

As we worship, there are always two other things that we seek in the same hour. One is information to the mind and the other is inspiration for the soul. You have all heard of the ^{doctry} ~~doctry~~ Churchill, who in his very last years was not a very great speaker any longer, very old, beginning to fall apart. He was once asked to address a school gathering. His message was very brief. Three words: "Never Give Up." And he had exemplified it, of course, in his own life.

We are privileged here week by week when we hear the stories of Roy as well as his teaching in his sermons. He never omits that element of inspiration. Information is not enough. Dr. ^{Kuhn} ~~Green~~ loves the story (because ^{but} I heard him allude to it) of how when Carlyle said, "If I was a preacher I'd tell them, 'You know what to do, go and do it!'" His mother said, "Thomas, aye, but will you tell them how?" It is not enough to know what. You need inspiration to acutally follow it through and do it.

When our Lord told us about prayer, he not only told us what to pray about in the Lord's prayer; seven petitions, six of them spiritual. I'm glad for the seventh. I am very interested in things material. They are not nearly important as things spiritual but they are important. In the Lord's prayer he included those, "Give us this day our daily bread." He wanted us to know he is concerned with all of our well being...when we get the flu, when we have a fall, when a child is in trouble, when the IRS is breathing down...whatever. He's interested in the material but the Lord's prayer told us what in a very perspective sense he put things in their right order...six out of the seven, spiritual. First, God's kingdom, will and reign, then

this business of sin, forgiveness of sin and power over sin and the problem of the presence of sin as if/^{he}was saying to us, listen, if you get the sin problem solved, everything is solved. The great simplicity in the Christian life, seek ye first the kingdom of God AND his righteousness, all the rest will be added. Great simplicity--give God his place and everything else falls into place. He meant that when he said, "When ye pray." There is no such thing as a prayerless Christian. Many people say prayers that never pray. So in two stories he told us what real praying was--earnest intensity. Not measured by length of prayers on the calculation of arithmetic or chronology but by their depth.

Jesus often told parables in pairs. One, because we are forgetful and, two, it gave him provision for extending and enlarging the truth of the first parable. Last week Roy read to us the story of the man who went to his neighbor's for bread because an unexpected traveler had come. Today he read to us the story of the widow and the judge. What wonderful stories! The first one is full of humor. It is so easy to picture what Christ is saying. It is a warm, human, compassionate story. The silence of the night is suddenly broken in this little eastern village and a man is taken out of his bed but happy, it's a friend who has come. It does not matter that it is midnight, it's a friend. "I've got enough for your horse to eat but I haven't anything for you. I've got no food left in the cupboard but I've got a friend. Sit down on the sofa. I won't be long; I will not be denied. I will come back with food so that not only your horse, but you will be cared for." So he goes down the street. He does have a friend but not everyone thought the friend was friendly. He knocks at the door, a man rolls over in bed, knocks again. "What's that?" says his wife. "Ah,

it's probably a drunk, ignore it." Wife: "You better do something about it." "No, I'm not going to do anything about it!" Then some of the children called out, "Dad, fix it up; we can't sleep!" So he goes to the window: "What do you want?" "I'm your friend, Isaac; don't you know Benjamin? Can't you recognize my voice?" "Well, what are you doing here at this time?" "I've some one who has lost his way, a friend, and he came to my house and I have enough for his horse but I have nothing for him. I can't send a guest to bed with an empty stomach! You know how that is, Isaac." "Go away; it is cold, my children are tucked in, go away!" "Isaac, I've got news for you, I am not going to budge until you give me bread." And he gets his bread. It is a beautiful, humorous story. Christ is not content with/what to pray, that's the Lord's prayer; seven petitions, spiritual, his things first, then ours, and it includes the material. Now he wants to tell us how to pray, persistent, intent, meaningful. Don't say prayers, that's useless--pray, pray. The best prayers in the bible are brief, very brief, pungent arrows to the heart of God, that's praying, constant, staccato like, through the day in every situation: "Lord, help me, Lord forgive me, direct me, guide me, thank you, Lord."

And then the story that was read to us this morning. A widow, of all people most helpless, the widow, especially in ancient times, especially in the East. She is not only a widow, she is a widow that is being sinned against. She needs help but she has a very unscrupulous judge. This was a heathen judge. The Jews did not go to judges. Their elders decided the cases. So this is a heathen judge appointed by Herod or someone like him. No wonder he does not have a word of encouragement, no wonder he does not have a smile of compassion. "Your honor, I need

help." "Go away, woman!" She goes but the next day she is back. "Didn't I see you here yesterday?" "Yes, your honor, but I need help." "Madam, I have already decided your case against you, get out." The next day she comes back and the bailiff blocks her. "You can't go in there; you've been here twice. Your honor won't listen to you." Then a stray dog goes where it should not go and the bailiff has to chase the dog away and she goes into the court and the judge sees her. "What are you doing her woman? I've dealt with you twice." "Your honor, I am determined to be heard!" And so, this goes on for days and days until the unscrupulous judge says, "look, this is getting me down. You see, the weak woman has the strength he does not have. She's in the right. The strongest man who is not in the right is a weakling. The weakest person, even a widow with no protection is as strong as heaven itself if in the right. So she gets what she wants."

Now, the stories raise two questions: When can I take no for an answer and stop praying? "Lord, I want to win the _____, Lord, I want a new Mercedes, Lord, it's time great, great, great, grand-father died and left me his fortune." When can I take no for an answer? Why does God want me to pray more than once about the same thing? Is he asleep the first time like the neighbor I visit. Is he tucked in in his bed afraid to disturb the angels? Why do I have to keep knocking? These are the two questions. When do I persist and why do I have to? Persist we must. There is no real prayer without persistence. It is not always persisting on the same thing, however. We'll come to that as we ask the question, when do I keep on praying about the same thing. Notice in the first story the request was urgent. It was not on a cool summer's day when the sun was high in

the sky and everyone was relaxing. It was at midnight! Urgent! The second thing to notice is that it was unselfish. He was not at the neighbor's because he had forgotten to bake that day. He wanted for somebody else. So we have a clue to the matter of when I can refuse to take 'no'. There are times when God says 'no.' When he says listen, if you won the _____ it would be the death of you. If you had a Mercedes, strong car though it be, you might not own it long and you may end up in the hospital because you love driving so much, you keep going until you are in trouble...often the Lord says 'no.' We've got to know when to accept that no. If it is purely material and purely selfish, and by selfish, I mean pertaining to self it still may not be wrong because we are material beings and we do have a stewardship of the self. As a matter of fact unless you are something you have nothing to offer someone else. So it is not wrong to ask for material things, God made us physical. He made the world material. Christ took a human body. Material things are not wrong in themselves but if my request is purely material and purely selfish, there comes a time in prayer when I ought to listen to God's 'no.' I need to rethink some petition if God is still saying no. I have to ask myself, why do I want this thing? Is there a danger if answered yes? But whenever you are asking something spiritual or for somebody else's good, you can keep going. For example, in some Bibles you will find in the margin in this first story that the man was out of the way on his journey, got lost and, therefore, when he came to a certain village he realized he had a friend there, I'll go to him. Here's a beautiful picture of people in our house who are lost and need help. Most of us have some of them, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters, mothers or fathers, aunts or uncles, someone who is out of the way and lost. You can be very persistent. George Muller (?)

prayed 45 years for a friend and before his death as a very old man, he saw that friend converted after nearly a half a century of prayer on his behalf. ^{If} you are praying for somebody else, someone who is lost, out of their way, a spiritual need who has come to you, they don't know God but they know you...you can be very persistent about spiritual things. If you suspect, as I happen to know about myself, that you are not patient enough, kind enough, loving enough and a thousand other virtues, you can keep praying about that, anything spiritual you can be persistent with, always. Anything unselfish, you can be persistent with, that's for sure.

There is something else to add, if your prayer is in the right like the widow's, see, the unjust judge is in contrast to the just widow. We need to often look at the content of our prayers in saying is it right? I desire a lot of things that are not right. We all have a sinful nature. We prefer ease to effort. We prefer abundance to any type of lack. We prefer glory to humiliation. We want a lot of things that are not good for us. So we are challenged often to look at the content of our prayers. But, you know, there is something strange about these stories. Is God like a crusty old neighbor that is reluctant to help me? Is God an unjust judge? No, these are stories that teach, as Roy indicated earlier today, by contrast. Just as Gethsemane was in contrast to Eden, as the two Adams came to wrestle with sin. So now, God teaches by contrast. These are how much more stories. If you being evil know how to give bread to a neighbor, how much more shall the gracious, loving, compassionate God...see, it's a contrast teaching. God's a just judge. God is the best neighbor. God is not asleep either. You don't have to wake him up. The angels don't mind hearing our prayers. They mingle with the anthem of heaven.

And so when you are tempted to ask the question, does God act like a crusty old neighbor? No, God is saying, look, if that type of a person will say yes, how much more / ^{someone who} is not crusty, some one who is love itself....how much more, how much more? If an unjust judge would at last say yes, how much more the just judge.

These stories tell us something about how to pray. We don't need a go-between. You don't have to go to Roy and say, "Roy, I don't know how to phrase these words towards heaven; you are good with words, you pray for me." Oh, it's fine to say, Roy, I am praying please remember it as well. That's fine but you don't need a go-between. You go direct and you are very frank. The best prayer is startlingly clear. God does not need our flattery. We are told to neither receive or give it; how much more the Almighty. He does not need our flattery. You know, the best prayer has four elements. You remember the name of the book that follows the gospel. You can always remember the content of prayer; the acts of prayer are 'A' for adoration, 'C' for confession; 'T' for thanksgiving and 'S' for supplication. That's the content of prayer: adoration, our Father; confession, I'm and sinner, forgive me my tresspasses; thanksgiving, Lord, thank you for bread and remember I need it tomorrow and later on in the day; supplication--deliver me from evil. You know, you might think that these stories are removed from the Lord's prayer. ^{the contents} They are not/the same. In the Lord's prayer it told about bread and in this first story the man is going to ask for bread. In the Lord's prayer it ended up with deliverance from evil or as some translations have it, deliver us from the evil one. And this widow says, avenge me from mine adversary. You know who our adversary is? The devil. He accuses us before the throne of God night and day. That's what it

says in Revelation 10. The great serpent is our adversary. The widow is the symbol of the church, the bride of Christ; her husband is gone, left her. She is alone in the world and she has a great antagonist. We are all parts of that widow. We all have a great enemy. He wants to destroy us. Wants to take as many down to hell with him as possible so we come to God because we are not strong enough.

Why does God keep me waiting? I've noticed that there are answers to the first question, I can persist when the matter is urgent and when I have looked at it to see if it is right, just, like the widow and, especially, if it is unselfish. I can persist. But, you know, why don't they answer the first time? You don't value anything you get easy. It would be a miserable world if all our prayers were immediately answered, yes. It would destroy us. Things are not what they seem. I find myself constantly in life absorbed with what I can get done. God is much more interested in something else. He's more interested in what is done in me than what's done by me. That's a hard lesson. It is humiliating...Lord, don't you need me? Well, the truth is, no. He's much more interested in what's done in me than what's done by me. Why does he not answer the first time? Because there's a lot of work that needs doing in here. The impatient need to become patient. Those who think they can achieve need to be taught their dependence. There's nothing more dangerous in life than to feel all sufficient; nothing more detrimental to spiritual development than to think you can cope. They say that most of the world's work is done by the world's neurotics. It is a good thing to realize that we are all somewhat neurotic. It's only a matter of degree. And because of that, because I don't see clearly, because much of what I think is so, isn't so; much that is so, I think isn't

so, because I am filled with predjudices which means prejudging without the facts, I am a very vulnerable being and I need to acknowledge it to God. God delays immediate answers because he wants to teach us the truth about ourselves, that we are weak and dependent. Take those that are out of their way that are in our house and we want help for them...you can't give it! No one can give God to someone else. You cannot give it!

I told you more than once my story about going to a camp meeting and a lady saying, "Hey, I brought my husband. He's an atheist. I brought him so you can convert him." And my immediate response was, "Madam, I can't raise the dead." So here are the lost, out of the way, in our house and we want help for them but we can't provide the spiritual bread. We can't make them eat it! So we come to God. Why does he delay? Because they have to want it too, you know. Many people we long to see converted, our children, our parents or our friends. Prayer is a part of the process. They initiate God's moving on these people and you know what he often does to them? Increases their troubles. Because until a person has an awareness of need, they are not open to help from God or man. So why does God wait and not answer me immediately? Because I need to learn how dependent I am, how in and of myself I can do nothing. I can't create life. Here's a stone, turn it into a living thing, we can't do it. We can't touch its stony heart. It is impossible. It takes the power of God to do that. We can go to God and say, "Please touch that stony heart." and he seems to do nothing but because we have prayed, there are extra blessings in the sense of extra pressure upon a person prayed for. It is only the person in need who can receive help. We only do things out of anxiety. We only do things out of fear. We only

do things when we're in trouble. That's when we make changes. When everything is smooth we never change. The worst enemy is always security. We make most progress in time of storm and trouble and I love biographies. I own hundreds and have read hundreds and I find that people God has used most have been the people who have had the most trouble. It's not good news, I wish it were not so. But the people God has used most are those who have had the most trouble. Early in my ministry I came across a statement from George Fox which I thought was wonderful. He was a Quaker. He said, "I have concluded that God put some of us through many, many experiences, not for our own sake, but ~~but~~ so we can be of help to other people who have those experiences." That's true of every Christian. God permits many things to happen to you, not for your own sake but so you can help other people who have that problem. So God permits us to pray more than once because, one, we would not appreciate it if it came too easily. Some of you have degrees in medicine or architecture, all sorts of other things or other achievements but you didn't get them by a dream at night, not on some whimsical Sunday afternoon from the nearest stream. It took blood and sweat and tears and you appreciated it. You only appreciate what comes hard. God knows our weakness. There is nothing worse than a spoiled child. One spoiled child can ruin life for many people. I know of a family where the parents were wonderful people. I knew them personally and they had a child that from the age of two kicked her heels until she got what she wanted and they were soft and they gave it to her. As she grew up she ruined every life she came in contact with and died a selfish self-centered person without a friend in the world. That's a terribly tragic thing to get all that she wanted. God has millions of children

but none of his best children are spoiled children. They are children who go through the fires. And so God is more concerned with what he does in me than what he does through me. And he does not answer me immediately because I would begin to take a lot of things for granted and because I need to realize how empty I am, how ignorant I am, how useless I am without Him.

Let's look at one other story that makes this point, Matthew 15 beginning at verse 21: "And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Behold a Canaanite women from that region came out and cried, 'Have mercy on me, oh Lord, son of David, my daughter is severely possessed by demons.' He didn't answer a word. His disciples came and begged him, send her away, she is crying after us. He answered, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But she came and knelt before him saying, 'Lord, help me.' It's not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. 'Yea, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.' And Jesus answered her, woman, great is your faith, be it done to you as you desire. Her daughter was healed instantly." You remember in the Old Testament, Joseph spoke roughly to his brethren. That's a great line! He loved these brethren but it says he spoke roughly to them. This is the only time in the gospels where Christ ever speaks roughly to someone who comes to him with a need. He is trying to teach us something. He has traveled 100 miles; he has gone through four mountain passes, mountains higher than the highest mountains in England in order to reach this woman on the borders of heathendom. He does not give a sermon...just goes there to act out this charade, to give this acted parable and come home again...marvelous, marvelous. He knew

about this woman's daughter before he left. That's why he makes the trip. It is the only reason he has gone there. But he acts out the way of the Pharisees and the disciples would be tempted to deal with the gentiles who were unclean. This woman is a Syrophoenician. He knows how the Pharisees deal with the gentiles. He knows the temptation of his disciples. From where he is he can look over to the west, to the region of Rome, even nearer Greece. He knows that soon there will be multitudes coming in and the church has to learn how to deal with them, not to treat them as dogs. And he has to teach us who will often be treated by other people as dogs how to react. And he answers her not a word. Isn't that like God sometimes? I find God is usually very silent when I need him most...for a time. He answers us not a word. It is very much like the disciples in the boat..."Don't you care that we perish?" Well, the answer seems to be no, I don't care. God's deliverance never comes in the first watch of the night. The Assyrians, they break through the borders of Palestine, they come right across; they are into Judah and now they are at the very doors of Jerusalem. That's when it was that the record reads that the next morning when they got up, they were all dead men...only when they got to Jerusalem. Peter is in prison and the church makes prayer constantly for Peter and God answers them not a word...until the last night. He is to be beheaded the next day and Peter is a good fisherman and knows how to sleep and he is asleep, has a clear conscience, he has eternal life, so what, if he loses his head all earthly worries are over. The angel taps him on the side, his chains fall off, "Rise up Peter, but don't forget your sandals; a bit cold out there; put your coat around you for we don't want you catching the flu. You have to preach next week." But it is only the 4th watch of the night, it's when the ship is going down, it's when the disciples have wrestled

right through the night that in the fourth watch Jesus comes walking on the sea. It's only late in the storm on the other occasion when he is in the boat. He wakes up. How often God seems asleep. I've got to learn to grapple with this, this is a daily, constant problem, a silent God. Me, I'm as full of needs, full of desires as a porcupine has quills. I need help and I have a silent God! How should I behave? See how this woman behaved. She was smart. She took hold of his words and trapped him in his own words as he intended she should. She takes hold of the hand that is trying to thrust her away and pulls herself nearer on that trusting hand. Oh, that's real faith, when you can take every discouragement as an encouragement. I've never learned it. I am very slow to learn. I often think that my slowness in the Christian life is so that I can be more sympathetic with the people to whom I preach because I am very slow to learn and some in my congregation are like me. I've never learned this great lesson to take every discouragement and treat it as an encouragement. Treat woes as mercies, of curses as blessings because we have a God who changes things, transforms things; he brings good out of evil and light out of darkness. That's the way he operates. But this woman, what a pattern for us..."Yes Lord, it's true but remember the dogs..." and the Greek word is 'little dogs.' She is talking about the little dogs in every household there in that area where the children were their masters and while the adults were talking at the table the children would be breaking up bits of food and throwing it under the table. The children were the real bosses. "Yes, master, I'm a dog but I'm your dog and I'm a loved dog. And I'm a dog that's cared for."

Whom God is going to honor, he first humbles. If God is going to use you, you will go through hell first. If you have not been through hell

yet, you have some distance to go. Whom God is going to honor, he first humiliates, hurts, wounds, tests. That's the way God operates. This woman prepared herself to take the place of the dog, but, Lord, I am a loved dog. I'm a dog that's cared for; I'm secure. And, you know, she is not asked for herself, though, she says, "Lord, help me!" She's made her daughter's hurt her own. Christ can never refuse a heart that is like his, that cares, but he will answer in his own time.

In summary, when can I keep praying about the same thing? Well, examine myself and say, is it right? The widow had a just cause. If I want something just so I can be better than my neighbor, ahead of the other people in my profession, that's not a good motive. I need to look and ask the reason why I want it. Is it right? How urgent is it? Is it unselfish? It can be a material blessing. God wants us to have material blessings. Solomon had loads of them but it must never be material blessings to be selfishly used. I am a steward of all God has lent me.

The second question...why does he delay? Because I wouldn't appreciate it if I got it too easily, that's why. It would be a worst possible world where you don't have to raise a finger and you got everything you wanted. If you all had an Aladdin's lamp and you all had a genie that made possible all your wants--I would love it but it would destroy me. And because he is more interested in what is done in me than what is done by me. And I have to develop the faith of this woman who can turn discouragement into encouragement. I have to learn to take hold of the hand that thrusts me away and use it to draw me nearer to God. And I have to develop a heart like his that cares for other people. We live in that 25% of the world that has 3/4 of the world's goods. We have to have a heart and prayers and actions to the other 3/4 of

the world. If we can see we are privileged above the millions in the world that can't see. If we are not in the hospital, we are privileged above the ones who are in the hospital. If we have the Bible and the gospel we are the most privileged of all. But with every privilege comes responsibility and one day you'll take an account. So God wants to develop in me a heart like his own that cares and that care is shown by sharing. So the woman has made her child's problem her own, "Lord, help me." So real prayer does not mean gabbling words all day long or you would not do anything else. In the early Christian era there were some Christians who tried to keep saying the same prayers all day. They soon disintegrated. So would we if we tried it. When the Bible talks about praying always, it means being always in the spirit of prayer, recognizing in every problem, every blessing, every new venture an invitation to address heaven. You know, I often kneel to pray by I say 99% of my prayers not kneeling and I am sure the same is true of you... not just gabbling words. It is an awareness that God is near so I can talk to Him. He is nearer than your husband. He's nearer than your wife. He's nearer than that guy on the TV or the radio, nearer than breathing; closer than hands and feet and the spirit of prayer is I can talk to him at any time about any thing! You don't have to close your eyes. You can do a lot of praying while you are driving. You can do a lot of praying as you are working. The spirit of prayer is what it is talking about. It's like the ancient beacons at the time of the Spanish armada. When word came, the armada was coming, all England felt dependent on God. They knew they had to do what they could so they put up piles of wood on the coast of England and only when the first ships were seen, they set them alight. They were ready. True prayer comes from the soul that knows that God is near, a soul that

is ready that sets alight a beacon of prayer in every challenge and every opportunity. And our God loves to answer such prayers.