Am I wanting what God wants?"

Well, you might ask, "What does God want?" Remember that the will of God is a spiritual concept and cannot be known except through spiritual discernment. The Father helps us in this regard. First of all, He has given us His Word, a spiritual entity, and secondly, He has given to His children His Spirit, a spiritual force. Through the Scriptures God reveals who He is, how He operates, and what He expects...His will. Through the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we are able to understand the Word of God (John 16:13-14).

The one problem some of us have, however, is the emotional side of our lives. Because we are so emotionally wrapped up, we will seek to discern God's will by some feeling without knowledge of the Word. If something makes us have "spiritual goose pimples," then we think it must be the moving of the Holy Spirit, and if any situation is tied to that emotion, then it must be a sign from God. We will make conclusions about the will of the Father on the basis of our up and down emotions.

Never forget that your faith is not based upon your feelings but upon the truth of God in Christ. Faith that is based upon only emotion without truth is mere sentimentality and will only add to the roller coaster ride of life.

Others are more intellectual than some, so they will search the Scriptures for knowledge, and whenever "it all falls into place," meaning there is logic to what has been learned, then it must be the will of God. Far too often believers searching for the will of God for their lives will eagerly yearn for some word from the Lord and think they have found it in some verse taken out of its context.

Further, we will try and make the Scriptures say what we want them to say in order to support our agendas or deceptive needs.

We should always be very careful to allow God to speak to us through His Word without our biases. Faith that is based upon biased knowledge alone without the truth will be legalistic.

The work of the Holy Spirit and the revelation of the Scriptures go hand in hand when praying according to the will of God. Three spiritual concepts working in tandem. When a ship sets for the open sea, three critical items are required beyond general supplies. It is imperative that the ship has a radio, a compass, and navigational charts. Much like a ship at sea, the believer must employ the combination of prayer, the Spirit, and the Word to discern the will of the Father. Spiritual communication, spiritual guidance, and spiritual direction bring us to wanting what God wants.

Confident Praying Has a Long View.

The Apostle Paul also affirms the confidence of the believer in praying as he gives some final encouragement to the Thessalonians in the closing of his first letter to them.

¹⁶ Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Because of who they are in Christ, their relationship with the Lord should display notable traits.

Joy will be obvious in the demeanor of the believer. Their approach to living should not be haphazard, but purposeful and confident. In every situation faced they have the potential to be and should be thankful to God. Nothing should be so great or problematic as to hinder praising or giving thanks to the Heavenly Father.

Notice that these traits are forever. The descriptive words attached to joy, prayer, and thanksgiving, "always," "continuing," and "in everything," identify a perspective of life that God intends for us. In other words, we look to the whole of our living not just the urgencies of the day. If we allow ourselves, we can grapple so with the present that we will drown in it, losing the joy the Lord's will intends. There must be a longer, faithful view. Of course, we do not ignore the urgencies and duties of the day, but they are handled with the care and sensibility fostered by a faith that forever looks to and waits for the Lord. Praying helps us keep this perspective.

"Pray without ceasing" does not mean the vain repetitious acts of "babbling" on and on like the pagans (Matthew 6:7), but is a consistency and constancy of the mind, will, and emotions (Psalm 21:2; 145:19). We continue to pray even though there will come things our way that could hinder and even stop our praying. This is how believers continue in their faith. Our faith is in the One who redeemed us in Jesus Christ and not in ourselves or our abilities. We must have the long view of life: from the day we first believed to the day we will be received in God's Heaven.

While we wait, our praying to God is "continuous" or "without ceasing," and we demonstrate a unique spirit of thankfulness even in the midst of trial or joy. Paul tells us that a joyful, thankful spirit that expresses itself in unceasing prayer is God's design for all believers.

Conclusions

It takes a solid trust that God will respond to us as His children for us to have confidence in praying. This truth is repeated time and again in the Scriptures. Meditating on the Word of God and surrendering to its truth as revealed to us through the guidance of the Holy Spirit will cause our praying to be transformed to wanting what God wants. Our praying will become a renewed walk with Christ because three spiritual concepts of prayer, Word and Spirit are united. Finally, we can be confident in praying because we have a long view of our lives. We are headed somewhere. Our lives have meaning. While in this journey we handle the mundane with an inner joy, unceasing prayer, and thanksgiving.

As hard as it might be, it is time for us to tweak our theology of prayer. Prayer is not our informing or notifying God of anything, but rather our approaching God in humility and in dependence. We come in a relationship with our sovereign Father, knowing and trusting, assured of his interest in and care for us *right then*.

Henri Nouwen says it best when he writes: "Prayer is a radical conversion of all our mental processes because in prayer we move away from ourselves, our worries, preoccupations and self-gratification—and direct all that we recognize as ours to God in the simple trust that through His love all will be made new."