

Sermon: Persistent Prayer—A Conversation that Transforms (18th October 2025)

Texts: Luke 18:1–8; 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5

A little boy once wanted a bicycle but didn't quite know how to pray for one. So one evening he watched a traditional church service on television and decided to imitate the minister. Kneeling beside his bed, he prayed earnestly, "Lord, if it is in Your sovereign will and in Your eternal plan that I can get myself a bicycle—in Your time and according to Your will—would You please get me a bicycle. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Two days later, no bicycle. So he watched another programme, this time with a preacher who was more assertive in faith. That night the boy declared, "Lord, I claim my need for a blue bicycle, to be delivered to my home within 24 hours! I believe it, I receive it, Amen!"

Days passed. Still no bicycle. As he walked through the hall, he saw a statue of the Virgin Mary on a shelf. He quietly took it away and hid it. That night, kneeling to pray, he said, "Dear Jesus... if you ever want to see your mother again..."

It's a funny story—but it captures something true about our human struggle with prayer. We sometimes treat prayer as a transaction, or as a formula to get what we want. And when it doesn't work, we try new strategies, new words, new bargains.

Today, as we gather in worship, around 85 million Anglicans across 165 countries are praying with us — at least the majority of them. Across the wider Church, more than 2.38 billion Christians are also worshipping at different times today, many joining in the Holy Communion and offering prayers for one another.

But why do we continue and persistent to pray?

Even when prayers often seem unanswered, or not answered in the way they hoped, Christians continue to pray. Some people give up on prayer altogether. Others see it merely as a psychological exercise. Some imagine it to have magical power. Many approach it in desperation — longing for healing, answers, or tangible results.

Into this human struggle and longing, Jesus tells a parable — about a widow who keeps asking for justice but does not receive it immediately. And yet, Jesus says: do not give up.

1. The Parable of Persistence and the Silence of God

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a story of a widow who keeps pleading with an unjust judge for justice. Luke tells us Jesus shared this parable to show that we "should always pray and not give up."

At first, it sounds simple—pray persistently, and you'll get what you ask for. But our real experience tells a different story. Many of us have prayed for healing, reconciliation, or justice, and yet God seemed silent. Even Jesus knew that silence. In Gethsemane, he prayed, "Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me." The cup was not taken away. God's will prevailed—but through that unanswered prayer came the redemption of the world.

On the cross, Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—words that reveal the full humanity of his suffering, the feeling of being unheard, even abandoned. But even in that silence, God was working redemption through the very event that seemed like defeat.

2. Prayer as Conversation, Not Transaction

Prayer is not a magical formula or a psychological exercise to make us feel better. Some people indeed treat prayer as a coping mechanism—something that calms the mind but does not move heaven. Others believe that if we fast, pray hard, and ask in Jesus’ name, God will surely act and even intervene in nature and history.

Both views capture a fragment of truth, yet the whole picture is larger. As one theologian observed:

“Much prayer in the church has been reduced to an emotional exercise... we water down our petitions so as not to ask in bold ways, assuming there is no one listening anyway.”

But we must remember another truth:

“God does not act the same way whether we pray or not. Prayer exerts an influence on God’s action... God is not deaf—He listens, and He acts.”

Prayer, then, is a real conversation—a meeting between divine and human hearts. When God spoke with Abraham or Moses, it was not a one-way monologue. It was dialogue, sometimes even debate. Abraham pleaded for Sodom, and God said “yes” to some parts and “no” to others. Moses interceded for Israel, and God sometimes relented—and sometimes refused.

Human sin, at its heart, is our claim to autonomy—trying to live apart from God’s voice. When two hearts are far apart, conversation becomes shouting. Even when they are physically near, they don’t listen. Today, technology connects us instantly, yet we often ignore each other’s messages. Likewise, when our hearts drift from God, we stop hearing even though God is still speaking. Prayer brings our hearts back into proximity with God’s.

A mission worker prayed for a bicycle, and God provided one. Later, he asked for a motorbike, and God gave him that too. He then prayed for a car, and it was also granted. Eventually, he was meant to travel to Parliament to receive a national medal, but on the way, his car broke down in a dense forest. He could not leave the vehicle because of fear of wild animals, and he was unable to push it the remaining five miles to catch his flight. In this way, what he had received through prayer became, unexpectedly, an obstacle in his path.

3. Prayer That Changes Us

Look at Daniel. He prayed faithfully for his people in exile. God did not immediately restore Jerusalem. Instead, Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den. But through that trial, God revealed His faithfulness and elevated Daniel in a foreign empire. Daniel’s prayer changed him before it changed his circumstances.

Abraham prayed and was granted a child, but he never possessed the land promised to him. He lived as a wanderer, trusting that God’s promise would unfold for future generations. His prayer was answered in part, because he was part of a story much larger than himself.

In this way, prayer doesn't just change the world—it changes us. It molds our desires to fit God's purpose. It turns us from demanding quick results to trusting in God's larger story.

4. The Mystery and Power of Prayer

Prayer is a mystery. It's not about manipulating divine power; it's about participating in divine love. It is both personal and communal, an act of faith that shapes our world.

Some say, "Prayer doesn't work—so why bother?" But prayer *is* work—the work of faith. It is preparation, participation, and perseverance. It involves listening, acting, and following up.

Prayer may not always change circumstances, but it changes communities. It binds us together in hope and compassion. It builds a bridge between heaven and earth, between despair and faith.

5. The Application: Praying for Family, Community, Nation, and the World

If prayer is conversation with God, then it must also be conversation *for others*—for our families, our communities, our nations, and our world.

- **For our families:** Prayer teaches us to listen, forgive, and remain patient. It restores relationships and helps us to hear each other's hearts as God hears ours.
- **For our communities:** Persistent prayer invites us to work for justice, to care for the lonely, and to stand with those whose voices are unheard—like the persistent widow in the parable.
- **For our nation:** Prayer calls us beyond self-interest to righteousness and peace, reminding leaders and citizens alike that moral and spiritual renewal are as vital as economic growth.
- **For the world:** Prayer reminds us that we belong to one human family—interdependent, fragile, and beloved by God. In a time of wars, climate crises, and divisions, prayer aligns us with God's purpose for peace and restoration.

When we pray for others, our hearts expand. Prayer becomes an act of solidarity, an expression of love that binds heaven and earth.

Conclusion

So, Jesus says, "Pray always and do not give up." Not because God is reluctant, but because through prayer, we grow closer to the heart of God.

Prayer is not an escape from reality—it is our way of entering God's reality. It's not simply words we speak; it's life we live. It's a conversation that transforms, sustains, and sends us out to love and serve in the name of Christ.

So keep on praying—when you're waiting for God's generous presence in our lives⁶, when God seems silent, when the world feels heavy. For in every prayer, God is nearer than you think, listening, shaping, and acting in ways far greater than we can imagine.

"What shall I do when my prayer is not answered in the way I hoped?"

Perhaps the answer is to keep praying, keep trusting, and allow God to transform our hearts as we continue in faithful conversation. For in persistent prayer, we discover that God is always present, always listening, and always working—for our good and for the sake of His Kingdom.

Let us go forth, then, with patience, hope, and unwavering faith, remembering that prayer shapes not only the world around us but the very hearts of those who pray.

Amen.

I asked for strength and God
gave me difficulties to make me strong.

I asked for wisdom and God
gave me problems to solve.

I asked for prosperity and God
gave me brawn and brains to work.

I asked for courage and God
gave me dangers to overcome.

I asked for patience and God
placed me in situations where I was forced to wait.

I asked for love and God
gave me troubled people to help.

I asked for favors and God
gave me opportunities.

I asked for everything so I could enjoy life.
Instead, He gave me life so I could enjoy everything.

I received nothing I wanted,
I received everything I needed.

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