

PROCEEDING WITH PATIENCE

Introduction

After weeks or months in isolation, it's natural to ask "how long is this all going to last?" As we wait for things to play out—for economies to rebound and for pandemic infection and death rates to subside—it's all too easy for impatience to set in. Does God get it? Does he understand how we're feeling and what we're thinking as we press forward day by day? He most certainly does . . . and he proves it by his Word of promise and divine perspective.

Devotion

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? *Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily* (Luke 18:1-8a, ESV, emphasis added).

Is it a simple matter to trust Jesus' promise in this verse? No, it is not. It takes a long time to learn it, a lifetime to learn it well, and an eternity to fully appreciate it. But, again, that is the nature of faith—that we trust God's Word and promise. We abandon our reason and feelings in favor of Jesus' assurance that, as the Father's elect, we have to all of our prayers always the best answer of the perfect judge. That's the justice he won for us by all that he has done for our salvation. In that justice is our peace and our joy both now and forever.

Perhaps it will help a little if we give some thought to the way that God looks at time as contrasted with the way we look at it. *The big difference is that God always sees the end of things from their beginning; we tend to think only of the moment.* We are so shortsighted. A number of years ago, there was a commercial for an antacid of some sort; its catchy and very appealing promise was, "Relief is just a moment away!" That's the way we want things to be even in our prayers, do we not? I am in pain. My marriage is in trouble. My job is insecure. My children seem to be going down a path to ruin. My savings will never last. My health and strength are vanishing. All is lost! I am ruined! O God, where are you? Where is your promise of speedy help and relief? Why do you delay when you promised to rescue me quickly?

Now to be sure, sometimes God answers obviously with speed so swift that the prayer hasn't even been finished and the help has already come. Some of the minor liturgies, for example, begin with the Psalm verses: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise! Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O Lord!" These verses too often mindlessly spoken or sung are beautiful examples of prayers that God answers even before the prayer is finished. For what happens as soon as the last word of the verse has been sung? The organ breaks forth and we sing, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit." What is that but God's own answer to the cry for him to open our lips so that we might praise him? What is that but the answer of a forgiving and loving Father who has come at once to our rescue so that we would not be struck down and cast away from his presence because of our sins. He hurried to deliver. His help was at once at hand. And the simple fact that the worship service continued was proof of it.

But at other times and for other specific needs, his help seems not so hasty in its coming and it may feel a long way off. That is so, however, only because we are so shortsighted, because we do not consider as God does the end of a thing from its beginning. To learn better how God does that, just consider a few of the very many examples in the Bible. God promised the descendants of Abraham the land of Canaan. But they were not ready for the fulfillment of that promise until hundreds of years later at the time of Moses. God promised Ahaz the virgin birth of the Messiah in words that sound as though his coming is five minutes away (Isaiah 7:14). Likewise, the promises of the Savior's suffering and the result of his anguish are promised in words that sound like his work was already finished (Isaiah 53); but, in fact, the time would not be ripe for his appearing for another several hundred years. All of that is again because God sees things

from the beginning to their end, the end that he has perfectly planned for them. When the time is perfect, what he has promised comes to pass (Galatians 4:4). Even Jesus' prayer for rescue in the Garden of Gethsemane was answered only when the time was perfect for its answer: on Easter Sunday, after our redemption had been fully secured!

In all of these instances and in so many more, God answered speedily! He answered with his mind focused on the best possible time for him to answer and to give what he had promised. To have answered earlier would not have been a speedy answer; it would have been a premature answer. It would have been an answer that would have failed to accomplish God's own good and his gracious, always-loving purpose and intent for his elect, who cry to him day and night.

Learn from the poor woman in Mark 5 and so many like her. She was afflicted for 12 years with her terrible sickness. Do you imagine that she never prayed for help and rescue? Of course she called to God in pain and often for deliverance. Now, do you imagine that she complained after Jesus healed her about having had to wait so long? Certainly, she did not. The very waiting must have made her thanksgiving more profound than it would have been had the help come sooner.

So among the many things that this parable urges on us is the lesson of patience, yes, of faith when we pray for rescue from the earthly consequences of sins, whether our own or the sins of others. God's answer is speedy. It comes in just the right way and at just the perfect time. Again, it is the very nature of faith that it clings to God's promises when we cannot see in the moment what has been promised. Just as we trust that heaven is ours in the end even though we do not see it in the moment, so we trust that God's answers to our prayers are speedy; his help he does not delay.

In fact, the very appearance of delay is already part of his answer to our prayers. For with the apparent delay, God wants to teach us persistence as well as patience. He wants to drive out of our hearts any notions of merit or self-righteousness. He wants to remove any thought that the help when it comes is mere coincidence. He wants to get us closer to the point where we abandon ourselves entirely to his promises of grace and mercy. These and such other lessons as he may have in his fatherly and most loving heart would not be learned if he answered in any other way or at any other time than the one he has chosen. And so, looking more to the end of things than their beginning, we too come to understand bit by bit that he has answered us speedily and without delay, just as he promised.

Prayer

O God, grant me your grace and mercy as I pray. Teach me to abandon myself entirely and to trust that you do indeed answer me speedily, even when it seems to me that you delay. Then when I receive the rescue for which I prayed, remind me to give you thanks and praise for hearing my cry speedily, for granting exactly what I most needed and at the time best for receiving it. And should my eyes of faith be dim and fail to see it in the here and now, grant this blessing that I trust, nevertheless, that in heaven it will all be clear to me; there I will spend eternity not complaining about what you didn't grant but adoring you and giving you thanks for having granted everything through the merits of your Son, my Savior. Amen.

—by Daniel M. Deutschlander from [On Giving Advice to God, Part 2](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Use these resources to better understand God's providence and to grow in Godly patience:

On Giving Advice to God: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [2-volume set](#) (discount available)

[The Theology of the Cross](#): persevering with patience when facing the trials of faith and life

[Patient Parenting](#): raising children under the guidance of the all-patient heavenly Father

[Purposeful Grieving](#): a walk through one of the all-time favorite Psalms on patience (Psalm 13) in the context of grief