

The Widow and the Unjust Judge

July 15 • Bible Study Guide 7

Bible Background • LUKE 18:1–8

Printed Text • LUKE 18:1–8 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 145:13b–20

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson we will: EXAMINE the relationship between persistence and justice; VALUE the need for faithful persistence today; and BECOME persistent in prayer.

In Focus

Jonathan never thought this day would come. After spending twenty years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, Jonathan was vindicated after a DNA test proved his innocence. Through the persistent prayers of his loving mother, Evelyn, Jonathan was finally free.

At age seventeen, Jonathan had been falsely accused of robbing a convenience store and shooting the store owner. He fit the description of the shooter, and Jonathan's clothes had the owner's blood on them because he had attempted to help the victim. Despite Jonathan's defense, the jury found him guilty of the charges.

Devastated by the conviction, Evelyn made it her mission to seek her son's vindication. A Christian woman of prayer and action, Evelyn spent the next twenty years seeking justice for her son. While raising her other three children, she researched the background of Jonathan's case, noticing inconsistencies in witness testimonies and police reports. She sought the help of many lawyers, but to no avail. Yet Evelyn never gave up.

With God's help, Evelyn went to a local law school and earned a law degree. She joined a legal advocacy group that sought to overturn false convictions. Evelyn and her legal team gathered enough evidence, including DNA evidence, to request a judge to review the case. After many years of many setbacks, a judge exonerated Jonathan of the crime. Jonathan now advocates alongside his mother for seeking justice for the falsely accused. *In today's lesson, Jesus reminds believers to persist in prayer and faithful action.*

Keep in Mind

“And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?” (Luke 18:7).

Words You Should Know

A. Parable (Luke 18:1) *parabole* (Gk.)—A (symbolic) fictitious narrative of common life conveying a moral, or adage.

B. Avenge (v. 3) *ekdikeo* (Gk.)—To vindicate one's right, do justice; to protect, defend one person from another.

Say It Correctly

Adversary. ad-ver-sa-**REE**.

Troubleth. **TRU**-bi-lith.

KJV

Luke 18:1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;
2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:
3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.
4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;
5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.
6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.
7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?
8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

NLT

Luke 18:1 One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up.
2 “There was a judge in a certain city,” he said, “who neither feared God nor cared about people.
3 A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, ‘Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.’
4 The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, ‘I don’t fear God or care about people,
5 but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!’”
6 Then the Lord said, “Learn a lesson from this unjust judge.
7 Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don’t you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?
8 I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?”

The People, Places, and Times

Widows. In ancient Israel, women were dependent upon their husbands for their social status, well-being, and protection. When husbands died, the inheritance was bestowed to the next male relative, starting with the firstborn son. If there were no immediate surviving male relatives, the inheritance was given to the next male kin in the clan, leaving widows totally vulnerable to neglect and abuse from society if they didn’t have the protection of a male relative. In the Old Testament, God instructed Israel to care for the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner in the Law (see [Deuteronomy 24:17–18](#)) and promises judgment against those who would break His commandment ([Psalm 68:5](#)).

Judges. In ancient Israel, magistrates resolved conflicts between Israelites. God called Moses to appoint judges from among the people to handle minor matters among the Israelites. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses admonishes judges to hold impartiality, not preferring the rich and privileged over the orphan, the widow, and the foreigner among them (see [Deuteronomy 1:16–18](#)). If matters were too great for the judges to assess, they deferred to Moses. Judges might have served as chieftains or tribal leaders during times of crisis, as we see in the book of Judges. In the book, the prophet Deborah and the military leaders Othniel and Gideon are notable figures who “judged Israel” in the midst of fighting the Philistines.

If we analyze our current court system, how fair and impartial are the sentences handed down by judges?

Background

As Jesus was journeying to Jerusalem from Galilee to carry out His divine mission, He and His disciples made stops along the way in Samaria to minister to the people. Jesus performed many miracles and spoke many parables. As He was heading toward Jerusalem ([Luke 9:52–54](#)), Jesus passed through Samaria, a region north of

Judea whose people were notably despised by many Jews during Jesus' day. The Samaritans were the descendants of the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which fell to the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC. During that time, the Assyrians intermarried with the Israelite inhabitants. Consequently, the Samaritans were half-Jewish and half-Gentile. The Samaritans' faith tradition was similar to Jewish faith, but strikingly different in the part that mattered most to Jews: the holy dwelling place of God. For Jews, the house of God was the Temple in Jerusalem, while for Samaritans, the presence of God dwelt on Mt. Gerazim in the region of Samaria. One village did not receive Jesus' ministry ([Luke 9:51–53](#)), but He continued to teach, heal, and exorcise demons within Samaria.

On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus cleanses ten lepers ([Luke 17:11–19](#)), and some Pharisees ask Him about the coming of God's kingdom ([Luke 17:20–21](#)). After Jesus admonishes the Pharisees to recognize God's work among them, He urges the disciples to prepare for the coming of God's kingdom, although Jesus does not indicate when God will bring all things to fulfillment. However, there will be signs of its inbreaking ([Luke 17:22–37](#)).

What connection is there between the kingdom of God and our need to pray consistently?

At-A-Glance

1. The Persistent Widow ([Luke 18:1–3](#))
2. The Unjust Judge Relents (vv. 4–5)
3. God's Justice (vv. 6–8)

In Depth

1. The Persistent Widow ([Luke 18:1–3](#))

After Jesus discusses the coming of the Son of Man with His disciples ([Luke 17:22–37](#)), He tells them a parable to instruct them to persist in prayer during the present ordeal, which might include suffering for the sake of God's reign. Jesus introduces a widow who persistently seeks justice from a judge against an unspecified enemy. Here the widow's persistence serves as a model for the disciples. What is striking is that the widow, whose gender excluded her from being a credible witness in the ancient Jewish court, defies social conventions and pursues justice for herself without depending on a male relative to corroborate her claim. However, this judge "feared not God, neither regarded man." The judge's lack of interest toward the widow violated the judicial code of conduct outlined in the Old Testament. Despite this judge's lack of concern for God or the woman, the widow persists on coming to him to seek vindication.

How often do we choose to go the extra mile for those treated unjustly by others?

2. The Unjust Judge Relents (vv. 4–5)

At first, the judge simply refused the widow's petition. After a while, the judge relents and grants the persistent widow judgment, not because he repented from not fearing the God of justice or suddenly developed compassion for the widow. Rather, the judge grants her vindication because she continually troubles him. The judge becomes astonished at the widow's persistence; the widow, according to societal norms, should have accepted her fate. However, the widow defies these norms by demanding the judge to carry out his responsibility. The relentless widow "wears out" the judge by her actions. Thus, he reluctantly grants her justice.

How can persistent faith and actions create a change in our circumstances?

3. God's Justice (vv. 6–8)

Jesus tells His disciples to heed the words of the unjust judge: if he, an unjust man, can grant the widow vindication, surely God, who is the Righteous Judge ([Psalm 7:11](#); [2 Timothy 4:8](#)), will vindicate the elect, or "chosen people who cry to Him day and night." Yet the promise of God's quick vindication comes with a bit of irony. Although God promises to come quickly ([Revelation 22:12](#)), the people of God will endure the present ordeal. In the present ordeal, as Jesus relays, the disciples will incur suffering at the hands of unjust people. Hence, the people of God cry out to Him for their liberation. Given this present reality, the disciples must

follow the example of the persistent widow and continue to pray fervently until the Son of Man comes. The Lord will not delay; however He seeks to find signs of faith on earth signified by the persistence in prayer that is exemplified in the widow’s pursuit of justice.

Why is persistence in prayer distinguished as the key to liberation from injustices and oppression?

Search the Scriptures

1. What does the widow do to provoke a change in the unjust judge’s treatment of her (**Luke 18:4–5**)?
2. What does Jesus mean when He says, “shall [the Son of Man] find faith on the earth” (v. 8)?

Discuss the Meaning

Jesus reminds us that prayer is a lifelong practice for every believer. We pray with the knowledge that God is faithful to His promise to save His people when we call on Him in the midst of unjust situations.

Lesson in Our Society

Prayer is fundamental to the life of every believer. It comes in many forms—thanksgiving, lament, petition, praise, confession, and intercession. Persistence in prayer is a characteristic of the Black Christians who participated in the Civil Rights Movement. They understood that prayer was a necessary act of resistance against the segregationist policies of the Jim Crow South. They endured many trials, but understood that in the end God’s justice would come to pass and God’s people would be vindicated.

How can prayer produce an impact against the current racial injustices and brutality Black people endure today?

Make It Happen

With as many forms of injustice that remain in the world today, we must adopt a regular practice of intercession and petition for God’s justice to take root within our society. We also should practice pursuing justice within our spheres of influence. Whenever and wherever we see injustice, believers can pray for God’s strength and power to defend those who are the most vulnerable among us.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Luke 18:1–8

1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

The context of this parable must be examined in conjunction with the parable itself. Just before this, Jesus spoke to His disciples about His Second Coming (Luke 17). Afterward, He presented the parable to them.

Luke immediately tells us Jesus’ purpose for relaying this parable: to teach that men should always pray without ceasing (**1 Thessalonians 5:17**). Our prayers should be constant and consistent, not born of doubt or indecision.

Evil temptations, fleshly desires, bad days, and a lack of patience will discourage us from praying earnestly, but Jesus wants to show His disciples—including us—that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (from **James 5:16**).

2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: 3 and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

This judge has no respect for either God or any other man. He is arrogant, proud, and reliant upon himself to meet all his needs—trademarks of people of the world, who often believe they don't need God or anyone else. Widows of this era were symbols of helplessness. They were vulnerable to exploitation because they had no husbands to defend them. Apparently, the religious leaders of the time could not be trusted, as Jesus' indictment of the scribes and Pharisees suggests ([Matthew 23:14](#)). Here, the widow turns to the judge to avenge her (Gk. *ekdikeo*, **ek-dik-EH-oh**), meaning "to give justice" against her enemy. She was not seeking revenge through the judge, for Jesus would not honor such a petition. Instead, she wanted relief from the persecution she endured at the hands of her adversary, and she went through the correct channels of the justice system to pursue her vindication.

4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

The judge, because of the hardness of his heart and his concern only for himself, ignored the widow's pleas for some time. Eventually, he became annoyed with the woman's nagging requests. He reaffirms to himself that he is not accountable to anyone, but then relents because of the widow's persistence. "Troubleth me" would be more directly translated as "maketh trouble for me." The Greek word for trouble here is *kopos* (**KOP-os**), which refers to wearisome labor; beating one's breast in sorrow; and hardship amid turmoil and trials. The widow's refusal to give up began to weigh on the judge's mind because his peace was disturbed greatly.

The judge appears wary of more than the widow's endless trips to his chambers. There is the possibility of physical assault, evidenced by the phrase, "lest ... she weary me." The Greek word translated "weary" is *hupopiazo* (**hoo-poe-pee-AD-zo**), which could mean one of two things, depending on its derivation. It could be an intensified form of a verb meaning "to oppress, stifle, or exhaust," which is the understanding of the KJV translation. Alternatively, it could be a compound of the words "under-eye," which is a word used elsewhere to refer to striking someone under the eye. If this is the origin, the text could be dynamically translated as, "Lest ... she give me a black eye." The judge might have feared that the widow would be driven to physical blows. The point is that she wore him down to the point of submission.

6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. 7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

Jesus wanted His disciples to take note of the judge's change of heart. By calling him unjust (Gk. *adikia*, **ah-dee-KEE-ah**, "unrighteous") the Lord accentuated the magnitude of the situation. If a man who knew no righteousness would grant an increasing petition, why wouldn't a righteous God do the same? The elect (Gk. *eklektos*, **ek-lek-TOCE**) are those chosen by God. They belong to Him and no one else. In the parable, God's elect are contrasted with the widow, who had no ties with the judge. He cared for her no more or less than he did for any other citizen.

Notice the extent of the cries of God's elect: "day and night." Jesus paints a picture of incessant prayers and supplication to the Father that cease only when the need is satisfied. He also hints at the emotion and longing that drive them. God responds to the sincere, genuine prayers of those who endure patiently.

But God is longsuffering. He waits before acting. God has promised to avenge His people against their adversary when He's ready. However, our ignorance of God's time should not erode our prayer life. Persistent prayers are a sign of faithfulness, and God never fails to reward our faithfulness. The widow also showed that our continual coming to the Lord might be our only weapon in spiritual warfare.

God's forbearance with His people serves as a blessing. Though it would be easy for Him to provide quick answers, that would prevent us from experiencing His grace, mercy, and strength. By bearing long, God teaches us patience and appreciation. When God waits to bless His people, they tend to value those gifts more. The longer it seems our prayers go unanswered, the more joy we feel when we receive our answers.

8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

Again, we must read this passage in context with the last verses of chapter 17. Here, Jesus foreshadows His

Second Coming as God's method of vengeance. He then asks about the faith of those who will be waiting for Him. Will they have faith that prays always, suffers long, faints not, cries day and night, and waits expectantly for God's consent? He wanted His disciples to understand that the persecution and tribulations they would undergo would be validated when He came back to rule the earth.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Ask, God Will Respond
(Luke 11:5–13)

TUESDAY

I Always Remember You in Prayer
(Romans 1:7–15)

WEDNESDAY

Unceasing Prayer
(1 Thessalonians 5:12–18)

THURSDAY

God's Justice for the Widow
(Deuteronomy 10:17–21)

FRIDAY

Take Care of Widows Now
(Acts 6:1–6)

SATURDAY

The Lord Watches His People
(Psalm 33:18–22)

SUNDAY

Keep Insisting until Justice Comes
(Luke 18:1–8)