



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 19

October 19, 2025

The Purpose of Prayer

Luke 18:1–8

¹ Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, ²saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. ³ Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ ⁴ And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, ⁵ yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’”

⁶ Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. ⁷ And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? ⁸ I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

Why does God want us to pray? I mean, if God loves us, why would He withhold any good gift until we ask for it? Why does He say: "You have not because you ask not"? In other words, what is the value and purpose of prayer?

Almost everyone prays. There are times when it seems people pray automatically, even if they don't know who or what they're praying to. They pray in times of war, in the event of sudden danger, and when they're seriously ill. You might be surprised at how earnestly they pray in times like these.

But it would be interesting to take a poll to find out how many people pray regularly, or irregularly, or maybe not at all; I wonder how many actually feel that prayer is something that should be left to the clergy and a handful of unusually religious people; I wonder how many even think of prayer as a sign of weakness or a lack of self-confidence. I suppose that even those of us who do pray with some regularity could stand to be less hurried, and more fervent and thoughtful in our prayer life.

Jesus, of course, was a man of prayer. He often went off alone to pray by Himself. He taught us the Lord's Prayer. Again and again He said to His followers: "Watch and pray." And in the parable in today's pericope He spoke with the intent that we "should always pray and not give up," as if to plead with us to have faith in the God who answers prayer.

The widow in this parable came to a judge as her last and only hope. But he was a wicked judge; he neither feared God nor cared for man. Now, imagine this judge sitting one morning on his bench with many people coming before him seeking justice, which he



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deals out with decidedly villainous partiality, always giving his best pronouncements to those who brought the greatest incentives. Then comes this widow with her request. She has no money with which to bribe him; she has no power or influence with which to bully him; all she can do is cast herself upon his mercy. Several times she tried to speak, but each time her voice was drowned out, until at last she finally caught the judge's ear. "My lord," she said, "grant me justice against my adversary." Seeing her poverty, and that there was no benefit to him in hearing her, he commanded her to hold her tongue; he had other business to attend to, and so he went on to another case in which the fees for his services were more attractive. But still he hears her cry: "My lord, I am a widow, grant me justice against my adversary." Finally, he had her thrown out. She had interrupted the business of the court and made herself a nuisance. "Make sure she doesn't get in again," he said. But before the day was out he would discover just how troublesome she really was! She waited till he left the court, followed him to his home. No sooner had he sat down to dinner than there was a knock at the door. It was the widow. "Send her away!" he told his servants. The next morning, as he entered the court, there she was again. We don't know why she was so persistent. Maybe someone was trying to cheat her out of the land her husband had left her. Maybe someone was trying to rob her of her income, leaving her with hungry and crying children. Whatever it was, it had reached a level of crisis for her and she simply would not give up. This judge was her only hope. And if it was the last word on her lips, she would continue to plead with him: "Grant me justice against my adversary." Finally, the judge could stand it no longer. He cared nothing for her or her children, but so that she would not continue to pester him, he granted her request.

And now Jesus points out that if even a villain of a judge will hear the earnest pleading of a woman for whom he has no regard, won't the Father in heaven hear His own children, whom He loves, for whom He sent His own Son, and who are the heirs of His kingdom?

What are the lessons, then, that we can learn about prayer from this parable? First of all, we learn that God wants us to look to Him like the widow looked to that judge, that we are in utter need of His help and that He is our only hope.

The context tells us that Jesus was speaking to His disciples. He had just told them of rough days ahead for His followers, days when persecutions would come and it might seem as if God had forsaken His Church. He was encouraging them to persevere in prayer, like the widow, and not lose heart. God was still their Refuge and Strength.

Persecution of believers in Christ occurs in many places around the world today, and we can see it on our own doorstep. Ridicule and scorn toward the followers of Christ is increasingly evident. We've witnessed the name of Christ being maligned, as well as the names of many who take a stand in His defense. At times like these it may seem that our prayers to God go unanswered, as though God has no regard for the faithful. But in all the world events of our day, as in our own personal affairs, God's purpose is always to draw



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us closer to Himself. Under the surface His overall plan persists to increase in us a spirit of humility and faith which will draw our eyes to the hills from whence our help comes, to aid us in the realization that every good gift comes down from above, and to inspire us to sing with greater sincerity: "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow." If our young men and women must go forth once again to battle the forces of greed and oppression, if the family business fails and we find ourselves on the brink of financial ruin, if the condition of our physical health threatens to shorten the length of our journey here, if it seems that we are losing the battle against the forces of evil corrupting the moral fiber of our nation, God's intent in allowing us to face these and other crises is to drive us to our knees, to make us more sharply aware that with all our machines and wealth and intelligence, we are still utterly helpless and hopeless in our own strength, to make us feel like the doctor who leaves a hospital room to report to a family about his patient and who shakes his head, saying: "I've done everything I can. Only God can help us now."

So, one purpose of prayer is to remind us that we are entirely dependant upon God. Another lesson we learn from this parable is that prayer helps us to have a right attitude toward God. Someone once asked, "In church, why does the pastor say 'Let us pray'? What does he mean? Does he think we can change the order of the universe by prayer?" It's a fair question. Do we expect our prayers to change God? Certainly, God *can* change the order of the universe, but let's remember that the purpose of prayer is not to change the Will of God. "True prayer asks not that God's Will be *changed*, but that His Will be *done*, in us and through us." Our wills need to be changed. *We ourselves* need to be changed. We need to be brought into harmony with God and His plan for the world.

"Give us this day our daily bread," we ask in the Lord's Prayer. But then the Catechism explains that God gives daily bread to everyone without our prayer, even to all evil people. What we pray in this petition is that God will lead us to recognize that He's the Giver, so that we will receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

Origen, one of the early church fathers, said: "The whole life of the Christian should be one great connected prayer." When we have a proper understanding of our relationship to God we will pray all the time: at work, while we play or eat or sing or write, in our every act expressing harmony with God, always either thanking and honoring Him, or seeking forgiveness, or some other help. This is how we follow Scripture's admonition to pray "without ceasing."

To some, prayer is little more than wishfulness. If we want something hard enough and long enough, they say, it's bound to happen. But remember, the purpose of prayer is to lead us away from ourselves. True prayer reaches up. It takes effort and endurance, like climbing a mountain. God doesn't want us to be cheap in our devotion. "A trivial spirit cannot unlock Heaven's bounty." Our prayers should not be a few hasty words at the end of the day, nor thoughtless repetition, nor words spoken almost in superstition, like



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something awful will happen if we forget to pray. Of course, the fervency of our prayer does not earn us an answer from God, but still our prayer must be sincere.

And God always answers in His wisdom and in His own time. And when His time comes, when His purpose is fulfilled, He will eagerly pour out His blessings upon those He loves – upon you! The answer will then be like the sudden burst of green after the dreary months of winter. Remember, God is drawing us to Himself as we pray.

The judge in our Gospel couldn't stand the pleading of a widow, though he didn't care for her in the least. In Christ, God is our Father, and we are His children. How can the Father fail to be compassionate and tenderhearted toward His own child? We know that He cares for us. He gave Himself into death that we might be blessed forever. Jesus says: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden." "Ask, and you will receive." He assures us that "whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."

You can rest assured that our sisters in the Lutheran Women's Missionary League do their fair share of praying. I have known women who prayed over every coin dropped in their mite boxes, asking God to multiply them for His kingdom. Whenever the LWML meets in convention, prayers are sent to the throne of grace for the Lord's guidance on how to allocate their mission dollars, which are then sent to support missions all over the world. Our own ladies prayerfully produce blankets and assemble school and personal supplies to aid those in need in every corner of the globe. LWML mission gifts have helped to build hospitals, orphanages, and other facilities in which not only material aid is provided, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed. There is no doubt that souls abide in heaven as a result of the dedication of Lutheran Women in Mission. We praise God for them, knowing that they would in turn commend to each of us a rigorous life of prayer.

Like the widow, we come before the Lord with open hearts, pleading no merit of our own, offering no sacrifice by which we hope to gain His favor, but casting ourselves wholly upon the love of God in Christ, who receives our prayers and sets them in the lap of God. As we sang moments ago:

Jesus, advocate on high
Sacrificed on Calvary's altar.
Through Your priestly blood we cry:
Hear our prayers, though they may falter;
Place them on Your Father's throne
As Your own.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen