

## A Widow Goes a Long Way

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“He told them a parable on the necessity of praying always and not losing heart. ‘Once there was a judge in a certain city who respected neither God nor man. A widow in that city kept coming to him and saying, “Give me my rights against my opponent.” For a time he refused, but finally he thought, “I care little for God or man, but this widow is wearing me out. I am going to settle in her favor, or she will end by doing me violence.”’ The Lord said, ‘Listen to what the corrupt judge has to say. Will not God then do justice to his chosen who call out to him day and night?’” (Luke 18:1-7)

I used to have an image of this elderly woman rapping on the judge’s desk with her umbrella, sitting in his courtroom, day after day, quietly making her presence known, carrying signs and picketing in front of his home until she was given her rights. In my 20s, this person was personified by a religious sister I had known. She was relentless in her pursuit of justice for migrant farmworkers, even in the midst of her struggle with cancer.

Since then, I have at times seen myself as this woman. I’ve been told by friends that I am one of the most determined, persistent women they have ever known. I am able to hang in there against insurmountable odds. I continue long after others have thrown in the towel. Those who are not so friendly have other words for me—obstinate, stubborn, pigheaded.

But I have met my match in my daughters whose persistence and determination to get their way surpasses all that I have ever met. Turnabout is fair play, or so they say, and, if so, I have received my justice.

“It’s not fair,” I cry. “At least the judge didn’t have to live with the widow.”

“That’s not fair” is my daughters’ constant battle cry. Of course, their concept of fairness only extends to what they want for themselves or each other.

For months they asked me, “When will you put the trampoline up?” Daily I’m reminded, “When can I get my hair cut? When can I get my ears pierced?” They begin in January to make demands for their birthday in June. I am developing a greater sympathy for this unjust judge than I had ever thought possible. Still, I’m not an unjust judge. I’m on their side, as hard as they may find that to believe.

The purpose of this parable is to teach us about persistence in prayer and not losing heart. But it seems that I’m good at the persistence part and not so good at not losing heart. Sometimes I’m so easily discouraged. Wherever I look, there is so much that I don’t understand, so much that is unjust. You only need to open up a newspaper or listen to a news report to find evidence of that.

As I go through these middle years of life, I see people entering their golden years, being given a watch and forced into retirement even when they have many productive years ahead of them. And I wonder, Is that what I have to look forward to?

For every step forward, I seem to slide two steps back. For every small victory, there come new challenges and problems to overcome. No sooner do I deal with one crisis in ministry or parenting when another comes along, greater than the last and threatening to wipe out all that I've accomplished in the past. It's so easy to get discouraged under these circumstances.

I have to wonder how this widow managed to keep up her protest without losing heart. Perhaps she could focus so intensely because she was convinced she was right and was set on righting the wrong.

I, on the other hand, get pulled in so many directions. My energy gets diverted, and in an effort to be open-minded, I'm not able to be as convinced of my own rightness. I choose a course of action and hope and pray that I am making a sound decision, but I am always aware of trail of mistakes I have left in my path. All of this second-guessing and doubting is energy-draining and leaves me more prone to discouragement. If I could be as single-minded as the widow, then perhaps I might not lose heart.

But there are so many choices that can be made about any given situation and probably just as many opinions as to which is the right choice. I've seen the harm that single-minded people can do when they fail to realize that there are other courses of action available to them that are equally valid and worthy of consideration. I've learned the wisdom of picking and choosing my battles, cutting my losses, and living to fight another day.

All I can do is continue to be faithful to what God is calling me to—regardless of how imperfectly I may be fulfilling that or how many mistakes I may make along the way—and not lose hope.

As I progress, I am beset by the noonday demon of discouragement, tempting me to give up and give in. It tells me that no matter how much I've done or do, it's still not enough. So many ideals and dreams of younger years are gone, and I've yet to learn to dream again.

But how little I knew of life back then, how few experiences I had to base my dreams on. Now I know and understand so much more about what it takes to just keep going day after day. And I realize that sometimes the heroes among us aren't just those who die nobly for their faith or by saving someone's life, or even those who accomplish great feats that leave us in awe. Sometimes the real heroes in life are those who daily pick up their crosses, doing whatever small thing God asks of them, just like the widow. I see those heroes all around me in the faces of people in my community, good people who struggle to live good Christian lives in the face of adversity—the loss of loved ones, the loss of income, or the loss of a way of life.

I'm glad my daughters don't easily take no for an answer. I'm glad they stick up for what they think is right and for each other. I wouldn't want them to be wimps who go along with everybody else and don't question authority.

The widow never lost heart in the face of an unjust judge who had no compelling reason to listen her. But our God isn't the unjust and uncaring judge any more than I am unjust and uncaring where my children are concerned. God is on our side. God cares for us and hears us when we cry out to him in our pain and grief. God is a loving father and a devoted mother, caring more for us than we could ever imagine, wanting what's best for us just as we want what's best for our own children.

If our hope is based on getting results, then we might as well despair. We will always be needing more results, more victories, and we will be discouraged if these don't come.

Our hope doesn't come from any results we may expect for our actions. It doesn't come from the what or the why but rather from the *who*. As Mother Teresa has said, "God doesn't all us to be successful—just faithful."

God isn't the unjust judge who cares not for us. God hears us when we cry out to him. God wants us to cry out to him in our pain and grief. God hears in our anger and our cries of injustice. God hears us and stands ready to give us his blessing.

Do we hear God? Or do we listen to God the same way that our children listen to us? Do we not want to listen to God anymore than the unjust judge wants to listen to the widow? The times that I am most discouraged are precisely those times when I am not listening to God. Yet just as the widow doesn't give up, God never gives up on us.

Perhaps I am the unjust judge as well as the persistent widow, if not in my treatment of my children, at least in my treatment of God. God is always willing to listen to us, but am I always willing to listen to God? Do I take his message of love for me seriously?

There is a little bit of the widow and a little bit of the judge in each of us at times. They are paired together for a reason. But regardless of what role we fall into at different times, God remains the same. God loves the judge as well as the widow, and therein lies our hope.