

Your Persistent Prayers Pay Off

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This morning we [are moving] into Luke 18, so if have your Bibles, you can turn there. We are going to be looking at [how] persistent prayers pay off, but probably not in the way you think. There are some great things in this passage because it's got a few little puzzles in it, and we will try to untangle them so you can see some practical things about prayer.

I think we'd all agree that prayer is one of the most important of all the godly disciplines, if not *the* most important. Jesus taught His disciples to pray and in the book of Acts, when the Church is exploding and the Hellenistic widows need somebody to take care of them, the apostles are torn: should we meet these physical needs or should we pray and focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word. They assigned people [to take care of the widows] so [the apostles] can do those higher priority things [see Acts 6:1–4]. Peter was quickly imprisoned, and they prayed, and he was released [see Acts 12:5–19]. Paul writes to the churches, telling them to pray at all times, to “pray without ceasing” [1 Thessalonians 5:17], to pray in everything, and to pray for him.

It's very clear from the Scriptures, and I think we would all readily agree, that prayer is really important and needs to be a priority in our [lives]. The problem is that a lot of times Christians don't pray what they profess to believe. We can *say* that prayer is a priority, but we don't make it a priority. The fact is [that] a healthy spiritual walk with the Lord is concurrent with

the degree of [the Christian's] prayer. There is no such thing as a vibrant walk with the Lord that doesn't include lots of prayer. They go together. The same is true about healthy churches. Healthy churches can be discovered by the volume of prayers being offered up to the glory of God.

If you don't have any prayer going on in your life at all, then you're spiritually dead, surely. [Prayer] is like breathing—when somebody quits breathing, [he's] dead. When somebody quits prayer, [he's] dead. Even if you're praying a little, then you're kind of in [the] ICU, spiritually speaking. The same is true of a church. A church that sees very little need to pray is really a church that's saying, "We don't have faith in God. We don't believe His Word. We don't want to honor Him. We don't want to love Him." So, prayer is very critical.

There is an alarming lack of prayer in churches and, along with that, a great ignorance of what prayer is, what it is not, how to pray, why we should pray, and how prayer works. I hear people saying things that are really superstitious about prayer. They are not just misunderstandings, they're not even anywhere to be found in the Scriptures. These mystical, superstitious thoughts about prayer, for some reason, keep getting handed down from one generation to the next. We need to step back and look at what the Scriptures say so that when we pray, we pray for the right reasons, in the right way, expecting the right thing, understanding why we are to pray.

I'm going to rattle off twelve bullet points about prayer to get you thinking. If, [as I read these bullet points], you're thinking, "Boy, I wish you'd talk more about that," I have. You can get on [to] our website and type in "prayer" in the Google search box and it will bring everything up on our site [about] prayer—articles and everything.¹ Here we go.

[One]: let's talk about a definition of prayer. You think, "How would you define prayer?" Generally, prayer is talking to God, but the best definition I've ever discovered is from Bingham Hunter's book *The God Who Hears*.

¹Follow this link (<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org>) and then type the word "prayer" into the Google search field at the top of the page.

He defines prayer in this way: “Prayer is the means by which God gives us what He wants.”² Think about that. Prayer is the means [by which] God gives us what *He* wants. [Two]: Prayer is not for getting what *we* want, but for getting God what He wants. A lot of Christians don’t understand that. “If we ask anything *according to His will*”—what God wants—“He hears us” [see 1 John 5:14]. [Three]: God doesn’t hear the prayers of the wicked [or] even the prayers of Christians living in unconfessed sin, unless it is a prayer of repentance and confession. David writes in Psalm 66:18: “If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear.”

I think a lot of times we have sin in our [lives] and we kind of pretend that we [can] just segment that part of our [lives] off. We’re not going to confess it to God, we’re not going to deal with it, we’re not going to be reconciled, or whatever [the sin] is, and then we’re going to have this vibrant prayer life. No. [Four]: More people praying doesn’t increase your chances of getting your prayer answered like you want. Sorry. Five: Prayer at a certain time doesn’t increase your chances of getting what you want. [Someone says], “They’re going to have the operation at nine. Let’s pray at nine.” Well, praying at nine is fine, but there’s not a greater chance [that your prayer will be answered] if you pray at the [specific] time. Six: Prayers are always answered. They’re always answered. God always answers: “yes,” “yes but wait,” and “no.” Those are the answers. You always get one.

Seven: Believers don’t always know how to pray as they should. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that the Holy Spirit “intercedes. . . with groanings too deep for words. . . according to the will of God” [Romans 8 26–27]. It makes our prayers fail proof, even when [we] don’t know how to pray. The Holy Spirit is there to intercede for believers. He twists our prayers so that we pray according to the will of God. Think about that.

Eight: Prayer is for our blessing and God’s glory. It is a demonstration of our humility. It is a demonstration of our trust [in], faith [in], love for, dependence upon, and obedience to God. Nine: Prayer magnifies glory and

²W. Bingham Hunter, *The God Who Hears* (Nottingham, England: IVP Press, 1986), n.p.

praise to God. We pray, He answers, we tell people, and more people praise Him because of the answers. Ten: God may not answer your prayers in the way you wish He would, but He always answers them in the way that is best for you. Eleven: Prayer is not a waste of time. Not praying is a waste of time. Twelve: Believing God is sovereign is no excuse not to pray. It's the very reason why we pray. Why would you pray to a God who [isn't] sovereign?

God commands us to pray. Though God is sovereign, His sovereignty includes means to accomplish His will. There [are] a couple errors that people make. Usually they over-amp on sovereignty to the neglect of our responsibility, or they over-amp on our responsibility and ignore sovereignty. The two go together. God is absolutely sovereign and in His sovereignty He uses means. That is, He uses what theologians call instrumentality—tools—to accomplish His sovereign will.

Let's say you share the gospel with somebody, and the person repents, believes in Christ, and [is] born again. Do you go away and [say], "Man I just saved somebody"? No. What do you say? "Christ saved [him]."

"I thought you shared the gospel?"

"I did."

"Haven't you been praying for [him]?"

"Well, yeah."

"Then why did you say Christ saved [him] if you shared the gospel and have been praying for [him]?"

"Because the gospel and prayer are instruments, the means by which God accomplishes His will."

Prayer is one of those means—one of the primary means. Prayer is not about controlling God, but about us moving ourselves into the stream of God's will. God has a perfect plan. He declares the end from the beginning [see Isaiah 46:10]. God is not up there [saying], "I wish somebody would pray so I'd know what to do." He knows what He's going to do. He just wants you to pray according to His will so you can get in on the blessing.

As we come to Luke 18, it follows on the heel of Jesus' discussion of the judgment that would come upon the wicked at the end of the Tribulation

in the last half of [Luke] 17. Jesus, having talked about the judgment of the wicked, now knows that there will be believers during the Tribulation who will suffer greatly. He wants to encourage those who end up finding themselves in this period of great tribulation, and He wants to instruct them in prayer. Follow along in your Bibles as I read Luke 18:1–8. We read this:

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’” And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

I want you to know, there is some really fun stuff in there, especially that last phrase. We have these little discussions in our office and I ask the other guys, “What do you think that means?” I don’t like to read the commentaries until I decide on what I think [a passage] means, and then I read all my commentaries. But, that last little sentence there is really something, isn’t it? You’ll see, it fits in perfect[ly].

From this text, five elements of prayer emerge to encourage us to pray and not lose heart as we pray. The first is: Pray at all times. [Luke 18:]1 says: “Now He was telling them,” the them is referring to the disciples. He’s still having the same discussion with the disciples about the end times—the Second Coming. We know that, especially from [Luke 18:]8, where it says

so. Right at the very beginning [of Luke 18], we are told the twofold purpose of the prayer.

There are only two parables like this. They both appear in Luke, where we're just told [the purpose of the parable]. J.C. Ryle quotes an unnamed Puritanist saying, "the key to this parable hangs in the lock on the front door." That's so great, isn't it? Sometimes you read a parable, and you think, "What is that?" but here, the key is in the front door. Notice what [Luke 18:]1 says: "He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray." Just stop there. I think we all know that we need to pray. David says in Psalm 55:17: "Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, And He will hear my voice." In Psalm 62:8, he says: "Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us." The whole idea is that God is waiting; He is a refuge. Go to Him in prayer and just unload on [Him].

Jesus said in Matthew 7:7: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Paul says in Philippians 4:6: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." In 1 Thessalonians [5]:17, he says: "Pray without ceasing." John the Apostle says in 1 John 5:14: "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." Think about those [verses]. There are so many more we could discuss.

We are to pray at all times. It couldn't be any clearer. When you wake up in the morning, the alarm goes off, or you wake up [on your own], or however [it] happens, do you pray? When you get up and you're getting ready, are you thanking God for your clothes and asking Him to help you with your day? As you're eating your breakfast, are you thanking Him for your food? As you're getting in your car, are you asking Him for travel mercies? As you're listening to whatever you are [listening to], are you praying? When you get to work, are you asking God to help you be a good witness, to be a good employee? As you're working throughout the day are you shooting up little bullets to God *at all times*?

[This verse] is not just talking about those formal times [we] might have in a quiet time, where we're sitting down in the morning with our Bibles, and a cup of coffee, reading and praying. [It is talking about] all times. [It is to be] a constant communion with God, talking with God, speaking with God, saying, "Can You help me here? Could you bless this person?" You're stopped at a stoplight and you see an old woman, [and you] say [a quick prayer], "Lord, I just pray that woman there would come to know You if she doesn't know You, and if she does know You, may You bless her." [It should be] a constant outpouring of prayer. This is the Christian life: constant communion with God.

[Second]: Not only are we to pray at all times, but Jesus also wants us to know that we shouldn't lose heart in praying. Look at [Luke 18:]1 again: "Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart." The word [translated] "not to lose heart" literally means "to grow faint or weary, to give up." Have you ever prayed about something for a long time and God hasn't answered the prayer? Maybe you're still praying and He hasn't answered the prayer. You prayed for your child's salvation [and he hasn't] come to the Lord. You prayed for somebody to get healed; [he hasn't] gotten healed. You prayed that God would deliver you from some atrocious catastrophe and convulsion in your life. All these circumstances are just weighing you down and He hasn't rescued you. You look in the Word of God, and you're thinking, "Lord, I think I'm praying according to Your will. I'm saying, 'Not my will, but Yours be done' [see Luke 22:42], and I think this is what You want. It seems like what You want. It seems like I'm in line," and [an answer] doesn't come. What's the temptation? [The temptation is] to lose heart.

The longer you have to endure the trial, waiting for the answer, the greater [is] the temptation to lose heart. You pray and pray and things keep getting worse and worse. It doesn't seem like God is listening, and then the temptation comes. Satan begins to whisper in your ear, and says, "Listen, you've trusted Christ in vain. Christianity is a myth. Nobody even ever existed by the name of Jesus. You're praying into the air. Even if Jesus did

exist, He obviously doesn't care about you. I mean, look how many times you've prayed. Look how you're suffering! Look how you prayed according to His Word and here you are, still suffering. How could He love you? How could you even worship a God like that?" You know [that] every Christian has had to deal with temptations like that, right? It really gets down to this: Are you going to believe God or not? Are you going to trust God or not? Are you going to live the Christian life of faith in God or not?

Do not doubt. God is faithful and God will answer your prayer. Don't think that "no" or "wait" is a sign that God doesn't love you. [Imagine] your child comes up to you, [and says], "Mom, can I have a piece of chocolate cake?"

You say, "Listen, dinner is going to be in fifteen minutes." Why don't you give him the cake? You want to give him the cake. You're going to give him the cake [eventually], but not before dinner.

[Or, imagine] you are a coach [of] a [sports] team. You've been working [the team] hard all season long, and it's approaching the finals. You want to give them a break. You want to cut back, and say, "You know what? Take several months off. Just rest up and we'll see you next season," but you've got to finish the season. Now is not the time for resting.

[Or, imagine] you go to the doctor, and the doctor says, "You know what? I wish I could tell you [that] you could eat this and do that, but you can't. It wouldn't be good for you. You're going to have to wait." He wants to give you it, but it's just not the time.

[Or, imagine] you have somebody faithfully serving in ministry and you want to see that person put in a place of leadership, but [he] need[s] to grow, to be tested, to mature, to understand the Word better. You can't just throw [him] into places of leadership beyond what [he is] able and have [him] fall into the snare and condemnation of the devil, as Paul says [in 1 Timothy 3:7].

God wants good things for you. He wants good things for His children. He only gives them good things. All good things come "down from the Father of lights" [James 1:17], and He is going to bless you. He loves you.

When you pray and you aren't getting that answer you wish you could get, don't lose heart. Just because it may be long in coming doesn't mean it's not coming.

[Do] you remember what happened when Jesus [got] a little message, "Your friend, Lazarus, is dying! Your buddy," [in John 11:1–46]? Martha and Mary sent the messenger. "He's on the verge of death. Come quickly so you can heal him!" And so, what does Jesus do? He delays. He loiters, plays backgammon, I don't know. He waits.

What do you think Martha and Mary are doing back in Bethany? "Ahhh! Where is Jesus? Did you tell Him? Did you tell Him how urgent it was? Did you tell Him how sick [Lazarus] was?"

"Yeah, yeah, I told Him all that."

"Oh, no! [Lazarus] is on the verge of death!" [Lazarus] dies and then they stick him into a tomb. Then Jesus shows up, several days later. By that time, the King James [version] says, "[Lazarus] stinketh" [see John 11:39]. What happens when Jesus shows up? Mary and Martha lay into Him. "If you [had] been here, he wouldn't have died! If you [had] come... We have seen you heal all manner of disease and sickness. We know you could have healed him. You could have healed our brother! You could have healed your friend, and then he wouldn't have had to die. Now he has died because You delayed."

Jesus even wept, didn't He? If you were to ask them, pull[ing] Martha and Mary aside, "So, what do you think about this?"

"Oh, Jesus blew it."

"Why?"

"Well, He should have come."

"Why?"

"Because we wanted Him to. Because it was the only way for Lazarus to live." They had no idea. Jesus [then went] in to where Lazarus's body [was], stinking, starting to decay, and restore[d] it to perfect life and [brought] him out. Whoa. He put His own power on display, the power of God on display. He [taught] Mary and Martha a lesson they [would] never forget,

that nothing, nothing is impossible with God [see Luke 1:37] and that God's timing is always best. Don't doubt God. Don't lose heart. Just keep praying. He knows what's best.

Third: Be persistent in prayer. Now we come to the parable. The word "parable" means "to cast alongside." What's odd about this parable is [that] God, who is perfectly holy and just, is cast alongside the unjust judge, which is kind of strange. The Christian who has a very deep and intimate relationship with God is cast alongside the widow who has no relationship with the unjust judge at all. This parable is a parable of extreme contrast. This is one of those parables that is [a] "how much more will God" type of a parable. We need to keep that in mind.

Look at [Luke 18:]2. Jesus was saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man." Just stop there. The judge is out for himself. He is not a righteous judge. He doesn't fear God. He doesn't fear man. He doesn't care what people think. He's just out for himself. He is nothing like God.

Look at [Luke 18:]3: "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.'" Several things can be learned here. First, the widow is poor. How do we know that? [We know that] because she can't even afford a lawyer. She goes directly to the judge. Second, she has no wealthy benefactor. She is alone in the world. Otherwise that benefactor would have stepped up and got her a lawyer. Instead, she goes to the judge and wants the judge to be her lawyer, judge, and protector. It is a huge request and very unorthodox, but she sees no other option. Third, we can see she is persistent and relentless in seeking help from the unjust judge, who she probably doesn't know is unjust.

We're not told the details of her case, but you can kind of read in between the lines of what it probably is. Since she doesn't have any cash, she's probably land poor—she probably [has] a cute little house in a perfect part of town that a lot of guys would like to have. Somebody has figured out a way to scam her and take her house and land from her. That's all she has. Remember, Jesus describes in Luke 20:47 [people who "devour] widows'

houses.” What does that mean? They’d figure out a way to scam widows. This has always been a prime target for wicked and cowardly men—to go after widows. This is why the Law of Moses contains so many regulations to protect [widows]. Exodus 22:22–24 says:

You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I will surely hear his cry; and My anger will be kindled, and I will kill you with the word, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

He says, “Listen, if you oppress a widow, I’m going to make your wife a widow and your children orphans.” In Deuteronomy 27:19, God says: “‘Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’” This is very clear. There [are] a lot more [Scripture verses on this subject] than [what we just read]. It is very likely that some jackal of a guy has now found some way to try and manipulate and steal this woman’s land from her. So she comes to the judge, since she doesn’t have any money, looking for legal protection. The judge, though, since he is unjust, says, “Scram! Get out of here!” but she doesn’t take “no” for an answer.

Look at [Luke 18:]4: “For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’” Notice in [Luke 18:]3 [the phrase] “she kept coming,” [and] here in 18:4, the phrases “for a while,” “but afterward,” “because this widow bothers me,” and “continually coming.” [These phrases] teach [that] this woman is dogged. She is persistent. She has no other recourse, and she is going after this judge to make sure he gives her legal protection for free. She doesn’t have any money. Who would do that? The request is huge.

I want to be very clear at this point because I believe many people have misunderstood this parable and taught the exact opposite of what Jesus wants this parable to teach. Remember, this is a parable of extreme contrast,

a “how much more so” type of parable. God is nothing like the unjust judge. His relationship with His children is nothing like the relationship between this needy widow and this unjust judge. God, unlike the unjust judge, is eager to answer the prayers of His children. [He] wants to answer, *loves* to answer, [and] commands His children to come to Him. He is so eager to bless you, to answer your prayers, to have you in His presence [that] He commands you to do it just in case you might be tempted not to. He wants you to be close to Him, trusting Him, talking to Him every day, all day long. He is *nothing like* the unjust judge. God loves His children, and if you are one of His children, He loves you.

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:7–11:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

The whole point is: Oh, how much more so! If you’re a good father and you have the means, how are you going to bless your son? Think about this. If there is an extreme contrast between a good father, who has means to bless his son, and God, how much more of a contrast [is there] between the unjust judge and God Himself, who is holy and perfectly just and [who] loves those children who come to Him, needy, with requests. The widow had to keep going back to the unjust judge, but in extreme contrast, God’s children do not need to harass Him. They don’t need to beg Him.

God isn’t up there reluctantly saying, “Oh, it’s you again. Yeah, My Son died for you. What do you want?”

“Well, could You please get [me] this. Could You get me that, if it’s Your will? I’m just asking.”

“Yeah, [but first] sleep in that bed of nails for a month. Crawl on that broken glass. Maybe I’ll open My hand and throw you a few crumbs.” That’s not God. That’s [what] Satan wants us to think God is [like]. God is nothing like that. He is nothing like the unjust judge.

[I am] not say[ing] that God doesn’t want us to pray without ceasing. He *does* want us to pray without ceasing. I know [that] at this point you may be thinking, “OK, Pastor Jack, I’m confused. Let me see if I can get this right. I need to be persistent in prayer, but not because it increases my chances of getting my prayers answered.” True. “But I am to be persistent in prayer.” Yes. “But Jesus, didn’t He say not to just repeat yourself in prayer? Isn’t there a Scripture that says, ‘Don’t do that’?” Yes. In Matthew 6:7, Jesus said: “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.” Here, Jesus is condemning the false notion that you have a better chance of getting your prayers answered if you use more verbiage, [like the thought that] fifty Hail Marys is better than twenty-five. No, it’s not. [A larger] number of words will not increase the likelihood of a favorable response from God. Persistent prayer is good, but not for those reasons. The parable teaches persistent prayer, but not for those reasons.

We read all those Scriptures that talk about praying at all times. So you say, “Why should we pray at all times and not lose heart?” Let me just give you five reasons. One: Prayer is a demonstration of humility, isn’t it? We all need more of that. [Two]: Prayer is an act of faith in God. “Without faith, it is impossible to please God” [see Hebrews 11:6]. The only reason we pray is because we believe in God. We believe He exists. We believe He is listening. We believe He’s going to answer. [Three]: Prayer is an act of obedient love to God. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep my commandments” [see John 14:15]. He commands us to pray. So, it is a way we show love to God. Four: Prayer is the means God uses to give us what He wants for us. Five: Prayer magnifies praise to God. Those are biblical reasons to pray.

Please do not think, “Listen, man, I [have] to go there. I just [have] to keep pounding, and pounding, and pounding, saying, ‘Man, just open up. Just give me what I want.’”

God is up there going, “Oh, another person, another one of my children [is] hassling Me.” It’s nothing like that. It’s nothing like that.

Back to the parable. Look at the end of [Luke 18:]5 again. Do you see the phrase there “wear me out”? In the Greek, it is literally “give me a black eye.” Think about that: a black eye. We use that idiom today, don’t we? If somebody does something that damages [his] reputation, we might say, “Oh, that person has really given [himself] a black eye.” In other words, [he has] done something [that] people can see that has damaged [his] character. [Luke 18:5] could be translated, and I think *should* be translated, “Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection. Otherwise, by continually coming, she gives me a black eye.”

Picture it in your mind. The widow comes for legal protection and is sent away. She comes again. She stands in line with all the other people who are doing all their legal stuff, [just as in] any other court of law. She waits, and waits, and waits, and waits, and comes to the judge again, and he sees her, and [says], “Didn’t I talk to you yesterday?”

“Yes. You need to give me legal protection.”

He says, “I’m not giving you legal protection. Get a lawyer.”

“I don’t have the money.”

“Good-bye.” She leaves. The next day she comes back. She gets the same answer. The next day she comes back.

Pretty soon, people begin to recognize this needy widow and say to [each other], “Hey, do you see that widow over there? She has come to the judge every single day for three weeks.”

Somebody else says, “Yeah, you know why? [It’s] because he’s not giving her legal protection.”

Rumors begin to circulate and the judge realizes, “Uh oh. They’re realizing that I’m not giving this woman justice. It is harming my reputation.

People are going to figure out that I'm not a just judge. As soon as they figure out I'm unjust, my whole judgeship is going to be over, isn't it? This woman is going to ruin my reputation. She's going to expose me for what I really am and, therefore, I'm going to give her legal protection, unless by continually coming, she gives me a black eye in front of all these people."

Have you ever run into a pole [or] a branch? (Why are you laughing?) [Have you] hit your head on the cupboard, fallen on your face, given yourself a black eye, or mangled your face a little bit? [When you do something like that], everybody is going to be able to see what happened. Everybody is going to ask you, "So what happened to you?" Then you have to tell all those people [what you did]. Especially in church, it's bad. There are so many people at church and, since they're Christians, they have to care for you, so they have to ask you, and then you have to tell them the embarrassing story [of] how you hit yourself in the face with a hammer. [Rather than having to tell everyone about it], you may try to hide the injury. You [might] put on extra makeup or wear sunglasses, or kind of hide at home until it goes away and heals up.

The unjust judge realizes his deception, his delusion, is being put in jeopardy because this widow keeps coming and people see her continually being sent away and not receiving justice. So he gives her, reluctantly, legal protection. He is nothing like God. He says, "Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will give me a black eye, ruin my reputation" [see Luke 18:4–5].

Do you see this huge difference here? God is concerned about His reputation, isn't He? Yeah. In that way, He is like the unjust judge. Both the unjust judge and God are concerned about their reputation[s], but for totally different, antithetical, reasons. The unjust judge is concerned about maintaining his false delusion of what he really is. God, on the other hand, is interested in letting people know what He is. There is no façade. There is no deception. There is no scam. While both are concerned about their

reputations, the unjust judge is concerned because he wants to continue to deceive.

[Do] you remember in the Book of Exodus when God took Moses up on the mountain? While he was up on the mountain, He gave [Moses] the two tablets of stone [on which] He carved the Ten Commandments with His finger. The people are down below, these people He has made a covenant with to be [His] people. He would be their God. These are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the Abrahamic covenant was spoken to over and over again. “Through your seed, all the nations of the earth will be blessed” [see Genesis 18:18]. They all know this. All of a sudden, God says this in Exodus 32:7 and following: “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt. . .” I like that. “The people *you* have brought up.” He even blames Moses for bringing them up [out of Egypt].

“Your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.” [Exodus 32:7–10]

The problem is [that] God had made promises—lots of promises—that these stubborn, stiff-necked people would be made into His people. This is why Moses prayed the way he did in light of what was spoken to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. [Moses] said in Exodus 32:11: “O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?” Moses puts it back on God: “You did this.”

“Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth?’ Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people. [Exodus 32:12–14]

Let me just ask you: Did God not know what He was going to do? Did He actually have a plan, fix His eternal decree, change it, and then change it back again? No. So, the question is: Why did this happen? Was it for God’s sake or for Moses’s sake and our sake? [It was] for our sake and Moses’s sake. When we pray according to God’s will, He hears us. When God makes a promise, He cannot break it. He is the God who cannot lie, Paul says in Titus 1[:2].

God is not pushed around by your prayers. He is not a slave of your prayers. He’s not up there in heaven [thinking], “What am I going to do? Would somebody pray and tell me?” He knows what He’s doing. He’s infinitely wise, all-knowing, [and] sees the end from the beginning [see Isaiah 46:10]. Nothing takes Him by surprise. God is like the unjust judge in that He is concerned about His reputation because He wants people to know what He’s really like. The unjust judge, of course, is worried about his reputation because he *doesn’t* want people to know what he’s really like. God doesn’t want to receive a black eye either. That’s why He has to fulfill His promises to you in regards to prayer. You can bank on that.

Fourth: Don’t fear injustice from God when you pray. Look at [Luke 18:]7. This is so encouraging. He says: “Now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long

over them?” [This] is [a] great section. When it says [that] they cried “day and night” and will He not bring about justice to them, keep in mind [that] He’s talking about the end of the Tribulation, right before Christ returns, which He’s going to mention in a second. But the principles still apply.

The whole point is this: When those people are in the Tribulation, they have suffered, and suffered, and suffered, and suffered, and they are longing, aching, for Christ to come back. He’s not coming back, and things are getting worse, and the world is falling apart. Two-thirds of the people on the planet have been killed in the plagues, hail, earthquakes, tsunamis, and all the [other] stuff that is ravishing the earth because of the judgment of God. [Christians] are all praying out, never stop[ping] to think, “God’s not going to give us justice. He’s just going to let us suffer. He is going to let us just suffer, and the wicked are going to get away with this.” No. After [Jesus] asks that question “Will He delay long over them?” He answers it. Look at [Luke18:]8: “I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly.”

Who are God’s elect, and how is it that He brings justice for them quickly? The [word] “elect” [is] just another way of describing Christians—all true Christians, truly saved Christians. I mean [they are] truly saved in that [they are] not those who just call themselves Christians, who think they are Christians, or who pretend to be Christians, but those who are actually born-again believers, who are new creatures in Christ [see 2 Corinthians 5:17], who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and then [are] transformed, or regenerated. Those people are God’s elect. They are also called His chosen or those who are predestined by God.

I know that the doctrine of predestination makes some of you [nervous] because you don’t quite understand it. You understand the concept, that before the foundation of the world, He predestined us to adoption as sons, as Paul says in Ephesians 1[:4]. But listen, don’t ever let predestination hinder your prayers [or] hinder your evangelistic efforts to preach the gospel to the lost. Predestination is a doctrine—listen to me—to encourage believers only. Predestination is written to people *after* they believe. It’s never a doctrine that should be applied to those who don’t know Christ. There is a message

for those who don't know Christ, and that is [that] Jesus died on the cross for your sins, He was buried, and rose again on the third day. If you turn from your sin, if you place your faith in Christ and what He did on the cross, you will be saved. That's the message for an unbeliever. The message for the believer is: You were chosen, predestined, before the foundation of the world. You are one of God's elect.

But, of course, as soon as somebody finds out about this doctrine, the first thing [he] want[s] to do is apply predestination to who[m]? [He wants to apply it to] unbelievers. Then he can't make [the doctrine] work. Well, it's not supposed to work [that way]. There is a message to unbelievers: repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. There's a message for believers: You're the elect, chosen before the foundation of the world.

You say, "Well, yeah, but I don't understand. How do I know if I'm one of the elect?" Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and I'll tell you. "Yeah, but what if I'm not elect?" Well, there's a message for you. That message is: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. "But how can I know?" Believe and you'll know. I don't know, but if you believe I'll know. Then, once you know, God encourages you.

[In our passage in Luke 18], Jesus is saying, "God is not going to delay long, but He will bring about quick justice for His elect during this time of incredible tribulation that is coming upon the earth." Notice, [Luke 18:]7 also stresses persistent prayer again, when it says they "cry to Him day and night." He will not delay long over them, but bring about justice quickly.

This may cause a little wonder in your mind. You're thinking, "You know what? I've prayed prayers for a long time, and God has not brought justice quickly." Well, keep the context in mind. He's talking about the end of the Tribulation. [He's talking about the end times] from [Luke 17]:22 all the way down to this text. Do you remember what happened in the days of Noah? They were eating and drinking, and then what does the text say? [It] says that in that day, they were [Luke 17]:27: "marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." [It is] a quick, sudden judgment.

We could use Lot [to make this point as well]. “In the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all” [Luke 17:28–29]. Justice came and it came swiftly. That’s what Jesus is talking about [in our text]. He’s not saying God answers all prayers quickly. Though God is slow in bringing about judgment, He will bring it. He is longsuffering, but He is not ever-suffering. Peter talks about it. There [are] the mockers who come, and say, “Oh, when is [He] coming? Ever since creation, people have been saying, ‘He’s coming! He’s coming!’ He’s not coming. Everything has continued as it has always been!” [see 2 Peter 3:3–4]. Do you remember the Flood? That was a little hiccup in world history [when] things did not continue as they have always been.

Then [Peter] says, “Yes, God is not slow about His promises. Some count it slowness, but He is patient toward you, not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance” [see 2 Peter 3:9]. God is going to be harvesting those people whom He desires to save, and then justice will come quickly. Paul describes it this way in 1 Thessalonians 5:2–3:

For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

In Luke 21:34, Jesus describes His Second Coming as coming “suddenly like a trap.” Have you ever had a mouse in your house? Yeah, they’re kind of irritating. You find little traces of mice in places where you keep your food, and you don’t like that. So, you decide that you’re going to set a trap, but by that time the mouse is gone. So you just set [a trap] and put it under your sink and forget about it. Maybe it’s there for six or eight months, or a year, and then a bunch of rain comes, and a mouse decides to take refuge under your house. He’s crawling around in there looking for something, and he

finds a little crack next to a pipe. He gets up into the wall and finds himself under your sink.

That trap has just been sitting there, right? It hasn't caught any mice. There hasn't been anything going on. But it's waiting. It's waiting to execute justice for that loiterer coming into your house, getting [under] your sink. You don't believe in house mice. [You] like outside mice. [The mouse] goes to get a little nibble, and then down comes the steel bar and it's over. It comes quickly. Though it may be long in coming, when it comes, it comes quickly. That is what Jesus is talking about. So, we don't need to fear injustice from God. He'll bring [justice] about, and He'll bring it about swiftly.

Fifth and finally: Live the life of faith. Look at the middle of [Luke 18:]8. After Jesus promises quick justice upon the wicked at His Second Coming, He then asks: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" This is a rhetorical question. Jesus is not looking for information. As a matter of fact, this question is designed to drive home the main two points of the parable, which are: At all times we should pray and not lose heart.

You say, "How is that? How is 'However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth' [an indication of those two main points]?" [It is] because prayer is an act of what? [It is an act of] faith. Trusting God and not losing hope is an act of what? [It is an act of] faith. Christians pray because they believe God is going to listen and answer their prayers. Living out your faith is to live out a life of prayer. Listen carefully: Prayer is the primary demonstration that you believe there is an invisible God. You talk to Him.

Granted, it seems weird to people. I was just talking to one of the elders, saying, "Yeah," I said, "sometimes I go for walks, and when I'm going for a walk, [I] just want to pray, but there [are] so many [other] people walking. I'm thinking, 'What are they going to think if I'm walking around talking, [saying things like], 'So, Lord, I've got these issues'?' I'm talking and [people are] walking by, [thinking], 'Oh, [he's] one of those guys who has done a [few] too [many] illegal substances.'" I said, "Maybe I should get

one of those giant bluetooth things on my ear so they'll think I'm talking on the phone or something." I *am* talking to somebody.

Your prayer life is a demonstration that you have faith in God, isn't it? [Imagine] a father calls his son from work, and says, "Son, when I come home is the yard going to be mowed?" What does he mean? Mow the lawn, that's what he means, right? Jesus says, "When I come back in glory, am I going to find you living by faith?" the context being prayer. What is He saying? "Make sure you pray and don't lose heart." So let's pray.

Father, we thank You that we have learned some great truths in this text. [We have learned] that we should pray at all times because You want to hear from us. You're eager to hear from us. You love us and love to give Your children good things. [We learned] that we should not lose heart when we don't get the answer we want in the way we want or the time we want, knowing that Your timing is perfect and You know better than we do. [We learned] that we should be persistent in prayer not because it is a means to twist Your arm, but because You love to hear from us—all day long, every day—because You want to have a deep relationship with us. [We learned] that we should never fear injustice because You are a perfectly holy and just God. You will bring justice at the Second Coming and it will come swiftly. We need to live a life of faith and demonstrate that life by praying at all times and not losing heart. May we all do that for Your glory, honor, and praise, Amen.

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