

X MARKS THE SPOT

"THE UNNERVING SILENCE OF GOD"

LUKE 18:1-8

This Week's Core Competency

Prayer – I pray to God to know him, to lay my request before him and to find direction for my daily life. Psalm 66:16-20

*Come and listen, all you who fear God;
let me tell you what he has done for me.
17 I cried out to him with my mouth;
his praise was on my tongue.
18 If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened;
19 but God has surely listened
and heard my voice in prayer.
20 Praise be to God,
who has not rejected my prayer
or withheld his love from me!*

Patience and persistence are corollaries; they walk hand in hand. Patient people persist; they persevere. Impatient people hardly ever do. What's more, patience and persistence are pertinent to prayer. Impatient people give up on prayer too quickly; they seldom persist in prayer.

Too bad, impatience is infectious; practically all of us catch it from everyday life. We prefer email to "snail" mail for obvious reasons. We send text messages because calling is too much trouble and takes too much time; texting is easier and faster. We choose Comcast's Xfinity high speed

History is a test of faith, and the correct response to that test is persistent prayer.

- Philip Yancey

broadband—it's faster at 22.0 mbps than Charter Internet's service at 3.0 mbps for the same price—because we want to download music and videos faster. We buy online from vendors that offer one-day shipping. Want it tomorrow? If so, Amazon tells you how many minutes you have to order it. "Want it delivered Friday, June 1?" Amazon asks before you add the item to your shopping cart. "Order it in the next 2 hours and 46 minutes, and choose One-Day Shipping at checkout." It's no wonder we find it difficult to follow the example of the psalmist, David, who wrote, "I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry" (Ps 40:1).

Prayer isn't a "God, add this to my shipping cart" matter. What's more, he doesn't guarantee one-day shipping at Amen. When it comes to praying once is not enough; prayer demands persistence. Philip Yancey writes, "God views my persistence as a sign of genuine desire for change, the one prerequisite for spiritual growth. When I really want something, I strive and persist. Persistent prayer keeps bringing God and me together, with several important benefits. As I pour out my soul to God, I get it off my chest, so to speak, unloading some of my burden to One who can handle it better. Little by little, as I get to know God I learn that God has nothing in common with an unjust judge or a stingy neighbor, though at times it may seem so. What I learn from spending time with God then better equips me to discern what God wants to do on earth, as well as in my role in that plan" (*Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference*, 152).

For Discussion

On unanswered prayer, Philip Yancey comments, "I will always remember an alcoholic friend who expressed to me his frustration at praying daily for God to remove his desire for drink, only to find each morning his thoughts turning to Jack Daniel's whiskey. Was God even listening? Later, it dawned on him that the desire for alcohol was the main reason he prayed so diligently. Persistent temptation had compelled persistent prayer" (150). Well, was he?

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Luke 18:1-8

Cf., another translation

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 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 about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'"

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. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (NIV(c)1984)

18:1 Then Jesus told them a parable to show them they should always pray and not lose heart. 18:2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. 18:3 There was also a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' 18:4 For a while he refused, but later on he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor have regard for people, 18:5 yet because this widow keeps on bothering me, I will give her justice, or in the end she will wear me out by her unending pleas.'" 18:6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unrighteous judge says! 18:7 Won't God give justice to his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay long to help them? 18:8 I tell you, he will give them justice speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (the NET Bible)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "to" indicating *purpose* in v. 1.
- * Circle "judge" in v. 2.
- * Underline the description of the judge ("who . . .") in vv. 2, 4.
- * Circle "kept coming" in v. 3.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 4.
- * Highlight what the judge said to himself in v. 4.

- * Box "even though" indicating *concession* in v. 4.
- * Box "yet" indicating *contrast* in vv. 4, 5.
- * Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 5.
- * Box "so that" indicating *purpose* in v. 5.
- * Highlight what the Lord said in v. 6.
- * Circle "Son of Man" in v. 8.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Explain why verse 1 makes you want to read the parable.
2. Disciples should "always pray and not give up." Not give up what?
3. Verses 2 and 3 contain descriptions of the parable's two characters. What's your first impression of the judge?
4. Explain why the fact that he "neither feared God nor cared about men" is repeated.
5. What's your first impression of the widow?
6. "For some time he refused" the widow's plea comes as no surprise. How come?
7. "But finally" he granted her request. What does the word "finally" suggest to you?
8. For what reason and to what end did the judge make sure that the widow got justice?
9. The widow sought "justice," the unjust judge granted her "justice," and God will see that those who cry out for *justice* get *justice*. To what might "justice" refer?
10. **Discussion:** Jesus concludes with a reference to the coming of the Son of Man. Talk about what that has to do with the parable (cf., 17:22-37).

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Recognizing the point of a parable is like getting the punch line of a joke. You either get it or you don't, and if you don't, explaining it somehow diminishes the laughter in the one case or blunts the point in the other. The point of Jesus' parable in Luke 18:1-8 really is impossible to miss. Luke tells us what it is before he tells us the parable. "Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." Reading the parable with Luke's words ringing in our ears makes "getting it" easy. We ought to persist in prayer like the widow persisted. If an unjust judge granted her request simply because he didn't want to put up with her nagging any longer, how much more will God grant the requests of his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?

Philip Yancey writes, "Once again Jesus is presenting a parable of contrasts. In our prayers we may sometimes feel like the widow: alone, powerless, a victim of unfairness, disregarded, the least and last person in line. The truth, though, is the opposite. We have both an advocate and a direct line to a loving Father who has nothing in common with the insensitive judge in the story. When God seems slow to respond, we may suspect a lack of concern. Jesus corrects the misconception, pointing beyond how we may feel to an assurance of God's mercy. If even this widow gets justice from a heartless judge, how much more will God bring about justice for his chosen ones 'who cry out to him day and night.'"

But what about the haunting question at the end? Yancey continues. "And then, just as the audience settles back in comfortable reassurance, comes the sting in the tail: 'However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?' The disciples would have known exactly what Jesus meant, for he had just been talking about his eventual return, the second coming. Justice will surely reign one day. Appearing this time in power

and great glory, the Son of Man has pledged to turn the tables on this violent planet, righting every wrong and restoring the world to what God intended: a world without unjust judges and neglected widows; without any poverty, or death, suffering, or rebellion. Until that future day, some will be tempted to doubt, to disbelieve in God completely or to see God as a merciless judge" (148). In other words, some will be tempted to give up hope; others will be tempted to give up praying. Some will do both.

Nearly two thousand years ago Jesus told his disciples to pray "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:9, 10). And now scoffers have come in the last days saying, "Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation," and so they scornfully ask, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?" (2Pe 3:4). To them Jesus answers, "Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly." One author summarizes the message of this parable well. "In xvii. 20-37 the Saviour emphasized the fact that no one will be able to determine in advance the time of His second coming. He now teaches in this parable that when His coming is apparently slow in taking place believers are not to become discouraged, but should persist in prayer, knowing that He will indeed come at the right time and will answer their supplication by destroying the powers of evil and by causing His chosen ones to triumph. The parable has, however, also a more general meaning, namely, that the faithful should persevere in prayer with regard to all other matters when the answer is not immediately granted" (Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, NICNT, 446).

The Message of the Passage

Pray continually even if your requests aren't granted immediately; never stop praying.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

- Write about what God wants you to know . . .

- Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

- Write about what God wants you to do . . .

“The Unnerving Silence of God”
(Use the space below for Sunday’s message notes)

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **that** Even though the point of Jesus' parables isn't always obvious, the point of this one is impossible to miss. Luke states it at the outset; disciples "should always pray and not give up."
- v. 1 **always** "The idea is of continual prayer, not continuous, nonstop prayer" (Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC, 444). The Lord wants his disciples to persist in prayer until he returns (cf. 17:22-37). "Jesus told them a story showing that it was necessary for them to pray consistently and never quit" (*The Message*).
- v. 2 **neither** The judge had no regard for either the commandment to love God or to love neighbor. Sounds like this judge is a man like King Jehoiakim whom Josephus described as "unjust and wicked by nature, neither reverent toward God nor kind to people" (*Antiquities* 10.83). "What sort of official this 'judge' is supposed to be in the context of first-century Palestine is not clear (nor does the parable require that the reader know). Most matters of dispute were brought before the elders of the local synagogue, but a dishonest judge who had no respect for God hardly fits this picture. Thus, it is likely that a Gentile judge is in view, which would heighten the contrast made in v. 7 between the judge and God" (Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, NIBC, 269).
- v. 2 **men** I.e., "people" (cf., the NET Bible). Clearly the term connotes men and women—even widows!
- v. 3 **widow** "Widows, along with other unfortunates and outcasts of respectable Jewish society, are among those to whom Jesus regularly ministers and extends God's grace and favor. The judge's callousness toward the widow is clearly in violation of biblical injunctions (Deut. 10:18; Mal. 3:5; Sir 35:12-15) (269).
- v. 3 **kept coming** The imperfect tense describes *continuing* (or here *repeated*) action in the past. "This is an iterative imperfect; the widow did this on numerous occasions" (the NET Bible, **tn** 11 on Lk 18:3).
- v. 4 **even though** "'Even though' introduces a concessive clause, i.e., not *because* but *despite the fact that*. The repetition of 18:2b emphasizes the character of the judge as one that ignores the two basic commandments (10:27)" (Stein, 445).
- v. 5 **wear me out** Lit., "hit me under the eye." Most translations render the word figuratively, but one commentator thinks humor might be involved. "The verb that means 'to hit under the eye' (see 1 Cor. 9:27) is often used in a figurative sense ('to blacken the face' [i.e., besmirch one's character] or to 'wear out completely'; Fitzmyer, p. 1179). Jesus could intend humor (as there is in many of his sayings, see Matt. 7:3-5) and so the literal rendering may be the most appropriate; 'lest she come and give me a black eye.' The humor is seen in the fact that this uncaring judge, who fears neither God nor man, finally relents, lest he suffer violence at the hands of a widow" (269). *The Message* paraphrases the verse 5 that way, "But because this widow won't quit badgering me, I'd better do something and see that she gets justice—otherwise I'm going to end up beaten black-and-blue by her pounding."
- v. 7 **will not God** "Although the conclusion of the argument is in the form of a question that expects a positive answer, it can be reworded as follows: 'If the unjust judge yielded to the continuous cries of the widow, who was a stranger, and granted her the vindication she sought (the picture part of the parable), how much more will God, who is just and their loving Father (12:30; 11:2), hear the cries of his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night (the reality part)'" (Stein, 445).
- v. 8 **Son of Man** Jesus frequently used the designation "Son of Man" (cf. Dan 7:13) to refer to himself. Its use here links the parable to 17:22-37 about the return of the Son of Man.
- v. 8 **quickly** "God longs to vindicate the saints, and he will do so. When he does, his justice will be swift and sure, and our suffering will seem short-lived compared to the glory to follow. In the meantime he protects us" (Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, 455).
- v. 8 **will he find** "The words with which the Lord ends this discourse express not so much a question as a challenge. The Lord is not communicating despair or predicting defection. He is challenging His followers to endurance. The real issue isn't the goodness of God, but the endurance of man. God isn't like the judge, but are we like the widow? We can trust Him to answer, but can He trust us to keep asking?" (Gary Inrig, *The Parables*, 159).
- v. 8 **faith on the earth** I.e., will he find the faithful still praying? "Faith prompts prayer while prayer strengthens faith" (Evans, 267).

Family Time

Family time will help you take a break from your busy schedule and spend time connecting with your family.
Tips for your Family Time: Keep it simple! Be flexible! Do it often! HAVE FUN!!

The scene in Luke 18:1-8 is a familiar one. "Mom, can I have this?" "Can I?" "Please!" "Can I have it just this once?" "Pleeeeeeease can I get it?" "I won't ask for anything else if I can have it!" "Can I get it?"

How many times I have given in to the constant begging of my children simply to get some peace and quiet! Reading the account of the persistent widow makes me smile as I empathize with the judge. "Just give her what she wants so she won't wear me out!" However, Jesus uses this parable to teach us a valuable principle. We should never hesitate to bring our prayers and petitions before the Lord. He is glorified when we trust Him for everything we need. And unlike us, He does not tire of hearing us over and over again. Consider placing a prayer board in our home. It could be a poster on the refrigerator, a white board hanging in the hall, or a chalkboard near the dinner table. Begin listing your family's prayer requests on it. First, it will remind you to continue to pray for those things you are expecting God to answer. Next, it will keep you aware when He answers, especially when you get to erase one from the board. This is one time you have permission to beg!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Luke 18:1-8

*Why did the widow keep coming to the judge?

*Did the judge grant her request?

*What does the passage say God will do for those who cry out to him day and night?

What Do You Think

*How does Jesus relate this story to our prayers?

*How does our consistent praying show our faith in God?

*Are you persistent in your prayers or do you give up when it seems like God isn't answering?

What R U Going To Do

One night at dinner, make a list as a family of all the prayers you have seen God answer this year. Has a loved one been healed? Did the kids pass the test or make the team? Has God been faithful and provided for your needs? Post the list on the door you use the most so everyone is reminded that persistent prayers get answered!

MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

Core Comp

Prayer - I talk to God so I can know Him, ask Him for things, and find out what He wants me to do.

Memory Verse

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
 Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.