**The Teacher: Begging the Unjust Judge**

Luke 18:1-8

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In 1995 the church my family was part of was splintering, and we were right in the middle of it. My mom led worship, and my dad was the chairman of the board. And we supported the pastor in the face of what appeared to us to be baseless accusations.

And it looked like they would go nowhere, but then a cunning strategy was implemented. Over the previous decade many people had left the church for various reasons, but their names hadn’t been removed from membership. And so, when a big congregational meeting was planned the other side called all the people who had left, told them their side of the story, and invited them to come to the meeting and cast their votes. They were so angry they would use people who didn’t even come to the church to accomplish their plans.

My dad got wind of this but there was nothing that could be done. And I remember him coming to our family and warning us that the meeting could get violent and that I shouldn’t attend. And then we prayed around the dinner table that somehow God might show up. We prayed passionately.

And then, since I begged, I got to go watch firsthand as angry Christians got up one after the other and said things, many of which I didn’t understand. And while the only violence was verbal, in the end a vote was taken, the pastor was fired, the chairman of the board was sacked, and gleeful people kicked our family out of the church. It was an answer to prayer, but not a very good one.

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We are continuing our walk through the book of Luke and today are in chapter 18. If you’ve got a Bible, go ahead and open it up. Would you stand with me as we come before God’s word? We will start in verse 1. Hear now the word of the Lord.

[Read Luke 18:1-8]

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Last week we watched as Jesus told the Pharisees that their ideas about God’s coming kingdom were all wrong. While there is certainly more to come, God’s kingdom isn’t some far off reality, it is already here and they’d missed it.

But then He turns around to His disciples and deals head on with what He considered one of the biggest threats to life for a Christian living between the already and the not yet of God’s kingdom. This was a threat for His disciples, and Jesus looked forward and saw that it would be a threat for us – unanswered prayer.

And the answer He gives to unanswered prayer is this strange story. And it is strange. I mean Jesus says some things about us and God nobody else would dare say. But like everything Jesus says, it turns out it is exactly what we need. So there are three things Jesus has for us here – and this is our outline if you’re taking notes – first Jesus tells us that we need to start praying, then why we need to keep praying even when God doesn’t answer, and finally He shows us practically how people like us can pray with power like God wants.[[1]](#footnote-1)

So first, Jesus tells us we need to start praying. In verse 1 Luke says:

One day Jesus told His disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. (Luke 18:1)

Jesus tells us this story because He wants us to pray. Well that’s easy; isn’t this room full of people who pray? Sort of.

A resent survey of 7,500 Christians in the States asked people how often they pray. 26% said they prayed daily, 30% said weekly, and the rest prayed less than that. Of those who prayed they were asked how long they prayed. 59% prayed for less than a minute, 28% for between 1 and 5 minutes. And only 3% prayed for more than 10.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Theologian D.A. Carson says “If you really want to embarrass the average Christian – just ask them to tell you about their private prayer life. Many of us can impress others with our Bible knowledge or our evangelism stories, but our private prayer times are embarrassing.” Is this true for you?

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So before we can keep praying, we need to start. But what’s the big deal? I mean statistically most of us pray a bit, so why is Jesus so worked up? Well, the issue for Jesus is that He was convinced that without prayer we can’t do anything. Actually He wasn’t just convinced of this for us, He was convinced of this for Him. Once Jesus said:

“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself. He does only what He sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. (John 5:19)

In other words, Jesus depended on the power of the Father to do everything He did. And Jesus accessed this power through prayer. And we see this all over Luke.

So in Luke 3, at His baptism Jesus prays, and then in Luke 4 when He is being tempted by Satan He prays. In chapter 5 Luke tells us “Jesus often went away to pray alone.” Then in chapter 6, before choosing His disciples Jesus stayed up all night seeking God’s leading in prayer.

In chapter 9 Jesus spends the morning in prayer before taking His disciples off to a mountain to pray. In chapter 11 the disciples ask Jesus “teach us to pray” which is interesting because they had seen Him perform miracles and teach with authority, but they don’t ask Him “teach us to preach or do miracles” they recognized that Jesus’ power came from prayer, and so they ask Him, “teach us to pray.”

In Luke 22 Jesus tells Peter He will pray for him in his hour of need and then asks His disciples to pray that they won’t fall into temptation. And when Jesus was on the cross Luke tells us the very last sentence He spoke was a prayer. Jesus was always praying.

So this raises a crucial question, if Jesus was so convinced He could do nothing on His own, and this drove Him to always pray in spite of being the Son of God, then why do you and I spend so little time in prayer? Do we really think we are less dependant on the Father than Jesus was? Why don’t we pray more than we do?

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The study I cited earlier asked this question and the biggest answer, 32%, said it was because they were too busy. So essentially it felt like a self-discipline thing. “I don’t pray just like I don’t eat enough quinoa and kale or go to the gym enough. If I could just free up more time then I would pray more.”

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But this probably isn’t the real reason since all of us make time for the things that are important. So I would wager that the real reason we don’t pray is that we don’t think prayer does much good.

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Now nobody wants to admit this in church. But sometimes you pray and things happen, and sometimes you don’t pray and they don’t – that’s nice. But sometimes you forget to pray and the thing happens anyway. And this makes you wonder why bother.

And for some here, and some of the people we love who aren’t here, this is the reason faith has been abandoned. Like Years ago you prayed for something big. I’m not talking about when you were 16 and asked for a Lamborghini but got a rusted-out minivan instead. I’m talking about when you prayed for things you knew any good God would want to give you.

I’m talking about things like people getting along so your church doesn’t spit; or maybe your parents getting along instead of getting divorced, or your dad getting better instead of dying of cancer. And you prayed and prayed and instead of giving you what you asked God gave you the opposite. And so you’ve said if that’s what God’s like there is no point in praying.

We just don’t think it works. But Jesus did. He thought prayer was the source of His power and of ours. And then He told this story so we would pray, keep praying and not give up. So let’s look at this strange story. Verse 2 says:

“There was a judge in a certain city… who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, ‘Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.’ The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, ‘I don’t fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!’” (Luke 18:2-5)

Jesus tells a story about a bad judge to teach us about prayer – nice. And this is a bad dude. You would not want to end up in court with this guy. He doesn’t care about God or justice; he doesn’t care about people. He’s in it for the power or the money. And so when this widow comes, he writes her off. She isn’t worth his time.

The only problem is she doesn’t get the memo and just keeps coming back. And finally he realizes she’s never going to stop unless he does something, so he grants her justice. And in verse 6 Jesus says, actually there is no judge and no widow, I’m talking about God answering you when you pray.

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Now here we need to pause for a second and do a Parables 101 refresher course. We’ve had a few parables recently. So there was a shepherd who lost a sheep, and so he left his flock to search it out. And when he found it he rejoiced. What does it mean? Well, God is the shepherd and you’re the sheep. And He is hunting you down, and when He gets you back in relationship with Himself Jesus says there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 others who don’t think they need to.

Or there was a woman who lost a coin. Same thing. This time God is the woman and you’re the coin. And same solution – rejoicing when God gets you back.

Or there was a Father and two sons. One was prodigal – he didn’t care about his father – he just wanted to get his father’s stuff. And one was legalistic. He also didn’t care about his father – he was just trying to earn his father’s stuff. Bad boys!

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So if you are going to understand parables you need to figure out who God is in the story - that’s obviously the father - and then where you are. And some of us lean younger brother, and some lean older. But what we all tend to want is God’s stuff. And yet the father goes out to both sons. What God wants is relationship with all of us.

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So now back to today’s story – where are we here? Well, obviously we have to be the widow because she’s the one with the need which is like us. And that would make God the… unjust judge who doesn’t care about anyone and only gives out what’s needed when we won’t stop pestering him. It’s not that He loves us, it’s just that we’re bothering Him to death and so He’ll give us what we want.

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Is that the point of the story? Some of you are looking at me like all this makes sense.

No. God isn’t like the unjust judge in this story, He is in contrast to him. And part of this is good news, and another part is a honest critique of our souls by Jesus.

So first the good news. Jesus isn’t comparing God to the unjust judge; He is contrasting Him. There is a parallel passage to this story back in chapter 11 where the disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray and He says

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?...

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:11-13)

And similarly here we have an evil judge who gives out justice, and Jesus says how much more will your Father, who cares about justice and loves people, give good things to His children.

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See God wants to answer your prayers. He loves to. And not just the good prayers, but even some of the frivolous ones. When my kids ask for candy the dentist knows they often get it – though a recent survey found that 100% of Hoffmans poled thought they should get more.

But Jesus says don’t give up. Keep asking because of course God wants to answer your prayers – He’s your Father. That’s the good news.

But now the critique. See Jesus doesn’t compare God to this judge and He isn’t comparing us with the widow either. He is contrasting us. See this widow is relentless. She is constant in her request. She beats the door down on this judge’s house. “You’re the only hope I’ve got. You are the one who came make this situation right. Please give me what I need.” And she won’t stop banging until she gets an answer.

So Jesus isn’t saying, “Hey, disciples, Hey peeps at Fort George, you guys are just like this widow. You are constant in prayer. You are just nailing this.” No, verse 1 says:

Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” (Luke 18:1)

…because they weren’t always praying and were too easily giving up – just like us.

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Okay, fine. But if God is so just and really loves us, then why doesn’t He just give us what we ask right away. I mean, when we are asking for good things that we know are in His will, why doesn’t He answer those prayers? Why does He want us to come to Him and keep coming to Him over and over before He answers – if He even does?

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There are two answers to this. The first is “I don’t know.” And this isn’t a copout. Through Isaiah God says:

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,  
    and My ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. (Isaiah 55:8)

So the fact is God knows what is actually good for us and He gives that in its time. Some things seem good to us – a recovery from sickness or the unity of a church, but God sees things at another level. And we need to trust that He is good even when He doesn’t give out what we ask right away, or in our lifetimes.

But the second answer here is tied to the context of parables that Jesus has been telling – and this is the one that I think is most encouraging. See God isn’t an unjust judge, He is the Good Father. And we are the legalistic prodigals. We want Dad’s stuff – and we pray for it – but He wants us. And in this context, it isn’t just that He wants us, but He knows that what He wants for us – Himself – is actually what we need and what we want. See we were created in such a way that to live abundantly we must be connected to Him. We don’t need His stuff, we need Him.

And this is the point of prayer. See prayer isn’t primarily about getting health or love or provision or longevity. All those are good things – and our Heavenly Father loves to give good gifts to His children, so pray for them – but those aren’t the primary purpose of prayer. The primary purpose of prayer is to get God. And guess what, when you pray, and pray without ceasing or giving up, you always get God.

So yes, God wants to give you what you ask He just loves giving good gifts to His children. But the one thing He really wants is for us to want Him. And He uses prayer to lead us to this. So Jesus says “start praying, and keep praying, because you’ve got a Father who sees you and loves you. And He loves to give you what you need.”

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Now there are two shifts in thinking in Jesus’ words here that make what He calls us to practical and powerful. Let me end with this. First, we need to pray desperately.

In this story this widow is poor. She has no husband. She has no advocate. And she has been taken advantage of by an enemy. Life has been hard. And she is desperate. She knows she has nowhere to go but this judge. And so she goes to him. And Jesus says “Grow this in yourself. Realize how desperate you are.”

Now the problem with being Canadian is that we aren’t a desperate people. We are used to taking care of ourselves. We are Can-adians, not Can’t-adians. Elbows up, we’ve got this. But Jesus says this is deadly. He says:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

So whatever it is we are doing – all the principles we are putting into practice, all the books we are reading, all the work we are putting into communication has no eternal significance apart from connection with Jesus. If we want to accomplish anything of value the only thing we really need to do is pray.

So this means if your children are struggling in their faith we need to talk less to them about God and more to God about them. Prayer is the most important part of parenting.

And if your marriage is suffering and your spouse isn’t cooperating, it’s great to read books and go to counseling, but Jesus says what we really need is to spend less energy stressing over our situation and more energy giving God our stress. Prayer is the most important part of marriage.

And if you are having a difficult time getting a job or keeping one, it’s great to commit yourself to working hard and networking, but Jesus says what we really need is to spend less time working and more time giving God our work. Prayer is the most important part of provision.

So feed your desperation for God. Resist the pressure to be a Can-adian. Recognize your need. Jesus starts His Sermon on the Mount saying

“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,   
    for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. (Matthew 5:3)

Being humble about your need is the first step to getting what we all actually need because humble people pray. So practice your desperation.

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Second, pray persistently – don’t give up. The one thing the widow does is keep asking, seeking and knocking. She lays siege to this judge. And in this way she is like a kid who wants something. I mean isn’t it always, “mom, mom, mom, mom, mom, mom, mom?” “No” isn’t an answer with kids, it’s an invitation for an extended negotiation. And kids know it works – with mom, don’t try it with dad.

And Jesus says “pray like kids, not because God is an evil judge, but because He doesn’t want to be our vending machine, He wants to be our Father. He created you because He thought His eternity would be better in relationship with you.

See if we just prayed once and He gave us His stuff what do you think we would do? We would all be driving Lamborghinis… but guess what, none of us would be connected with God. We would just be putting in our quarters and pulling the lever. And God knows getting His stuff isn’t how we get abundant life.

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So here’s the grace: God loved the world so much that Jesus came to earth and gave up all the Father’s stuff. He was born in a manger; He had no bed to sleep on. And on the cross He cried out “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Jesus suffered separation from His Father even though He was the Son. Why? So that you and I could be adopted as God’s children.

So will you see God’s love and realize that He is more valuable to you then anything He has. If you will then Jesus promises that if we seek first the King and His Kingdom, then all these other things will be added to us as well. Life is abundant when we have God. So what’s keeping you from seeking Him? Will you seek the King?

1. Works consulted: JD Greear, “Surprised by God’s Willingness to Listen” and Danny Franks “Radical Prayer” <https://summitchurch.com/message-archive?book=5e45310e-0c30-4729-8ac5-feb2c980a1c5> Accessed July 16, 2025 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://graceandprayers.com/christian-prayer-frequency-statistics/> (Accessed July 18, 2025) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)