

2022 NA Leaders Conference

THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

Luke 18:1-14

Key Verse: 1, “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”

Happy New Year 2022! Although the pandemic seems to be stubbornly sticking around, our faithful God has brought us a new beginning without fail. Upon beginning 2022, what is your New year’s resolution? Maybe to exercise more? To eat more healthy food? Perhaps spend less time on smartphones and read more books? What about any spiritual resolutions? How about ‘more prayer’ as a new year’s resolution? In today’s passage, Jesus teaches His disciples about prayer, specifically about the ‘Spirit’ of prayer. Through His 2 parables, Jesus charges His disciples to always pray and not give up! At this time, may Jesus equip us with the right spirit of prayer to start the new year with new strength and humble repentance. Amen.

First, Spirit of Persistence in Prayer. (1-8) Let’s look at verse 1. “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” /From P. Moses Yoon’s message earlier, we learned how Jesus prayed and chose the twelve disciples. Now, the time was fast approaching for Jesus to go to Jerusalem to die on the cross. Though the twelve had been following Jesus for some time, they were still spiritually weak and unprepared. They had no idea what would happen to Jesus in Jerusalem. Jesus knew exactly what would happen to Him and to the twelve. There’d be tremendous difficulties, disappointments, failures and persecutions which the twelve would have to deal with. Knowing that, Jesus told the twelve a parable to prepare their hearts. Let’s read verse 1 together again. “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” Jesus knew that at this critical time, the twelve had to pray and pray with the right spirit. Jesus Himself always prayed. Throughout the Bible, it is not hard to find the passage where Jesus is described to pray. On the other hand, we do not see much about the twelve praying in the Bible. They either fall asleep or quarrel with one another instead of praying. We might find ourselves easily getting distracted or falling asleep while praying too. Jesus says, we should always pray and not give up.

Let’s look at verses 2-3. “He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’” /In this parable, there are 2 main characters: a widow and a judge. We don’t know exactly what a widow wants

when she asks the judge for justice against her adversary. Anyway, her matter was unfair and devastating enough to make her keep coming to a judge with the plea. Here we have to note two things about these 2 people. First, a judge neither feared God nor cared what people thought. Second, this woman was a widow, meaning she had no husband and most likely had no social power or status to approach the judge. Humanly speaking, it was the worst set up and this widow had no chance. Most people in that kind of situation would not even bother to start, thinking it would be a waste of time and energy. However, this widow kept coming to this heartless judge with a clear request. I'm sure this widow was not stupid and already knew how the judge would react to her plea. But she persistently came to him with her plea. It could seem pointless to keep coming and there might have been some days when she felt really discouraged and felt like giving up. However, this woman was persistent and did not stop.

In this postmodern 21st century era, especially under the pandemic and the virtual world dominating, it could seem pointless or impossible to keep praying and coming to campus and inviting students to Jesus. Just like the godless judge and a helpless widow, it might seem like the worst set up and already a lost battle. Why waste time and energy on campus mission? During the summer of 2021, me and my wife Esther paired with some of our student leaders to go to the University of Alberta campus 2 by 2 every week to pray and invite students. We planted the seed of prayer and met some students here and there each week, but 9 out of 10 times, the answer was a big fat 'no' 'not interested!' Still, every week, we kept coming to campus throughout the whole summer and talked to students and prayed. At this point, you might wonder how it all turned out at the end of summer. Well, not even one showed up out of all those students we met the whole summer! Students on campus were like that godless, heartless judge in a parable and we were like a helpless powerless widow. It felt like no one on campus seemed to care about God. To keep coming to campus felt like a waste of time, a lost battle. Why bother? It wouldn't work! Satan planted doubts and pessimistic thoughts. I felt burnt out and sometimes, it even felt like a waste of time to keep praying, keep preparing for Sunday messages and organizing Bible studies every week. Why bother? What's the point? I'm not even a real pastor nor a trained counselor. And the pandemic will never go away. Why bother? Why try? Why bother to keep going to a judge who will not even budge at my plea anyway? I should just stop talking to students and not do anything.

But, that's NOT how this widow was in Jesus' parable! That was NOT the spirit! Despite the judge's ignoring and repeated cold responses, she kept coming to him with her plea! She was determined to not give up!

This new year 2022, what are some of your prayer topics? Are there any prayer topics that you've been persistently praying for but have not gotten any answers to? How

persistent is really persistent when it comes to prayer anyway? We do not know, but there are some examples of those who persistently prayed with the same prayer topic for years. Monica, St Augustine's mother persistently prayed for her son. St. Augustine who is a well-known theologian and a writer actually had a very wayward youth. He was sexually immoral to the point where he became a teenaged father of a child at the age of 17 outside of marriage. Then how could someone like him be converted and become such a devout and influential man of faith? His mother Monica persistently prayed for him in tears for 17 years. I just prayed for a few months last summer and thought I was persistent. 17 long years of persistent prayer of a mother moved God's heart. A bishop who heard about her persistent prayer commented that a child with this much prayer with tears will never perish. God hears the persistent prayer of parents for their lost children.

Speaking of the parent's persistent prayer for children, I actually have an example from my own family. God answered the persistent prayer of my grandmother who was actually a widow and made all her 3 children and their 3 spouses UBF missionaries: my late uncle M. Daniel Park, my aunt M. Sarah Hwang in Mexico and my mother M. Grace Chang are all missionaries and I'm part of the next generation with my wife and my sister and her husband and some of my cousins and their spouses who are all UBF missionaries in North America too. Now we all have our own children, the 4th generation (total 10) who are growing as the future prophets and prophetesses of God as well. I usually take this for granted, but when I think about it, it is truly amazing that almost my entire family of 4 generations from my mom's side are all UBF missionaries in North America and in Mexico City. It certainly did not happen overnight and was not easy. Some almost didn't make it, including myself. I'm sure it took decades of persistent prayer from my grandmother who is now in heaven. I would certainly not be here serving campus mission and delivering this message, if it wasn't for her persistent and sincere prayer. Therefore, we cannot guess nor underestimate the impact of persistent prayer. We just simply can't imagine how much God will do through persistent prayer.

God definitely hears the persistent prayer of parents for their lost children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. /And God hears the persistent prayer of shepherds for their lost sheep. There are so many spiritually lost children and students on campus in North America. May God help us to pray persistently for them without giving up because we know our God hears! Amen!

Now let's look at verses 4-5. "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" Initially, it might have seemed like a totally lost battle with no chance for this poor widow. However, as she kept coming and bothering him, the judge would deal with her

request and even grant it! She did NOT stop! The Bible describes her as the ‘persistent’ widow. Persistent (by Oxford dictionary definition) means ‘Continuing firmly in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition’. So, praying persistently means to continue to pray firmly despite the difficulty or opposition. There was difficulty and hostility from the judge, but this widow did not give up. /With the upcoming death of Jesus on the cross and the threats of persecutions, the twelve disciples would have to deal with so many difficulties and rejections for sure. For us, with the pandemic and the ungodly and secular influences on campuses, there’s challenge in serving campus mission. However, Jesus wanted to show the twelve and us that we should always pray and not give up despite the difficulties, rejections or oppositions, just like this persistent widow. Sometimes we might feel discouraged and question, ‘why bother?’ ‘Why waste any more time and energy?’ We might feel as if our prayers just hit the wall and fall to the ground. All summer, we tried and not even one new person showed up. We felt like our prayers just fell to the ground as if nothing happened. Well, here’s a twist. Summer ended and September came. God graciously reopened the campus and the Clubs Fair and the classes were in-person again after a year and a half. I was still a bit skeptical based on my experience during the summer. But God proved me so wrong! Our prayer during the summer was NOT in vain. God was paying attention to our persistent prayer and showed us that there are so many students on campus who truly need and seek Jesus, about 80 signed up at the Club’s fair. And each week, God sent new students constantly! These students were really looking for Bible studies and worship on campus and thirsty for the opportunity to have fellowship with Kingdom friends on campus! I was totally blown away by God’s answer to our prayers. The best part is that our God is NOT like that godless cold-hearted judge. God generously answered our prayers way beyond our expectations and imaginations. That is how our God is. Praise God!

/Now let’s look at verses 6-8. “And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 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? 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?” /Our God is generous, not reluctant, to hear our persistent cry. Sometimes when we do not hear any answer to our prayer, we could start doubting and panicking. Our enemy Satan is persistent too and keeps trying to lure us away from prayer life and make us give up, because even he knows that our persistent prayer makes God’s heart move. And when God’s heart moves and works on His children’s lives, our enemy Satan would start losing his power over us. So he does whatever it takes to make us stop praying. We might be constantly distracted during our prayer by our phone, instagram, kakao talk etc. But more fundamentally, what weakens our prayer and makes us give up is our own unbelief! In verse 7, Jesus asks His disciples, “Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?” Based on this, God will answer the prayer from His

chosen ones. In this parable, a judge seems to be in a much higher and favourable position than the widow. However, the chosen ones in Jesus' point of view are NOT the powerful big shots of the world like the judge. Rather, the chosen ones are the ones who persistently cry out to Jesus day and night like the widow who cried out by faith! In verse 8b, Jesus asks "...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Jesus wants to find faith in our hearts. What ultimately motivated the widow to keep coming to the judge was faith. We must keep our faith in any situation, even when our prayer does not seem to get answered initially. Our prayer life is a spiritual battle. We must be equipped with the full armour of God! In Ephesians 6, on top of all the list of spiritual armours, Apostle Paul lists one more in verses 18-19: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel," /We must guard our hearts to keep our faith and keep on praying! Our unbelief, our own sin, past failures constantly interfere with our prayer and tempt us to give up. Life on this earth is a constant struggle and full of uncertainties especially with the pandemic. Life in 2022 might not always be rosy and smooth. I just heard the announcement from U of A that the January Clubs Fair for the new semester has been cancelled and the classes will go back online for 3 weeks due to growing cases. I was devastated. But, let us not lose faith and not give up! May God help us persistently pray with the spirit of perseverance and faith like the widow in this parable from Jesus, because we know our loving and generous God hears our prayer! Amen!

Second, Spirit of Humility & Repentance in Prayer. (9-14) Look at verse 9, "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:" /This second parable was targeting a group of people who were self-righteous, most likely the Pharisees. Earlier, through P. Moses Yoon's message on Luke 6, we saw how Jesus was deeply disappointed by the Pharisees, however Jesus still wanted to teach them and help them through this parable.

Look at verse 10. "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector." /Again in this parable, there are 2 main people: one a Pharisee and a tax collector. A Pharisee is the stereotypical self-righteous stuck-up snob, while a tax collector is a typical public sinner. They both came to the temple to pray, but with very contrasting motives and attitudes. Look at verse 11-12. "The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'" His prayer was not really a prayer to God or about God, but about himself and comparing himself with others to show how superior he is. He does say, Thank you to God, but his thankfulness does not come from God but from his own achievements and from the fact that he is better than others. I doubt that anybody here prays like this. I certainly hope

not. My dear brother in Christ, Spencer Luebben from Minneapolis is such a holy and awesome man of God that he might pray like this, "God, I thank you that I am not like this David Chang fellow from Canada, so incompetent and sinful..." Nah, I don't think he prays like that. I certainly hope not! /But while we might not necessarily pray like a Pharisee, it's still definitely worth examining our prayer pattern and motive of prayer. Prayer should not be like a report on my own deeds and achievements or lists of to dos. While it is great to give thanks to God for the list of amazing things He did for us and He helped us do for Him, we must be careful that we do not list them and feel entitled for His compliments or blessings. In verse 9, Jesus describes those people as being confident of their own righteousness and looking down on everyone else. This Pharisee thought he was more righteous than robbers, evildoers, adulterers or this tax collector. He believed all the fasting and tithing made him righteous and better than others and gave him bragging rights. Again, we must examine our hearts and motives. I feel guilty that I sometimes become prideful. My wife M. Esther and I sometimes get into arguments because she feels that I act in self-righteous ways and judge her even for very minor errors or tiny mistakes. But the truth is I am certainly not righteous, very very far from it. No matter how many times a Pharisee fasts or how much tithes he offers at the temple, no matter how many Bible students or Sunday Worship service attendees we report, no matter how many messages we deliver at the conference or testimonies we write, based on God's standard, we are all unrighteous. Romans 3:10-12 point out this fact. "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." This is the truth. We are all sinners before God. We are only 'made' righteous by God's grace alone, not based on what we do nor how we are better than someone else. It's pointless to compare ourselves with others as we are all the same in God's eyes, all sinners who are equally in need of Jesus' forgiveness and salvation.

Now look at verse 13. "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' Unlike a Pharisee, the tax collector looked at himself, his own sins. Thinking of all his sins, he felt too ashamed to look up. Unlike a Pharisee, he focused on his own guilt. Then, he beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' His prayer was not based on his own merit. His prayer was full of humility and sincere repentance. He acknowledged himself as a sinner before God who is in need of God's mercy. Earlier, we noted that there is no one righteous, not even one. That means everyone without an exception is in dire need of God's mercy. Like this tax collector, we all do not deserve God's forgiveness. Only thing we deserve from God is actually punishment and judgment. Therefore, we need God's mercy which is freely given to sinners only out of God's compassion. /Some say that this whole pandemic and various natural disasters are God's judgment against this corrupted and sinful world. We are indeed going through an unprecedented time.

This past summer, some parts of Western Canada, including where I am, had very unusual heat waves and the temperature hit a record high. Where I am, we usually worry about being too cold, never about being too hot. Our God is the Almighty Creator God. If He wants, He can even make Canada scorching hot. He can let the pandemic cover the entire universe. Knowing that, we can't help but kneel down before Him in awe and repentance, begging for His mercy. This time of pandemic and this whole situation of working from home and virtual classes etc might be good opportunities for us to pray more in self reflection and repentance. We must pray humbly for God's mercy in this unprecedented time.

/Now look at verse 14. "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Outwardly, the Pharisee might seem much more holy and worthy than a tax collector, however in Jesus' sight, the tax collector went home justified before God. Both of them were unrighteous and undeserving sinners before God who were in need of God's mercy. The difference is that the Pharisee did not acknowledge the need of God's mercy because of his own self-righteousness and the sense of entitlement, while the tax collector fully acknowledged himself as a sinner in need of God's mercy.

/Our gracious God granted us to have this precious North American Leaders' conference. By God's mercy alone, we are all here, called to serve as the leaders of North American UBF chapters. Personally, I think it is absolutely bizarre and even ridiculous that someone like me is here attending this conference, even delivering a message like this. I mean, how? Why? This is absolutely by God's reckless love and mercy! While meditating on this Luke 18 passage and preparing for this message, I felt like a tax collector. I couldn't help but beat my chest and said, 'God, have mercy on me, an undeserving and impossible sinner. How can I dare to prepare and deliver this message?' I was very overwhelmed and even thought to ask P. Teddy that I'm really not worthy to do this, please let someone who is more worthy and capable do it. But, I'm here only by God's mercy alone which justified me through Jesus.

In this new year 2022, Jesus chose us as He chose the twelve. And He tells these 2 parables to us. He is encouraging us to always pray and not give up! Also, He reminds us of who we really are: sinners in need of God's mercy. He expects us to continue to come before Him in humility and repentance. As the leaders of NA UBF ministries, there could be times when we might feel discouraged, disappointed, exhausted and burnt out and feel like giving up. Our Jesus teaches us that we should always pray persistently and not give up! And He hears and answers in His way and His time! May God's mercy and love motivate us this year and equip us with the spirit of persistence and humility to

keep praying and repenting and serving the North American campus mission without giving up! Amen!