

July 15  
Lesson 7 (NIV)

# THE WIDOW

## AND THE UNJUST JUDGE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 145:13b-20

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 18:1-8

### LUKE 18:1-8

<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. <sup>2</sup> He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. <sup>3</sup> And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

<sup>4</sup> “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, <sup>5</sup> yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

<sup>6</sup> And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. <sup>7</sup> 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? <sup>8</sup> 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?”

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### KEY VERSE

*Will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?—Luke 18:7a*

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Retell Jesus’ parable of the persistent widow and the unjust judge.
2. Explain what the parable teaches about prayer.
3. Identify a spiritually mature Christian to use as a role model for persistence in prayer.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Contest of Wills
- B. Lesson Background

#### I. Parable (LUKE 18:1-5)

- A. Particular Purpose (v. 1)  
*Yes, We Pray . . . But “Always”?*
- B. Pompous Judge (v. 2)
- C. Persistent Widow (v. 3)
- D. Promising Perspective (vv. 4, 5)

#### II. Principles (LUKE 18:6-8)

- A. Affirming God’s Justice (vv. 6-8a)
- B. Asking a Question (v. 8b)  
*Waiting for Christmas*

#### Conclusion

- A. Prayer in a Weary World
- B. Justice as a Burning Issue
- C. Revelation as an Insightful Help
- D. Prayer
- E. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Contest of Wills

As of the time of this writing, there were at least a dozen “judge shows” airing on North American television. Their popularity is traced to the launch of *The People’s Court* in 1981. The formats are often the same: judges preside over certain types of cases, listen to evidence presented by each side, and issue rulings. Usually these programs last a half hour and feature two cases; thus each case is wrapped up in a little under 15 minutes.

Not so the legal drama of today’s lesson! Our lesson text features instead a drawn-out process in which two people having entrenched viewpoints engage in a contest of wills. It may remind us of the old conundrum “What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object?” Jesus used this parable to call attention to important truths concerning our relationship with the ultimate judge, the judge of judges: Almighty God.

### B. Lesson Background

Whereas last week’s lesson was drawn from an incident that occurred during Passion Week, this week’s study actually moves back a bit on the time line, to perhaps a couple of months before Passion Week. The text comes from a portion of Luke’s Gospel that covers the ministry of Jesus in Perea. The designation *Perea* is not found in the Gospels, but it is used in records of the time to describe the territory east of the Jordan River, opposite the southern part of Samaria and most of Judea.

[John 10:39-42](#) may indicate the beginning of Jesus’ Perea ministry. Following his presence in Jerusalem at “the Festival of Dedication” ([10:22](#)), he “went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days” ([10:40](#)). [Luke 13:22-19:27](#) is that Gospel’s record of Jesus’ Perea ministry.

Immediately before giving the parable of today’s lesson, Jesus had been addressing a question of the Pharisees concerning when the kingdom of God would come ([Luke 17:20](#)). In doing so, he issued some very solemn warnings about the future, most of them tied to his second coming. The suddenness of Jesus’ return will catch many people off guard; they will be engaged in ordinary, routine activities “on the day the Son of man is revealed” ([17:30](#)). His return will not be a time for looking back and attempting to save anything of value, as indicated by the ominous warning, “Remember Lot’s wife!” ([17:32](#)). After the time frame of Jesus’ teaching shifts from the future ([17:20-25](#)) to analogies between past and future ([17:26-33](#)) to the future again ([17:34-37](#)), Jesus puts the spotlight on the present with the parable that follows.

## I. Parable

(LUKE 18:1-5)

### A. Particular Purpose (v. 1)

**<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.**

After the intense instruction of [Luke 17](#), Jesus returns to his common teaching method of using parables. Perhaps *his disciples* are taken aback by Jesus’ teaching concerning his return. The analogies to lightning, the flood of Noah’s day, and the destruction of Sodom in [chapter 17](#) indicate much turmoil to come. How does one prepare?

The preparation of prayer is foundational. The word translated *not give up* carries the idea of “never tire,” which is how the word is translated in [2 Thessalonians 3:13](#). It’s vital not to get worn out as one prays *always*. Stay focused! The story at hand is out of the ordinary among Jesus’ parables in that the purpose is stated at the outset.

### YES, WE PRAY. . . BUT “ALWAYS”?

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Americans spontaneously turned to God in prayer. President Bush subsequently proclaimed September 14 as a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance. Bells rang across the land at noon as churches opened their doors for memorial services. That evening, candlelight services marked the solemn occasion.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Micah *My-kuh*.

Perea *Peh-ree-uh*.

Samaria *Suh-mare-ee-uh*.

But the change didn’t hold for long. Even as the cleanup of the massive pile of rubble and human remains continued, Americans returned to everyday habits. Prayer was again tucked away like a spare tire—to be saved for use when the next calamity struck.

Tucked-away prayer is symptomatic of a tucked-away God. More than one commentator agreed with Anne Graham Lotz (Billy Graham’s daughter) when she said, “For several years now Americans in a sense have shaken their fist at God and said, ‘God, we want you out of our schools, our government, our business, we want you out of our marketplace.’ And God, who is a gentleman . . . [has removed] his hand of blessing and protection.”

Whether one agrees with these thoughts or not, Jesus’ instruction is still valid: we should *always* pray! What are we saying about our relationship with him if we view prayer as only our “spare tire” to be used in emergencies?

—C. R. B.

### B. Pompous Judge (v. 2)

**<sup>2</sup> He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought.**

The first person described has no redeeming qualities. To have no fear of God is to have no concern for God’s righteous standards. Neither does this judge care about what people may think about any decision he renders. One gets the impression that he is entirely self-centered. Cold and insensitive, he lacks any degree of compassion for anyone.

This is not the kind of character that judges are to possess, according to the Law of Moses. Judges are to judge God’s people “fairly” ([Deuteronomy 16:18](#)). They

are not to “pervert justice” (16:19). They are to show no favoritism and must not allow bribes to influence their thinking (16:19). Judging in this manner reflects the just character of the Lord himself (10:17, 18).

### C. Persistent Widow (v. 3)

3. **“And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’**

Widows in antiquity are especially vulnerable to being mistreated or taken advantage of by unscrupulous individuals (which is often the case today as well). The Law of Moses includes several commands that widows be properly cared for and not be abused or abandoned (Exodus 22:22-24; Deuteronomy 14:28, 29; 24:17-22; 26:12, 13; 27:19). Jesus confronted the religious leaders of his day with their heartless treatment of widows, stating that they “devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers” (Luke 20:47).

We are not told what this widow’s *adversary* has done to her. But we keep in mind that this is a fictional story; unstated actions are unimportant. What is important is that the widow needs someone to intervene on her behalf, which she hopes this judge will do. *Kept coming* indicates a continuing action; she tries repeatedly to persuade this callous judge to show concern for the law.

### D. Promising Perspective (vv. 4, 5)

4, 5. **“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”**

Jesus does not specify the amount of time that passes before the judge tires of the woman’s persistent nagging. His decision to hear her out is not based on any change in his personal character; he still neither fears God nor has any concern for people. His reasoning is purely pragmatic: “If I help her, I’ll get her off my back, and she’ll quit bothering me!”

#### What Do You Think?

If you were to discuss persistent prayer with someone who models it, what would you want to learn regarding his or her motivations? Why?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding intercessory prayer
- Regarding prayers of praise and worship
- Regarding prayers of petition
- Regarding prayers of thanksgiving

## II. Principles

(LUKE 18:6-8)

### A. Affirming God’s Justice (vv. 6-8a)

6, 7. **And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 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?”**

Jesus does not say specifically how *the unjust judge* decides the widow’s case. The implication, however, is that the judge adjudicates in the widow’s favor.

Jesus’ explanation of this parable should not be taken to mean that God is the equivalent of an unjust judge. God is the very essence of justice (Deuteronomy 32:4). Jesus is drawing a contrast between God and the unjust judge in arguing from the lesser to the greater: If this self-centered, unjust judge will finally agree to come to the aid of a person who persistently seeks his assistance, then will not the sovereign *God bring about justice for his chosen ones*, who come to him persistently (*day and night*) in prayer? Responding to prayer is part of his nature as not only a righteous and just judge but also a compassionate heavenly Father.

#### What Do You Think?

How did a time of persistence in prayer result in your spiritual growth?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In ways unseen to others
- In ways seen to others but personal to you
- In ways others could see and learn from

The question *will he keep putting them off?* implies the answer “no,” but they may need to be “patient,” as the same Greek wording is translated in 1 Corinthians 13:4 and 2 Peter 3:9. It appears that Jesus is telling us that God exercises his own brand of persistent patience as he delays answering those who call on him. There will be an opportune time to respond, but that time may not come as soon as we would like. This speaks to the issue Jesus raises in the parable: When will God come to the defense of his people (*his chosen ones*) who are under attack from their enemies? When will he carry out retributive justice on their behalf?

Considering again 2 Peter 3, we are told concerning “the day of the Lord” that God in his patience is “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (3:9, 10). Paul echoes this thought in Romans 2:4. Part of God’s seeming failure to come to the aid of his beleaguered, suffering people is that he is giving those enemies a period of time, an opportunity, to turn from their sinful ways and find his salvation. Thinking of your own previously lost state, aren’t you glad he does?

#### What Do You Think?

How does (or should) God’s concern for justice influence how you pray?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding prayers for yourself  
 Regarding prayers for your church  
 Regarding prayers for your nation

**8a. “I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.**

Jesus answers the question he has raised. In so doing, he assures his disciples (and us) that God will come to his people’s defense in the proper way at the proper time. What must be kept in mind, however, is that *quickly* has to be understood according to God’s timetable, not ours. Again to the apostle Peter: “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2 Peter 3:8). The speed will occur when God determines that the time for judgment has come (compare Hebrews 10:37).

From our standpoint, God often does not act as quickly as we would like. As the prophet reminds us, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8). We are to trust that he, as the righteous judge, will bring about *justice* in his time.

When that time comes—and come it will—it will happen in no uncertain terms. Abraham asked, during his “negotiations” with the Lord over Sodom and Gomorrah, “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25). Most assuredly he will, at the right time. His timing is always perfect (compare Galatians 4:4, 5). Waiting for that perfect timing is, of course, the hard part for us (compare Psalm 94:1-7).

**B. Asking a Question (v. 8b)**

**8b. “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”**

In the parable just told, the unjust judge is the one who is concerned about becoming worn out because of the widow’s persistence. But in our time of waiting for our judge (God) to act, we are the ones who may grow weary at his seemingly delayed response to our cries for justice. This leads to the question that Jesus raises here as he concludes his parable.

The verse before us should be read in light of Jesus’ teaching regarding his second coming (see the Lesson Background). The question thus is asking the disciples to consider whether their faith will be strong enough to survive the wait until Jesus returns. During that time, they (and we) may have to endure ridicule, persecution, etc. Will faith continue or collapse?

*What Do You Think?*

Without giving advice, how would you counsel someone who struggles in prayer waiting for God’s help?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Considering the person’s level of spiritual maturity
- Considering the nature of the need
- Considering appropriate and inappropriate use of Romans 8:28; etc.

Jesus’ question is rhetorical. It is not a question that requires a specific answer on the spot, but rather is a challenge for self-examination and reflection. Each person listening to this parable is challenged to consider whether he or she will be judged as a person of faith. Such reflective reaction is similar to what Jesus’ disciples will experience later during the last supper as each asks in turn “Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?” (Matthew 26:20-22) when learning of the pending betrayal.

***WAITING FOR CHRISTMAS***

Do you remember how hard it was to wait for Christmas when you were a child? We are reminded of our own long-ago childhood every year as we watch the little ones in our families eagerly anticipate Christmas. Many families use a calendar to count down the days to December 25.



Sheet 6—Summer 2018, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

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Visual for Lesson 7. *Put learners in small groups to come up with more words that begin with the letter P to describe prayer.*

A certain company specializes in calendars for this purpose and claims to have 300 varieties in stock. For example, the company sells a chocolate calendar with a piece of chocolate behind the window for each day. Then there are religious calendars with Scripture verses behind each window. Those with a more secular orientation have Santas, snowmen, winter scenes, or Victorian-era art as the surprise each day. Admittedly, the last one probably would not be of much interest to the average child!

Jesus concluded his parable about the unjust judge by making a point about how we should await his return. Some Christians create “end-times calendars” with “windows” that feature clues as to how close we are to the second coming. The Lord doesn’t want us to waste time trying to determine the exact timing of his return. He’s more interested in what we do and how we pray during that interim, right?

—C. R. B.

### Conclusion

### A. Prayer in a Weary World

It is easy when reading this parable to forget, or at least fail to give attention to, the specific purpose for it. That purpose is stated in the opening verse: “that [people] should always pray and not give up” ([Luke 18:1](#)). We can get so caught up in the issues of God’s justice and the timing of his action on behalf of his people that we overlook the fact that this parable is meant to help us with our prayer life. Proper prayer will result in self-examination; this is much more useful than prayers of complaint regarding a perceived lack of action on God’s part. A vital ingredient in maintaining the faith that Jesus mentioned at the close of the parable is steadfast, refuse-to-faint prayer.

At times prayer may seem ineffective in providing genuine solutions to the burning issues of our time. Some skeptics view prayer as a means of avoiding the hard work required to right or reverse some of the injustices in a terribly broken world. Those participating in various social programs and working hard to solve society’s ills are often presented as those who are really making a difference (and in many cases, they are). People who pray, by contrast, are seen as out of touch or unwilling to get their hands dirty and tackle the problems that exist.

But that’s a false either-or distinction. Certainly prayer should not be a substitute for work. God does expect his people to be salt and light ([Matthew 5:13-16](#)), to penetrate the darkness and to give more of his “seasoning” to the world as salt does to food. Part of this includes acting “justly” as the prophet tells us ([Micah 6:8](#)).

### B. Justice as a Burning Issue

We recognize that justice (or rather the lack of it) is a burning issue in contemporary society. But we take care to note that the justice specifically addressed by Jesus in today’s parable is that which concerns God’s “chosen ones” (Christians). The issue is their continuing to be persecuted in various ways while God does not intervene on their behalf. So, how are Christians to react to this kind of continuing injustice?

As we read Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, we see that we are not to take personal vengeance against wrongdoers; in fact, we are to seek the good of our enemies ([Matthew 5:38-48](#)). Paul’s counsel in [Romans 12:19-21](#) is consistent with this: “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” ([12:19](#)).

For many Christians today, this requirement creates great tension. This is particularly so in parts of the world where places of Christian worship are being burned to the ground and followers of Jesus (including children) are being tortured, mutilated, and killed because of their allegiance to him. Christians see sin flourishing and wrongdoers enjoying life, apparently free to live under the radar of divine wrath. In the midst of this, the teaching that people “should always pray and not give up” can seem hollow, certainly much easier said than done.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How did you grow spiritually during a time when you prayed for God to change your circumstances, but he ended up changing you instead?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Regarding patience
- Regarding how you view circumstances
- Other

### C. Revelation as an Insightful Help

The book of Revelation offers a proper perspective on this matter of maintaining faith under fire. As John describes the opening of the fifth of seven seals, he testifies, “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained” ([Revelation 6:9](#)). He then notes how they cry out as they ask, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” ([6:10](#)).

This language calls to mind the reality behind the imagery of our lesson’s parable: oppressed believers are crying out for God to judge their enemies and avenge them. They are in danger of giving up in the sense of wondering *What’s the use in praying? Nothing changes, so we might as well spend the time doing something else.* The “how long” question posed by both the dead and the living (see [Psalm 35:17-28](#); [Habakkuk 1:2-4](#); etc.) is felt profoundly.

As we read through Revelation, we see vividly portrayed the intense conflict between good and evil, between the Lord and Satan. Finally as we draw near to the book’s conclusion, we read how John describes hearing “the roar of a great multitude in heaven” proclaiming the praises of the Lord ([Revelation 19:1](#)). A few verses later the great marriage supper of the Lamb is pictured, to which all the faithful are invited ([19:7-9](#)).

As [Revelation 19](#) progresses, a rider on a white horse appears. “[The horse’s] rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war” ([19:11](#)). The rider is called “the Word of God” ([19:13](#)) and “on his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” ([19:16](#)). He has come to judge the nations and to carry out the wrath of God Almighty ([19:15](#)).

There is no question who this rider is: he is Jesus, coming in glory as he promised to do in today’s parable. And he comes quickly, to avenge the faithful and to carry out God’s holy judgment on the wicked.

The cry for vengeance will be answered, in the ultimate sense, when Satan is cast into the lake of fire ([Revelation 20:10](#)). He is the one whom Jesus came to destroy ([Hebrews 2:14, 15](#); [1 John 3:8](#)). Those who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior are equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome Satan’s temptations and schemes ([1 John 4:4](#)).

Even so, we still feel the impact of the broken, sin-cursed world that awaits redemption ([Romans 8:22, 23](#)). That full redemption will come with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth ([2 Peter 3:13](#); [Revelation 21:1](#)). And when that takes place, it will happen *quickly*.

May Jesus find us faithful when he comes.

### D. Prayer

Father, we live in a time when so many voices are raised in protest, in anger, in defiance—but so few voices are raised in prayer. May we not allow the unchanging evil around us to silence our prayers. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

### E. Thought to Remember

Prayer is a plea  
to the highest court of appeals.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

### Into the Lesson

Read to the group the following quote by a famous minister:

Nothing paralyzes our lives like the attitude that things can never change. We need to remind ourselves that God can change things. Outlook determines outcome. If we see only the problems, we will be defeated; but if we see the possibilities in the problems, we can have victory.—Warren Wiersbe

Pose the following questions for whole-class response in light of this quote. 1-Why do people get stuck thinking that there's nothing that they can do to change their situation? 2-Why does believing that God can make a difference give some people the energy to take the next, most responsible small step? 3-In what ways does God call us to participate in the change he wants to create in our lives?

After discussion say, "Today's lesson focuses on a parable that illustrates the importance of persevering with the Lord in prayer."

### Into the Word

Read the eight verses of the lesson text to the class or have two volunteers take turns doing so.

Then divide the class into two groups. Group 1 will examine the parable and make a list of ways the unjust judge and God are alike. Group 2 will examine the parable and make a list of ways that the judge and God are different.

After a few minutes, bring everyone together to talk about conclusions. Ask, "Why would Jesus use a corrupt and calloused human character to help us better understand something about God?" (*Expected response: Jesus was using a lesser-to-a-greater form of logic.*)

Ask for volunteers to suggest how the parable sets the stage for Christians to understand the importance of perseverance in prayer. At some point in the discussion, give examples of two prayers: one that has been offered humbly for the thirtieth time, and one that is impatient, even though it is being offered for only the second time.

### Into Life

Ask students to name a mature Christian in their lives whose prayer life is characterized by respectful persistence, especially on behalf of others. Jot each name on the board as it is mentioned.

When no further names are forthcoming, go back through the names one at a time and ask the one who offered the name to describe that person's prayer in terms of *form* (how the prayers are structured and offered) and *content* (what is actually said). Jot responses in two columns on the board.

When the list is complete, ask learners to identify common elements and how they can emulate those traits.

*Option.* Encourage your students to fill out the "Answers to Prayer" chart on the reproducible page, which can be downloaded. One of the goals of the chart is to give them an idea of how long they might have been praying for a particular thing—or how long God took to answer a particular prayer.

*Option.* If you wish to explore the lesson's subtheme of justice, distribute copies of the "The Pursuit of Justice" activity from the reproducible page. Have students identify some injustices happening to people close to them or themselves.

Encourage students to use their chart to keep track of how persistently they pray for those experiencing injustice. Draw their attention to the column they can use to describe a small step that they can take to address the injustices they've listed.

If learners need an introduction to the important distinctions among various types of justice, distribute copies of the Get the Setting article on page 340. Depending on group interest and time available, work through some of the Scripture references to clarify.