

## The Discipline of Prayer

### Luke 18:1-8

Last week we began a new series for this year that will focus on some of the basics of the Christian life so that together we can grow in godliness. We could call this series “disciplines of a godly person.” Over the next number of weeks we will look at the discipline of prayer.

The great protestant reformer Martin Luther, once said “As is the business of tailors to make clothes and cobblers to make shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.”

F.B. Meyer stated that “the greatest tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.”

James said we don’t have because we don’t ask.

And yet prayer is one of those disciplines I fear we take all too casually. To put it in perspective for us, E.M. Bounds adds that “Prayer should not be regarded as a duty which must be performed, but rather as a privilege to be enjoyed.”

Pro baseball player turned evangelist, Billy Sunday once remarked “If you are a stranger to prayer, you are a stranger to the greatest source of power known to human beings.”

William Cowper poetically stated  
 “When we don’t pray, we quit the fight.  
 Prayer keeps the Christian’s armor bright.  
 And Satan trembles when he sees,  
 The weakest saint upon his knees.”

An anonymous source made this statement worth remembering: “don’t forget to pray today, because God didn’t forget to wake you up this morning.”

With that in mind, turn to **Luke 18:1-8**.

The beginning of **verse 1** draws our attention to the close of the preceding chapter. In the NIV it’s the word “**then**”, which means “*at that time*.” Jesus had just spoken about the coming Kingdom of God and challenged His audience to consider that just as it was in the days of Noah where people were living normally – getting up and going to work, sending

their kids off to school, doing laundry, shopping, walking the dog, mowing their lawn, attending weddings, having the neighbors over for a cook out – their normal activities caused them to be oblivious or unconcerned about the coming global judgment. Jesus said people in Sodom acted the same way, unmoved by the coming judgment. Jesus then said that people would act the same way in the last days before the return of the Son of Man, Jesus Himself. People are going to be going about their lives unconcerned, unmoved, unchanged and unregenerate. It will be business as usual when Jesus returns to judge. **What should believers do as we anticipate His return? Chapter 18** tells us how we are to occupy our time. In this chapter, Jesus teaches us the importance of prayer in such times.

So as Jesus points out that things are going to be just like those by-gone days prior to judgment, we might wonder how much worse it will get before Jesus returns. If we think it’s bad now and He has returned to judge the world, how bad was it back then? **What is His rally cry to action?** Pray.

He teaches us that it is through prayer that we will keep from fainting or growing weary in these last days while we wait for His return. Everything happening is setting the stage for His second coming and the pending judgment with it.

As we consider what is happening around the world today from natural disasters to global pandemics and man-made catastrophes you may be wondering what the world is coming to? The simple answer is that it’s coming to an end. Jesus tells us in **Luke 18** how to respond. He gives us a command to pray. He speaks about our commitment to pray. He encourages us to have confidence to pray.

## I. OUR COMMAND TO PRAY – v. 1

Jesus introduced a parable to strike home a spiritual lesson. The word parable means to throw beside something else. Jesus took one thing and put it beside something else in order to teach a divine truth. In this case, He wants to illustrate that if an unjust judge will give a widow what she wants, how much more a loving God.

First, notice the duration of prayer.

## A. The Duration of Prayer

This is a command Jesus gives them: **“always pray.”** The word **“always”** is simply defined *“at all times”* or *“all the time”* or *“at any time.”* It can also mean *“on all occasions”* or *“continuously”*, *“in every instance”*, *“forever”*, and *“without exception”*.

Paul put it this way to the Thessalonians:

**“Pray without ceasing.” I Thessalonians 5:17**

To the Romans he wrote that we are **“to be faithful in prayer.” (Romans 12:12)**

And to those believers in Philippi he stated that **“in everything”** or **“about everything”** they should pray. **(Philippians 4:6)**

Prayer has simply been defined as personal communication with God.

A.B. Simpson describes prayer as **“the link that connects us with God.”**

Billy Graham defines prayer as **“simply a two-way conversation between you and God.”**

In its simplest form we understand communication to require both active listening and speaking. So in prayer we both talk to God about what’s on our mind and then we listen to Him through His Word.

I was reading recently about a woman who was not a believer but was seeking to know God and wanted to pray but wasn’t sure how, so she texted God on her phone.

What is texting if not simply communicating with someone else to whom you are sending a message. Though prayer is a command, it doesn’t have to be difficult. There isn’t a formula or pattern we have to follow. It is simply talking to God about what’s on our heart.

Paul’s admonition is that we pray about everything. From the moment we wake up, to the moment we close our eyes having an attitude of prayer. Always praying doesn’t mean we are in an active prayer

with eyes closed and heads bowed. That would be rather impractical. Both Jesus and Paul speak of an attitude of prayer, a conscious awareness of God’s abiding presence that encourages us to tell Him what we’re thinking.

I think it’s how Nehemiah prayed when one day he was doing his normal duties serving the king, who noticed he wasn’t quite himself for some reason. The king asked what was troubling him so Nehemiah told him what was on his mind. He said he was distressed because the city of his people was in ruins. Jerusalem lay in shambles. The king could have just left it right there, but he asked Nehemiah what he wanted. **Nehemiah 2:4** tells us that he prayed to God. I don’t think it was the kind of prayer that was asking God what he should ask for. He had already been praying about it and had a list of what he needed. I think his prayer was more along the lines of asking God for boldness to speak because what he wanted was a lot and I also think he asked God that the King would be receptive.

Paul writes **“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to the power that is at work within us.” (Ephesians 3:20)**

**If we are commanded to pray, do we?** The command is to pray about big things, little things and all the in between things: pray about everything at all times.

Pray for someone who comes to mind when you’re pushing your shopping cart down the grocery aisle.

When writing a letter, ironing a blouse, making a PBJ sandwich, mowing your lawn, watching the news, those are included in the always of prayer.

When you arrive at work and you see your boss or a co-worker, pause to pray for them. They may be having some medical concern, job pressure or home issue that has them under extra stress.

You may hear about another country in the news undergoing hardship. Pray for the believers there.

Pray for your neighbors while on your morning walk as you pass their house.

All these and so many other occasions are opportunities to pray while we wash dishes, pack a lunch, read the mail, or type up a memo.

We are entering an election cycle and I'm inclined to throw out all those political fliers. I should instead pray for those candidates.

**We are told to always pray, but do we take that command to heart, especially as the world events around us become even more difficult?**

Lord, I have a test in...

Lord, I'm having trouble with...

Lord, I don't understand...

Lord, I need wisdom about...

Lord, I'm struggling with...

Lord, thank you for...

Lord, I need your peace

Lord, I need your comfort

Lord, I need your strength

Lord, help

Lord, when will You return

Until Jesus returns, we are to always pray, and in this context always pray about His return. In the model prayer He told the disciples to pray this way:

**“Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come” (Luke 11:2)**

They were to pray for God's kingdom to come because until then things are going to go from bad to worse and prayer is going to be essential to help us stand strong in our faith.

Maybe John was thinking back to these very words recorded by Luke as he closed out the book of Revelation. Pondering all the horrific events he witnessed in his vision about the end times, maybe he thought about what the Lord said. His prayer should be our prayer. **“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen (writes John). Come, Lord Jesus.” (Rev. 22:20)**

Here's my take on it: “Lord, everything you have revealed that will happen in the last days leading up to Your kingdom on earth is going to be terrible. Come as quick as you can. Don't let those days last too long.

We need to pray every day **“Even so come Lord Jesus.”**

**Are we praying about all things, every day, all day?  
Are we praying that His return will be sooner than later?**

The command is to pray and the duration is always. Jesus then tells us why we should always pray. He speaks about the despair we have without prayer.

## **B. The Despair Without Prayer**

**Have any of you ever fainted?** I have, when I was 11. It was summer and we had just moved up to camp. We had gone into camp before lunch so Mom could help in the kitchen with meal prep. It was my favorite – grilled cheese and tomato soup. I was given the job of stirring the big pot of soup on the stove. It was one of those large industrial pots. Being short, the head cook stood me up on a milk crate. It was a particularly hot day and the stove made it even hotter. While stirring everything began to turn dark. Things around me started to close in. I felt woozy, turned and called for my Mom and then I blacked out. I lost control of my mental and physical faculties, became limp and keeled over, fortunately leaving the pot of soup on the stove. The next thing I know, I was laying on the picnic table bench with my head in my Mom's lap while she kept a cold cloth on my head.

Jesus says the reason we are to pray is so we don't **“faint”**, the word used in the KJV. The NIV says so we **“don't give up.”** The Amplified says so we won't **“turn coward or lose heart”** while the Message says we are to pray consistently so we **“never quit.”** In other words, if we stop praying, we'll lose heart, we'll become discouraged. If prayer isn't a habit, it will become easy to be disheartened by all the negative things that are happening around us or to us and we will give up and give in. Looking at the storm instead of the storm keeper can cause us to lose hope, joy, faith and even trust as we let them overwhelm us. Instead of fixing our eyes on Christ, we look at the pounding waves and allow them to sink us.

During WWII when London was being bombed the heaviest by the German aerial attack, a sign appeared outside a church: “If your knees knock together, kneel on them!” In other words, when the shells of adversity are exploding all around – **“We ought to pray and not faint.”**

Jesus was telling them that the last days were going to be tough on faith and prayer would keep them from losing heart. And we are living in days when more than ever we need to pray. **E.M. Bounds states that “prayer is simply faith...when faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live.”**

If you are prone to fear and anxiety about what the future holds – pray! Pray like you have never prayed before. It must be a deliberate attitude as we wait for Christ’s coming. Even when we don’t know how to pray or what to pray for – pray for His coming, pray for His peace to settle our heart prior to His coming. The uncertainties can be unnerving. We can begin to listen to all the nay-sayers mocking our belief in the Lord’s return to the point that we begin to question the promise of His return. As events in the world go from bad to worse, we can become anxious. Jesus says pray, don’t faint. **Proverbs 24:10 “If you falter (faint) in times of trouble, how small is your strength!”**

As we look around at all that’s going wrong in the world, we can become faint hearted, but the Lord commands us to pray. To illustrate He used a parable to demonstrate our commitment to pray.

## II. OUR COMMITMENT TO PRAY – v. 2-5

This parable has two characters – a widow and a judge. I’d like to look at the parable from the perspective of the widow. Now let me say this about the parable because there is the tendency on the part of some to look at this and compare the judge to God and the poor widow to believers. But a closer look will help us see that instead of a comparison, there is actually a contrast. God is never unjust, and He has the greatest regard for mankind. Scripture tells us He has loved us with an everlasting love. He demonstrated that love when He sent Jesus to take our place and die for our sins paying the debt we

owed to give us an eternal home with Him. The judge had no reverence for God. He didn’t fear God’s wrath and he had no respect for man or man’s opinion of him. We could say that he disdained them. He continually refused to hear the case of the widow, but in contrast we know that God hears the cries of the widows and orphans when they are mistreated. When someone has no reverence for God, he has no regard for mankind.

God, on the other hand, is just and longs for us to bring our requests to Him. He is kind, loving and benevolent. He invites us to carry our burdens to Him so that He can answer them according to His will and in His time. He is never too busy. He never turns us away. He never turns a deaf ear to our pleas in times of hardship.

So here is this widow and we notice first her trouble.

### A. Her Trouble

Our passage tells us that she had a problem with an adversary. Someone was making trouble for her. From what Jesus says we assume that it was serious because she kept going and pleading with the judge to get justice for the unjust way she was being treated. Somehow, some way, someone was taking advantage of her, and she pleaded for legal help in the matter.

According to the Old Testament Law, widows were to be taken care of, but over the course of time, they became more of a burden on society than a blessing. She was obviously having a tough time. In the book of Acts the church took on the role of helping widows and later on Paul gave criteria on who qualified as a widow in need because there was abuse. By and large widows got the short end of the legal stick. The trouble began first because she was a woman. Women didn’t receive equal justice under the civil law. Second, she had no husband to defend her in this particular case. Third, she was poor and couldn’t bribe the officials.

The judge set the agenda for the day’s docket of cases to be heard. The court traveled from town to

town. A tent was set up and assistants surrounded the tent. Anyone could stand outside and present their case but only those approved to have their case heard were allowed inside the tent. Bribery was accepted as a way of getting your case brought before the judge. Alfred Edersheim called them robber judges because they were corrupt.

In that culture women had little voice in court. It was usually the husband who sought legal action in such matters. She had no husband, no advocate, no one to stand up for her rights. She had to take on the system by herself. This contrasts the believer who has both Jesus and the Holy Spirit as an advocate before a just judge.

**I John 2:1**

**Romans 8:26-27**

Whatever the case was, she was in desperate need. **How do we know that?** We know that because in **verse 3** we read that **“she kept coming to him with the plea.”** The text suggests that she made up her mind never to give up. She was relentless. Every day she came to the tent to present her case. Every day she got the same answer – no. Understand her resolve. She had nothing to lose, so she continually came hoping the judge would change his mind and every day she got the same answer.

Her trouble wasn't merely in the situation that prompted her to seek judicial action. There was also trouble with the judge. In just a few short words our text gives a vivid description of him. In **verse 2** we are told that he neither feared God nor cared about men. He only thought of himself. In **verse 6** Jesus describes him as an unjust judge. He was immoral, corrupt, unscrupulous.

The Middle Eastern culture was a culture based on shame and honor. They sought to live honorable lives so they wouldn't bring shame to them or their family. Fear of public disapproval shamed people into being or doing good. That culture hoped public shame would keep others from doing anything wrong. The Romans did that with crucifixions except that they wanted to instill fear. It was the same in medieval times with public executions.

This judge had no shame. He didn't fear God and didn't care what anyone else thought about him.

Her situation was desperate because of the injustice and because of the callous judge. She was in trouble, which brings us to her tenacity.

## B. Her Tenacity

**Has there been anything in your life that you really fought hard for?** Maybe it was a grade, a spot of the team, or a promotion. Think about the tenacity, the determination, the commitment to see it through to the end.

Here is this widow with all the odds stacked against her. She didn't stand a chance, but she kept pressing him. Finally, the judge relented, gave in, decided to hear the case and give the woman the justice she fought so hard for. Now don't for a moment think that this guy suddenly had a change of heart and felt pity on the woman and offered her mercy. He was still unjust. He still did not fear God or care what anyone thought. His motivation was purely out of selfishness. He only cared about his reputation. She was a bother. He described her tenacity as something that would eventually wear him out.

That term in **verse 5** literally means *to strike to the face, to beat black and blue*. He was figuratively getting beat up by her relentless pestering. In essence, if he didn't do something about her, she was going to give him a bad reputation.

Maybe you are experiencing some kind of injustice yourself.

Maybe as you watch the news you see injustice, things that simply get overlooked or overturned and you wonder why justice has left the courtroom.

Maybe you think that justice really is blind, but not in the way it was originally intended. In some cases justice seems topsy turvy where the victim becomes the criminal and the criminal becomes the victim.

**What can we do about it?**

We are commanded to pray.

We are to be committed to pray.

Finally, we see our confidence to pray.

## III. OUR CONFIDENCE TO PRAY – vs. 6-8

I said a moment ago that prayer is trust. When we pray, we believe God will keep His promises, even when He seems far off.

Jesus concludes this parable with an explanation about the parable and why we are command to pray and why we must be committed to pray, especially in light of end times.

It's easy to look around and watch the world unravel, watch politicians and law enforcement either turn a blind eye or have their hands tied so that they can do nothing to enforce laws. We can become outraged at the injustice or the abuse of power. We can demand justice, demand that laws are obeyed and yet nothing seems to happen. Where is the outrage? Where is the justice? We expect it. We demand it.

That's what Jesus is talking about in these closing verses. He contrasts the unjust judge with God who is the Judge of all the earth and our loving Father. He spoke first about praying with perseverance.

#### A. Pray With Perseverance – vs. 6-7

This passage is not saying that by our tenacity in prayer God will in some way become weary by our badgering and give in to our prayers. What Jesus is saying is that if an unjust judge will respond how much more will a loving God respond to the prayers of His people? **One author wrote “If an unworthy judge who feels no constraint of right or wrong is compelled by persistence to deal justly with a helpless individual, how much more will God answer prayer! He is not like the unjust judge, who had to be badgered until he wearied and gave in.”**

Prayer isn't to make God aware of what we need, neither is it a demand we make. He already knows. **Matthew 6:8 “Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”**

God desires that we pray because it conveys our trust and dependence on Him. In his book on Systematic Theology, Wayne Grudem writes that prayer “is a means whereby our trust in Him can increase. In fact, perhaps the primary emphasis of the Bible's teaching on prayer is that we are to pray

**with faith, which means trust and dependence on God.”**

When we humbly persevere in prayer, it casts our dependence on God and His promises and trust in His attributes as a loving, gracious, benevolent, caring and yes, even a just God.

When we pray with perseverance, we learn to pray with patience.

#### B. Pray With Patience – v. 8

It's learning to wait on God.

Warren Wiersbe provides a thought-provoking response. **“God's delays are not inactivity but of preparation. God is always answering prayer, otherwise Romans 8:28 could not be in the Bible. God is working in all things, at all times, causing all things to work together to accomplish His purposes.”**

Jesus closes **verse 8** with a question. **“When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” In other words, will anyone be found praying, looking for His return?**

It's not a question wondering if there will be any believers on the earth when He comes back. The question is meant to encourage believers to be praying in faith until He returns. As commanded, keep praying, otherwise you will lose heart.

**What are you praying for in this new year?  
Is growth in your walk with Christ part of your prayers?  
Are you praying for His return?  
Are you praying that you won't grow weary until He returns?**

We have been given a command to pray. We are to be committed in prayer. We are to have confidence when we pray. Now, **“let's pray so we don't faint.”**