

## ***“Persistence in Prayer”***

*February 16, 2025 — Selby United Church – Scripture Luke 18:1-8*

*By Rebecca Stacey*

After all, isn't it reasonable that our response to a Father who loves us so deeply—so much that He sent His Son to die for us—would be persistent prayer? That we would acknowledge His indescribable love by staying in constant conversation with Him. That nothing is too big or too small to bring before Him, and even when we don't understand His timing, we trust Him through prayer.

Life often leaves us with scars—reminders of the challenges we've faced and the healing we've experienced. Jesus shows us the importance of prayer in every season of life, teaching us to pray persistently and to deepen our relationship with God.

To those working full-time jobs, raising children, juggling endless responsibilities, and praying for wisdom in guiding the next generation: remember that Jesus, too, sought the Father's guidance in big decisions. Before choosing His disciples, He spent the night in prayer. Trust that as you bring your concerns to God, He will provide the wisdom you need.

To those navigating school, friendships, and the transition from childhood to adulthood, remember that Jesus, too, experienced the challenges of growing up. As a child, He grew in wisdom and stature and as a young man, He faced temptation and remained faithful. Persistent prayer can anchor you in truth, remind you of your worth, and strengthen you to stand firm in a world that often pulls you in many directions.

To those carrying the joys and burdens of seeing the next generation of your families grow, persistent prayer can be a lifeline. Just as Jesus prayed for His disciples and for all who would come to believe in Him

(John 17:20-21), your prayers strengthen the faith of future generations, as you lift up your children, grandchildren, and all who will follow in the path of faith.

To those who are grieving, walking through seasons of mourning and loneliness: Jesus, too, knew the depths of sorrow and brought His anguish to God in the Garden of Gethsemane. Persistent prayer reminds you that God is close to the broken-hearted and is your constant source of comfort and strength.

To those wrestling with strained relationships or the pain of conflict: follow Jesus' example on the cross when, betrayed by His friends, and scorned by His enemies, He prayed, "Father, forgive them." Persistent prayer softens our hearts, enabling God to work in us and through us to bring healing and reconciliation.

While our present-day use of the word "persistent" may seem like a call to be an annoyance or to wear God down, that's not what it means. Persistent prayer is about cultivating a deep dependence on God. It's about showing up, day after day, and trusting that He is working toward His big picture—even when we can't see it.

Let's let persistence shape our prayers. Bring your joys and your sorrows, your scars, your struggles, and your story to God, and trust Him to continue His work. Keep knocking, keep seeking, and keep asking. Trust that God is faithful to respond. In His presence, our joys are multiplied, our scars are softened, our struggles find strength, and our lives are transformed by His grace.

Amen.

Recall, two weeks ago, we read that Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them *how to pray*. Through His teaching, the foundation for relational prayer was laid. In Luke's gospel, Jesus followed up His teaching of the Lord's Prayer with a parable (Luke 11:1-13) that emphasizes God's willingness to respond to those who pray with persistence and trust.

*Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.' And suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need" (Luke 11:5-8).*

Jesus told this parable about the friend who persistently asks for bread highlighting the importance of perseverance in prayer. The request itself wasn't that big. By etiquette's standards, I suppose that it was a bit rude. Asking a neighbour for a cup of sugar in the morning is different than banging on the door in the middle of the night because friends arrive, and you don't have any groceries in the house.

*"...yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need" (Luke 11:8.)*

With this statement, Jesus assured His disciples that "audacity" doesn't mean

disrespect, but rather a courageous and relentless approach, without fear of rejection or discomfort. Some translations use the word "boldness" to describe the request. God is a loving Father and gives good gifts to those who ask Him.

Jesus said: *"So, I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."* (Luke 11:9-10)

Jesus is encouraging us to keep coming to God in prayer. He tells us to ask, knowing that God is generous and wants to give to those who seek Him. Seeking means going beyond just asking for things; it's about truly pursuing God's will and His presence in our lives, as our loving Father. And knocking is all about persistence—continuing to approach God, even when it feels like the answer isn't coming right away, trusting that He will open a door when the time is right.

Through this parable, Jesus emphasizes that if even imperfect humans will eventually help someone who asks boldly, how much more will God, who is perfectly loving and just, respond to our persistent prayers?

Jesus isn't telling us to wear God down with our requests; He's teaching us that persistent prayer helps us build a deeper relationship with God. As we keep asking, seeking, and knocking, our hearts align with God's will, and we trust that He will respond in His perfect way and timing.

Through today's scripture reading, we find another lesson from Jesus, encouraging us to petition God persistently. *"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up"* (Luke 18:1).

As we heard earlier, Jesus tells the story of a widow and an unjust judge to teach about persistence in prayer. In Jesus' time, widows were among the most vulnerable members of society. Without a husband to provide for them, they often had little financial security and very few legal rights.

This widow keeps going to the judge, asking for justice, likely she had been wronged, perhaps over an inheritance, land, or financial support that was being withheld. Without a male advocate to plead her case, she had to go alone, and she did!

Now, this judge doesn't fear God and doesn't care about people, so he ignores her at first. But she is relentless. Day after day, she keeps coming back, asking for justice. Finally, the judge just gets tired of her persistence and says, *"Even though I don't fear God or care about people, I'm going to give her what she wants so she'll leave me alone."*

Jesus explains the point: *If even an unjust, uncaring judge gives in because of persistence, how much more will our loving God respond to His people who cry out to Him day and night?*

How does this parable resonate with you? Verses 1-7 sit well with me. It's a feel-good sort of tale. I love it when Jesus tells a story with humour and teases out our very human ways. He knows us so well. He knows we want to ask and receive! It's not

until **verse 8** that it hits me. *Oh, there's the aha moment!* Jesus' parables and lessons always have an *aha moment*.

*"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 11:8).

This is a call for persistence – to keep praying, trusting, and not to lose heart. Jesus is teaching that faith isn't instant—it takes perseverance. God promises justice, but His timing is often different from ours, so we need to keep pressing on, even when we don't see immediate results. Persistent prayer helps us build endurance in our spiritual lives and strengthens our trust in God's goodness. Jesus also points to the hope of His return, encouraging us to keep trusting in God's promises, even when trials come or when His justice doesn't look like we expect.

Jesus knew there would be times when would find it challenging to keep the faith. I'm thankful that during his time on Earth, He modelled persistence in prayer. Jesus prayed in all situations.

### 1. Before Important Decisions

Before selecting the twelve disciples, Jesus spent the entire night in prayer.

*"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles"* (Luke 6:12-13).

If Jesus took time to seek the Father's guidance in prayer, how much more should we? Listening to God often requires us to step back from our busyness and focus entirely on Him.

### 2. During Times of Grief

Upon learning of John the Baptist's death, Jesus prayed.

*"When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place"* (Matthew 14:13).

When we face loss or heartache, Jesus shows us that prayer can be a place of refuge, comfort and strength.

### 3. Before Major Challenges

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed intensely, wrestling with the weight of His mission but ultimately submitting to God's will.

*"Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' ... Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will'"* (Matthew 26:36-39).

Jesus modelled how to seek God's will even in the most challenging moments. He didn't avoid prayer when things got hard; instead, He leaned in and trusted the Father's plan.

### 4. Amid Success

After a day of healing and preaching, Jesus chose to retreat early to pray. Despite the demands of the crowds, He prioritized His relationship with the Father.

*"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'"* (Mark 1:35-37).

Even when life is going well, Jesus demonstrated the need for prayer. He modelled that prayer is essential for maintaining our connection with God in all

seasons. We are invited to do the same, to come into this relationship with childlike persistence.

Children are fully dependent, and when you're fully dependent, you need to be persistent in your asking. Persistence pays off for kids. They ask until someone says yes. They have no shame. They know what they want and they're not stopping until they get it, or the opportunity is no longer available. And then, they're right on asking for the next thing, knocking at the next door, *Mom, Dad, can I...*

***Can you begin to imagine the depth of your faith and the connection you would build, if you prayed for God's will to be done, as persistently as the children in our lives make requests upon us?***

- *Dad, let Your will be done.*
- *Dad, help me to do Your will in this situation.*
- *Dad, guide my steps to align with Your will.*
- *Dad, give me the strength to surrender to Your plan.*
- *Dad, help me trust that Your will is better than mine.*
- *Dad, give me wisdom to see Your will clearly.*
- *Dad, let my heart desire what You desire.*
- *Father, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Take a moment to reflect on your time in prayer. When do you pray? What do you say? Are you consistent? Are you persistent? Do you have new conversations with God, or do you share the same prayers you've always prayed? Maybe you feel comfortable with your prayer life, but perhaps God is inviting you into a deeper conversation—one that goes beyond routine and draws you even closer to Him.