
Small Group Study Luke 18:1-14: Prayer

Opening Discussion: Describe your prayer life in a couple of sentences. Describe a pattern you use, or a specific time of day. Share any thing that help you pray more faithfully or hinders you from praying consistently.

- Context: Jesus had just revealed His Father's master plan of betrayal and death, and he had warned his followers that the world (through what the NT epistles referred to as the spirit of antichrist) would circle like vultures to prey on the spiritually weak and dying. This must have been so disheartening for Jesus' followers. He now wanted to encourage them.
 - Remember: he foretold the kingdom would be inside of them, not observable and visible as they desired. His admonishment was not to seek earthly dead things, but to seek living and life giving things found in the soul through God. (Remember Lot's Wife! - Luke 17:32)
- If Jesus admonished his followers to avoid the dead-earthly things, then what were they to pursue? What were the living and life-giving things? The answer is simple yet profound: seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all the rest will be added.¹

Discussion Question: What discourages you and/or encourages you the most about today's culture when it comes to being able to share the Gospel?

- Jesus told **two parables to reinforce the truth about God's plan for building a spiritual kingdom:**
 - **Parable 1 - a justice parable about God's plan for those who would believe and pursue Christ's righteousness. (Luke 18:1-8)**
 - **Parable 2 - a justice parable about God's plan for those who would go back to the law and rely on their own self righteousness. (Luke 18:9-14)**

Discussion Question: Does it help you personally to learn Gospel truth through parables? Why or why not? Why do you think Jesus utilized parables?

¹ Matthew 6:33

- **Parable 1 - a justice parable about God's plan for those who would believe and pursue Christ's righteousness:** Jesus decided to give His followers a parable to encourage them to pray and not lose heart.

- **[1] And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. [2] He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. [3] And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' [4] For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, [5] yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" [6] And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. [7] And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? [8] I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"**
- The women in this parable is meant to illustrate an annoying nag. NO ONE likes to be nagged. When I say "Mom, Mom, Mom, Mommy, Momma, Moma-cita, MOTHER!", I'm sure there are wonderful moms squirming in their seats right now. Jesus wanted to conjure that feeling, but he wanted to use that feeling in a positive way, because there are times when we should persistently keep after someone else to do the right thing, especially as it relates to justice!
- In this parable Jesus uses **a negative example to compare and contrast man's care for people with God's incredible care for His own people.**
 - Jesus was saying to pray to God with a nagging fervency, not because he is annoyed, but because God longs and loves to hear his children seek him in faith.²

Discussion Question: has there ever been anything you have given up praying for because it took to long to see a perceivable answer? Is there a legitimate reason to stop praying for that request, or start praying for that request again?

- **The key phrase in this parable is "justice to His elect"**. God will give justice to His people, but the question is **"how long will that justice take?"** Here we see another example of "the already/not yet" timeline of the Gospel.³

² Psalm 34:15, 116:1; Jeremiah 33:3; 1 John 5:14

³ Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary: Luke Vol. 2. (NJ: P&R, 2009), 245.

- The speedy justice took place on the cross and with the empty tomb. This is an understanding that God's elect have now received the satisfaction of the justice of the cross for their sins with the accompanying offer of Christ's righteousness in payment.
- The long view of justice looks forward to Christ's eventual return when He comes back for His elect. Will He find us faithful? This harkens back to the separation He predicts in Luke 17.
- In the in between time of Jesus' resurrection and return, like the widow in this parable, God wants us to consistently and persistently pray!
- What are we supposed to persistently pray for?
 - The parable gives us clarity: Justice against our adversary.
- But who is our adversary?
 - Genesis 3:13-19 - Our adversarial relationship with Satan began from the very beginning, and the entire narrative of the Gospel throughout human history comes from that moment. Genesis 3:15 [15] I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (ESV)
 - Ephesians 6:12 - Paul taught the church that we need to look beyond mere flesh and blood to understand our true enemy! Ephesians 6:12 [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (ESV)
- Our days can be filled with struggle and our struggles find their root in the broken condition of this world due to sin. That sin was brought to the earth through Satan. The earth is in a continually pitched battle of darkness and light. We can see this in every story ever written: good vs evil.
- Jesus encouraged us to see this battle, name it, and ask God to lead us through it! In essence, we are praying in hope for the completion of God's gospel plan. We aren't praying in hope that he will accomplish his purpose. We are praying from the position of hope, knowing his promises are certain! This hope informs our confidence and courage to carry on!
- **Discussion Questions: Do you actively pray for God's protection and for the Devil's defeat? Why or why not? Take a moment to discuss why people pray for**

a “hedge of protection”. What does that mean? What is the profit of praying for something God has already promised us? (i.e. future victory over evil, the return of Christ, etc.)

- **18:9-14 Parable 2 - a justice parable about God’s plan for those who would go back to the law and rely on their own self righteousness:** Jesus went on to give an example of the division that would take place between Pharisees and followers of Christ.
- **[9] He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: [10] “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11] The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. [12] I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ [13] But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ [14] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”**
 - Jesus started with the prayer life (prayer is the theme of the last parable) of both a pharisee and a tax collector.
 - The tax collector was meant to represent followers of Christ within this context, and this should encourage us with Christ’s love for sinners.
 - **The Gospel gives us freedom to admit that we are worse than others can even say we are!**
 - **1 John 1:8–10 [8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (ESV)**

Discussion Question: when it comes to prayer, why is it important that we acknowledge our sin struggles in honesty to God?

- The Pharisee in this story prayed with a focus toward his own righteousness, while the tax collector prayed with an understanding of his own unworthiness. The Pharisee believed he had earned the right to approach God’s throne of grace with

confidence, while the tax collector knew he did not deserve to be in God's presence.

- As I mentioned last week, the spirit of antichrist wraps truths in lies, and lies in truths. We are encouraged in scripture to approach God boldly, but with an understanding of our unworthiness without Christ!⁴
- J. I. Packer said it this way: "A half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth."⁵
- Ray Ortlund, in his book *Eat, Drink & Be Merry*, said it this way: "The whole truth about me—and you—is two extremes together. We are created by God, and we are marred by sin. It's why Francis Schaeffer called us "glorious ruins."⁶
- Many of us approach God with a contractual prayer relationship. I mean to say that we come to God with a list of services rendered and a "balance due" expectation. It tends to sound something like this:
 - "God, I have done _____ for you, just as the Bible has told me to do. Now I am expecting you to respond to my prayer with _____."

Discussion Question: where have you seen these types of prayers employed in church or in the public square? Have you ever prayed with this attitude in your own life?

- **Only the tax collector received justification (forgiveness of sins) because he realized the source of righteousness (or his worthiness to approach God) could never come from himself.**
- In this parable, Jesus gave a nuanced truth that humility is very much a part of true surrender, salvation and sanctification.
- **Kingdom minded prayer seeks God's work of justice on the earth while also remembering that God is withholding justice from us that we deserve: the very justice Jesus settled on the cross.**

⁴ The context of Hebrews 4:16 is understanding Jesus as our high priest who makes it possible to approach God because of His salvific work, not our own worthiness as a priest.

⁵ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 126.

⁶ Ray Ortlund, *Eat, Drink & Be Merry: A Gospel Call to Bold Enjoyment*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2026), 75.

- I don't find it surprising that David's own Psalms change tone from seeking justice against his enemies to the Psalms in the 50's that ask God for mercy because of his own sin with Bathsheba.
- **I use a simple alliterated approach to prayer that helps me to follow the process of gospel mindedness when I pray.**
 - **Come** (to God with confidence), **Contrition** (remember your humble position and your dependence on Jesus), **Confession** (always start with your sinful condition and preach the Gospel to it), **Conversation** (share with God your concerns boldly and honestly).

Discussion Question: is there a pattern of prayer you prescribe to in your own personal life. How does the Lord's prayer (Matt. 6 & Luke 11) follow a similar pattern?

- Both of these parables draw us into a proper perspective on Gospel centered prayer.
 - Milton Vincent summarized it well in *A Gospel Primer*: "As long as I am inside the gospel, I experience all the protection I need from the powers of evil that rage against me. It is for this reason that the Bible tells me to "take up" and "put on" the whole armor of God; and the pieces of armor it tells me to put on are all merely synonyms for the gospel."⁷
- Application: **The Gospel is a message of dependency and freedom. When we are dependent on Christ alone for meaning, purpose and strength it gives us a bold freedom to walk though life with confidence, compassion and rest.**

Small Group Prayer Initiative: Spend some time as a group practicing a Gospel centered prayer pattern.

⁷ Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians, Learning to see the Glories of God's Love.* (Lockman Foundation, 2008), 15. The armor of God found in Ephesians 6.