

September 1st, 2018

## Luke 18:1-8

The Certain Gospel:  
Pray for Justice.

*Jonathan M. Romig*  
[CornerstoneWestford.com](http://CornerstoneWestford.com)

Does prayer work? When you're going through something and you ask people to pray for you, does it **matter**? Does it help? Maybe you've seen this **meme** on **Facebook** about the **uselessness** of prayer.

"I named my cats 'thoughts' and 'prayers' because they're useless."

I actually think that's **pretty funny**, but it's **sadly popular** because people believe it. Prayer doesn't work. Maybe some of you were on social media after the recent Parkland Shooting and you saw this meme showing **Neo** from the **Matrix** stopping bullets with his mind.

"When you're in school and the thoughts and prayers kick in."

The message is clear. Prayer **doesn't work**. Prayer doesn't matter. Do you believe this? I think most of us would say, "No! I believe prayer works." But our real answer is **not** what we **say** but what we **do**. If you spend time in prayer **every day**, you believe prayer works. It's easy to forget prayer's **power** and **importance**. Today I want to **encourage** us to both pray more and help us **understand** what to pray for.

### Always pray and never lose heart. (Luke 18:1)

What I like about the **parable** of the persistent widow is that Luke tells us up front **what it means**.

**Luke 18:1** "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." (NIV®)

So why does Jesus tell his disciples and us this parable? He calls us to...

#### 1) Pray consistently and regularly.

This sounds familiar to another passage of Scripture.

**1 Thessalonians 5:17** "pray continually," (NIV®) or "pray without ceasing," (ESV)

Is that really possible to pray constantly? The word for "continually" (adialeiptos) really means "to have a **consistent practice**." One pastor said it's not that our prayer should be constantly **occurring** but constantly **reoccurring**.<sup>1</sup> So to pray without ceasing means to pray **consistently** and **regularly**. If prayer is pouring your heart out to God you can do that by **intentionally directing** your attention to him **throughout your day**. I think that's what Jesus means by saying we should always pray.

If we look at the **parable** of this **widow** her practice seems to back this up. She keeps going back to the judge day after day. She's not always talking but she is **always going back**. Do you do something regularly, like your **daily commute**, driving the kids to **school** or **activities**, or maybe your **Dunkin Donuts** run? What if you used the first **15 minutes** of your commute or the **drive to school** to pray? When you pray, pray **out loud** as it keeps you **focused** on praying instead of your own thoughts and it **models** prayer for your kids. A great part of Cornerstone's story is how **Karyn** prayed for our building when they she drove by years before God brought Cornerstone into existence. Praise God. Prayer works. *Pray consistently and regularly.*

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

## 2) Never give up.

The word for “not give up” (egkakeo) means to “not lose heart.” It’s the same word we find here.

**Galatians 6:9** Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (NIV®)

May we never lose heart! May we **hope** that God will **answer** our prayers even when we’re **tired** and **afraid**. I love this illustration from C.S. Lewis’ book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. The young girl **Lucy**, her brother **Edmund**, and their cousin **Eustace** are taken to the land of **Narnia** where the **Christ-figure** is a lion named **Aslan**. The three of them go on a voyage and come to the island **Where Dreams Come True**. This is where **bad dreams** come true like **nightmares**. The **ship’s crew** is overcome by fear and begin to wildly row in the darkness. Each **sailor** hears a different noise: huge **scissors**, enemies crawling up the **side**, and **gongs**, so what does Lucy do? She **prays!**

*“Aslan, Aslan, if ever you loved us at all, send us help now.” The darkness did not grow any less, but she began to feel a little—a very, very little—better. “After all, nothing has really happened to us yet,” she thought.*

A ray of **light**, a spotlight, falls on the ship and Lucy sees something in it like a **cross**, an **albatross**. The albatross circles them three times, lands on their **mast**, sings out a note, and then **flies ahead** of them leading their ship out of the darkness.

*But no one except Lucy knew that as [the albatross] circled the mast it had whispered to her, “Courage, dear heart,” and the voice, she felt sure, was Aslan’s...*

This gets right down to the heart of it. We pray **so that** we never lose heart and we never lose heart **because** we pray. *Always pray and never lose heart!* But what should we pray for? Can we ask for anything we want?

## Pray for justice when justice seems far away. (Luke 18:2-8a)

Now we come to Jesus’ parable.

**Luke 18:2-8a** He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

4 “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 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? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.

## 1) Pray personally for vindication.

This widow **teaches us** to ask God for **personal vindication**. She is an **example** of the **Psalmist David** who prayed over and over again for God to vindicate and save him.

## Psalm 86:2

Preserve my life, for I am godly;  
save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God. (ESV)

When you feel **wronged** or **hurt** and especially when you feel **justified**, **do not lash** out at the one who hurt you **but pray** to the one who can **vindicate you**. This parable isn't a call to pray for all our **wants**. When I was a kid I **bugged** my **dad** till he bought me **computer games**. I bugged him over and over and he finally **gave in**. I think sometimes that's how we interpret this parable. **Bug God** till he gives you what you want. Although it's not that it is a call to pray **consistently, regularly, personally, and... specifically**.

## 2) Pray specifically for God's justice.

**Orphans** and **widows** were the most **at-risk class** of people in Jesus' day. This widow had **no husband** or **man** to defend her, which most women had, so it's left to her to plead her own case. Someone seems to have **taken advantage** of her. Although we don't exactly know the wrong this woman suffered, according to one **commentary** when their husbands died widows **couldn't inherit** the property directly. But they were supposed to be allowed to live in their **house** and on the **land** until they received a type of **settlement**.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this woman was **denied** her settlement or **kicked out** (Lk 20:47). We do know that her **cause** is **righteous** because although she deserves "justice" the judge initially refuses to grant it.

So we have the **widow** who is **powerless** and **at-risk** but also a **judge** who has a great deal of **power** and **authority** but misuses it for his own **pride** and **reputation**. Judges were supposed to judge **righteously** on the **Lord's behalf**. In the Old Testament king **Jehoshaphat installed** judges.

**2 Chronicles 19:6-7** He told them, "Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for mere mortals but for the Lord, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. <sup>7</sup> Now let the fear of the Lord be on you. Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery. (NIV®)

But this judge doesn't care what **man** or **God** thinks. He has **no shame** and **no honor**. I read [an article](#) recently about the judge who presided over the **Manafort case, T.S. Ellis III**. The article described him as "**tough**" because he will stop lawyers if they're not dealing in facts. He's also "**law driven**," and seeks "**just**" outcomes. He is even known to show "**compassion**" on those who take personal "**responsibility**" for their mistakes and is "not afraid to use his **discretion** to help defendants when he believes it's the **right thing** to do."<sup>3</sup> That's **not** the kind of judge this woman had. In the end what changes this judge's mind is not the fear of God but the **fear** of this woman **ruining his life**. He got tired of her **bugging** him and gave in.

Although it's **easy to overlook** I don't want us to miss that this woman is not an **example** of praying for **wants**. She is an example of praying for **justice**, specifically justice for the **oppressed** and **at-risk**. **First**, we should pray for **human justice**. This quote from **Bryan Stevenson's** book *Just Mercy* really made me think.

"The opposite of poverty is not wealth. In too many places, the opposite of poverty is justice."

As Christians, we should pray for the **oppressed** and **at-risk**. When we recognize **vulnerable** people groups, and I'm thinking of the **elderly, unborn, mentally handicapped, refugees**, those who **experience racism**, and the **impoverished** and **poor**. We should pray for them that God would grant them **human justice**.

**Second**, we should pray for **divine justice**. Notice the woman needs protection from her "**adversary**." "Adversary" is the same word used later in the New Testament to describe Satan.

**1 Peter 5:8** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your [adversary](#) the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (NIV®)

As Christians, we should be praying for justice against our adversary Satan. Satan has lot's of different tools. He can use all his spiritual tools like **discouragement**, **oppression**, and **temptation**, but he can also use the **tangible tools of injustice**, like **racism**, **predatory lending**, and **drug and alcohol addiction**. The two go together. *Let's pray specifically for God's justice, both human and divine.* It often feels like God is never going to do it, like God has **forgotten us** and his promise of justice.

### 3) God seems far away but he is not.

This passage contains what is called a “**lesser to greater argument**.”<sup>24</sup> If this **lesser** thing is true how much more must this **greater** thing be true? If this judge who is wicked and selfish is willing to grant justice **how much more** will God the father grant justice to the “chosen ones”? The **chosen ones** are those God has **adopted** by his grace and mercy (Eph 1:4-5; Rom 8:29). God may seem far away like a **strict judge** but in reality he is a **loving father** who is **near** and **invested** in our lives. *God seems far away but he is not.*

We also need to study the **literary context** of this passage for a moment. The literary context is what comes **before** and **after** your select passage. In Luke 17:20-37, the text right **before** ours, Jesus speaks of his **second coming** after he goes back into heaven. He tells us what the **last days** before his return will look like.

**Luke 17:22-24** Then he said to his disciples, “The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. 23 People will tell you, ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ Do not go running off after them. 24 For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other. (NIV®)

The reason we **experience injustice** in this world, both **human hardship** and **spiritual oppression**, is because Jesus has **not yet** returned. As Christians, it's easy to feel **disheartened** and attacked by the evil one, but the evil one wants us to believe the **lie** that Jesus is not coming back. He will return. It's been **2,000+ years** but Jesus is coming back. We're **one day closer** to Christ's return than we were **yesterday**. *Pray for justice when justice seems far away.*

### Justice comes with Christ. Do you believe that? Then pray. (Luke 18:8b)

Our parable ends by Jesus asking if he will find this kind of faith when he returns.

**Luke 18:8b** ...However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Justice is coming, but will anyone be praying for Jesus to bring that justice when he actually arrives? This is a call to pray **outside ourselves**. To not focus on myself but on **Jesus** and the **world** that needs him. Pray for **tangible justice** in our **world** and **communities** and for **spiritual justice** against **sin** and **Satan**. When Jesus comes back will he find people **yearning** for his return and the justice he brings? Will he find us praying? *Justice comes with Christ. Do you believe that? Then pray.*

If justice came **apart** from **Christ**, you and I would all be lost. We'd all be found guilty and condemned for our sins. Jesus is the judge who **recognizes** we are **guilty** but declares us **innocent** by taking the **penalty** for our sins upon himself. He went to the cross so he could **legally declare** us **righteous** because he bore our sin. One day he will return and will met-out final justice by **righting every wrong** and **making plain** every **lie**. We can rest-assured that the Father will **vindicate** all his children but the only reason we won't be **held accountable** unto death for **our sins** is because he has **forgiven us**. *Justice comes with Christ. Do you believe that? Then pray.*

PreachingToday shared a story of justice for a wrongly convicted man I want to close with.

*Nevest Coleman resumed his job as a groundskeeper for the Chicago White Sox after an unexpected hiatus left him unavailable to work-for 23 years. In 1994, Coleman was charged and convicted of rape and murder. He spent the next two decades behind bars until last November, when prosecutors vacated his conviction after considering DNA evidence that should've ruled him out as a suspect. Several months later, a Cook County judge granted Coleman a certificate of innocence, which officially cleared his name of all related charges.*

Can you **imagine** what Coleman went through? He served **two-decades** behind bars for a crime he didn't commit. What did he do to never give up? He told reporters he tried to stay positive and humble and "**I just kept praying**."5 It would have been so easy to give up but he didn't, so neither can we. The story continues.

*While maintaining a steadfast belief in his innocence, Coleman always looked back fondly on the time he spent working with the team, which felt very much like a family. After his release, friends and family members reached out to the White Sox organization, delighted by an official invite to come and reapply for his old job. After re-hiring him, the team issued an official statement:*

*"We're grateful that after more than two decades, justice has been carried out for Nevest," the team said in a statement. "It has been a long time, but we're thrilled that we have the opportunity to welcome him back to the White Sox family. We're looking forward to having Nevest back on Opening Day at home in our ballpark."6*

This is a picture of Nevest Coleman returning to his job. He's the one in the center. Nevest experienced justice and restoration after years and years of waiting. He always maintained his innocence. He never lost faith, he **prayed continually**, and one day his hope was **vindicated** and he was **restored**. How much more will we who are **in Christ** be vindicated and restored? We will all receive justice one day. We will be granted our **certificate of innocence**. *Justice comes with Christ. Do you believe that? Then pray.*

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Forestdale Community Church.*

September 1st, 2018

<sup>1</sup> Heitzig, Skip. Luke 18. Calvary Church with Skip Heitzig. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGYoz87PDyc> Accessed 8/2/18.

<sup>2</sup> Garland, David E.; Clinton E. Arnold. *Luke* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament series Book 3) (Kindle Locations 18648-18653). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Weiner, Rachel. 'He has torn my head off': Manafort judge known for being tough during trials. The Washington Post. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/he-has-torn-my-head-off-manafort-judge-known-for-being-tough/2018/07/31/f604e25a-6f28-11e8-afd5-778aca903bbe\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.c29b691215c7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/he-has-torn-my-head-off-manafort-judge-known-for-being-tough/2018/07/31/f604e25a-6f28-11e8-afd5-778aca903bbe_story.html?utm_term=.c29b691215c7) Accessed 8/1/18.

<sup>4</sup> Garland, Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Minor, Chris. *Former Chicago White Sox groundskeeper released from prison after DNA raises doubts*. WGAD 8. Published 11/20/17. <https://wqad.com/2017/11/20/former-chicago-white-sox-groundskeeper-released-from-prison-after-dna-raises-doubts/amp/> Accessed 9/1/18.

<sup>6</sup> Former Inmate Gets Job Back After DNA Exoneration. Copyright Christianity Today 2018. Accessed 8/2/18.