

REFLECTION OF GRACE

A Weekly Reflection on Stewardship from our Members



Sunday, October 16 | Gospel
Luke 18: 1-8



Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

MARGE AND THE PERSISTENT WIDOW **By Catherine Pryor Miller**

Persistent is an adjective that packs a punch! A quick Google search of the word reveals a handful of solid definitions. "Persevering, despite opposition, obstacles, and discouragement." "Stubbornly unyielding." What does it mean to be persistent? How do you describe a persistent person?

In today's Gospel lesson, we read about the parable of the persistent widow. There are two relevant characters, the widow and the corrupt judge. Her faith is unspecified, and his is nonexistent. The oppressive judge has an apathetic mindset, repeatedly dismissing the women's pleas for justice against her adversary. Yet she keeps returning to him. We don't know how long this period is between requests, but we know she wears him down, and eventually, he grants her plea.

At the parable's end, Jesus asks a question to his followers: "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?" The judge keeps ignoring the widow; God won't. The judge doesn't care about justice; God does. The lesson for me is to persevere in my faith against all odds.

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Marge is a family friend who represents all that is good in a PERSISTENT woman of faith. She's my mom's neighbor and has been a part of our lives for 25 years. Since I've known her, this remarkable woman has never missed an opportunity to "be the church" through her card and phone ministry.

The thing is, Marge's faith is an inspiration to all those she encounters. She's used a wheelchair since childhood and has suffered through countless surgeries for debilitating and disfiguring scoliosis and bouts with cancer. She's persisted through great physical agony. A gem of a person whose heart senses when neighbors are in need, Marge reaches out through phone messages and cards, unaware of the impact her kindness has on those around her. Her persistent and trusting faith has created powerful healing for others.

Mom and I visited Marge today. She's in skilled nursing recovering from a staph infection that almost took her life. Tenacious and persistent as ever, she talked our ears off and reflected on a book she is reading about prayer. Her body, ravaged by disease, is failing her. She has every reason to be bitter, but she chooses joy—every day. A stack of "Thinking of You " cards lie on her side table, ready to send out to friends in need.

I can be impatient sometimes, wondering if God hears my prayers. My current suffering hits me in the form of anxiety and stress from a recent health scare. I write this knowing we all have "oppression/suffering." Grief over losing a loved one, a toxic relationship, a scary diagnosis, fear for our children's future, financial burdens, loneliness...the list is exhaustive.

It's been my experience that having a persistent faith leads to a generous spirit. When I remain faithful, I am more aware of the blessings of God in my life. As these blessings become clear, my desire to share them with others also increases.

As I reflect on Marge and the widow, I cross the threshold of believing and knowing that the solution requires persistent faith. A faith that relies on and trusts beyond what is seen and unseen. Obstacles may seem too great, but faith drives me to carry on. It's easier said than done, but knowing my efforts may result in momentary suffering, I'm encouraged not to give up and instead, to persevere.

God has undoubtedly rewarded Marge's persistence by filling her with joy and hope. And the widow's persistent faith set her free from oppression. I persist. You persist. God persists as well. May our persistence, particularly in prayer, lead us closer to God and faith in his persistence in the world.

What's an example of a blessing you've experienced because of your persistence in faith?

I joined Ascension four years ago and have been blessed by this community. As a communications consultant, I'm passionate about helping churches and nonprofits share their stories in authentic and meaningful ways. I work with Ascension on a contract basis and love our people, leadership, and staff.

I grew up in ministry and was born and raised in Iran. My parents were Presbyterian missionaries in Rhesht and Tabriz for 13 years before we moved to Teheran, where my dad was called as Senior Pastor to the Community Church of Teheran, an interdenominational ex-pat community. He also served as the chaplain to the American Embassy in Teheran and remained there up until the hostage crisis. We were evacuated and ended up in Santa Barbara by way of New Jersey, where dad became Senior Pastor at First Presbyterian Church, SB. He remained there until his retirement. My parents played a critical role in developing my faith and worldview. For this, I am eternally grateful.

I'm a graduate of UCLA and have lived in Iran, New Jersey, California, and Georgia but call Texas home.

My husband Matt and I have been married for 33 years and have two amazing, young adult children, Pryor (25) and Caroline (23). I'm a mystic, contemplative, yoga practitioner and soon-to-be certified teacher. I am also a lover of travel, design, animals, and all things related to Christian spirituality.

