

PRAYER AND FAITH

“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8, NIV)

THE SAYING MAY GO “DRIVE FOR SHOW AND PUTT FOR DOUGH,” but in truth you need both to make for a stellar career in the professional game, and the gamblers at your club just might agree. A good golf game will be balanced. Indeed, it wasn’t until he fine-tuned his wedge play that Dustin Johnson became known among the best in the game—before that, he was counted as one of the “young bombers,” a label suggesting that these men had one exceptional talent but maybe not enough game to win consistently on tour.

Perhaps it is helpful to push this same thinking into our view of what it means to walk with Jesus. With Scripture reading, meditation, prayer, memorization, service, and generosity linked to the practice of our faith, is it good to say, for instance, “That Christian really knows the Word”? Or should we instead be encouraging one another toward a balanced life of spiritual exercise?

We can begin to find help in answering these questions in the Parable of the Persistent Widow, recorded in Luke 18. The woman in Jesus’ story has a desperate need: justice. She has an enemy who is making life very hard on her—think of a slanderous neighbor or a litigious business associate. This woman is in such straits that she takes her plea to the local judge, pounding on his door again and again. The judge, though not righteously interested in her case, *does care* about his own peace of mind; he responds to the woman to stem her relentless appeals.

Jesus uses the unrighteous judge as a foil, saying that if a man of questionable character can be aroused by persistent entreaties, wouldn’t God be trustworthy to hear our prayers? “Will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night,” Jesus asked his hearers, “and will He delay long over them?” (Luke 18:7, NASB).

There is plenty to consider in these questions alone, but Jesus had one more: “When I return, will I find faith here?” From the topic of prayer, Jesus suddenly turned to faith. Now, here is what we must recognize and concern ourselves with: the intertwining of practice and faith. Jesus showed his followers that their faith emerges in their practice. Your prayers will reflect your faith, and your faith will be marked by your prayers—and your reading and meditation and giving and service and more. When we are persistent in directing our spiritual practice to God, our faith in him shines through.

Opening questions Are you a closer to a balanced golfer, or do you have a dominant part of your game? • What might you list as evidences of faith in a person?

READING Luke 22:24-32; Matthew 8:5-10 & 15:21-28; James 2:14-24

The prayers of Jesus (Luke 22)

What did Jesus tell Peter he was praying for? What does this tell us about God’s desire for us? Have you ever prayed for a greater measure of faith (and if so, how was that prayer answered)?

Commendations for faith (Matthew 8 and 15)

In what terms did Jesus praise the centurion and the Canaanite woman? How do you think he recognized their faith? Is this different from how we would see faith in a person?

Faith and action (James 2)

What was James telling his readers about displaying their faith? If this does not mean that good works save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), what does it say about the connection between faith and works?

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