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# WHAT'S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

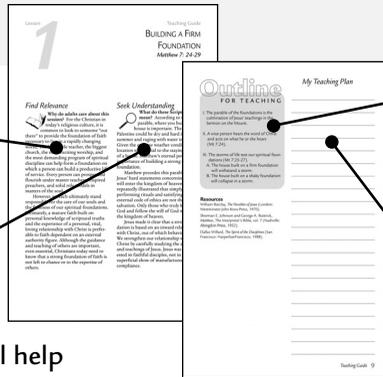
## Teacher Helps

### Find Relevance

helps you zero in on why each session is important for the adults you teach.

### Seek Understanding

presents helpful Bible Background informations and insights that will help you better understand the Scripture.



### Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.

**My Teaching Plan** is a convenient place for you to make notes for teaching the session.

## Teacher Options

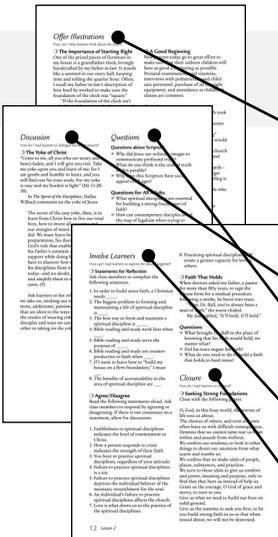
**Offer Illustrations** presents material that will help you paint a picture of the session. This section often presents items from church history, current events, or interesting anecdotes that help introduce the session.

**Discussion** provides teaching activities that will help learners discuss the Scripture text.

**Questions** presents multiple collections of questions for various kinds of adults.

**Involve Learners** helps learners become actively involved with the Scripture text for a particular session.

**Closure** gives you a means for wrapping up the session.



### You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

### Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

## AS WAS HIS CUSTOM: JESUS PRAYED

*Luke 3:21-22; 4:1-13; 6:12-13; 9:18-27*

### Find Relevance



**Why do adults care about this session?** This series of lessons focuses on the prayer life of Jesus as a model for contemporary Christians. Prayer for Jesus was more than an act of piety; it was a lifeline. Christians today know that they should pray, but many rarely do. These lessons can enrich the lives of individuals by helping them remember the importance of seeking God in daily prayer. These lessons suggest that prayer contributes to a greater sense of community. Prayer can be a means of bonding among those who follow Christ.

Too many Christians compartmentalize their lives. Religion is reduced to a once-a-week activity that is not allowed to touch secular existence. Jesus spent more time among the people than he did at synagogue, but every aspect of his life was a religious expression. Every human relationship reflected his understanding of God's will for him and the world. Jesus consulted God about every decision of his life. We would avoid many mistakes if we were to follow his example.

### Seek Understanding



**What do these Scriptures mean?** Jesus' mission was in part a demonstration of how a perfectly God-conscious person should live on this earth. Jesus was the unique Son of God; Scriptures and the doctrines of the church also affirm that he was human and subject to the full range of human experiences. Only as a fully living, breathing human was the Son of God able to show us so clearly how to live as children of God in this world.

*Truly man: Against all tendencies to deify Jesus, it must constantly be stressed even today that he was wholly and entirely man with all the consequences of this (capacity for suffering, fear, loneliness, insecurity, temptations, doubts, possibility of error). Not merely man, but true man. In describing him as such we insisted on the truth which was to be made true, the unity of theory and practice, of acknowledging and following him, of faith and action. As true man, by his proclamation, behavior and fate, he was a model of what it is to be human, enabling each and every one who commits himself to him to discover and to realize the meaning of being man and of his freedom to exist for his fellow men. As confirmed by God, he therefore represents the permanently reliable*



## Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

### ○ Listening

In George Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan*, the Dauphin discusses with Joan the voices she hears. He laments that he never hears any voices. Joan chides him with these words: "They do come to you, but you do not listen. You have not sat in the field in the evening and considered their message. When the Angelus rings, you cross yourself and are done with it; but if you prayed from your heart and listened to the trilling of the bells in the air, after they stopped ringing you would hear the same voices as I do."

### Questions

- Did Jesus hear God in any way that is not available to us?
- How does God communicate with us?
- How often do you listen to God in prayer?
- How might you reorient your prayer life so that you can hear the "voice" of God?

### ○ Praying Like Jesus

"My mother prayed on her knees at midday, at night, and first thing in the morning. Every day opened up to her [opportunities] to have God's will done in [her life]. Every night she totted up what she'd done and said and thought, to see how it squared with Him. That kind of life is dreary, people think, but they're missing the point. For one thing, such a life can never be boring. And nothing can happen to you that you can't make use of. Even if you're racked by troubles, and sick and poor and ugly, you've got your soul to carry through life like a treasure on a platter. Going upstairs to pray after the noon meal, my mother would be full of energy and expectation, seriously smiling." (Munro, 4)

Discuss with your class members the consistency of this woman's prayer life. Ask how we can benefit from communicating with God at regular intervals during the day.

## Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

### ○ Baptism

Ask members of the group to share their conversion or baptism experience. Did they have a sense of God's presence? What were the early challenges to their faith?

Watch the baptism scene from the movie *Tender Mercies*. Describe to the group the scene and the conversation of the little boy and the man as they go home in the pickup after baptism in the little church. The boy asks the man if he feels differently after baptism. The man responds, "Not yet." Should people have a different feeling after baptism?

### ○ Church Decisions

Ask the group to think back to major decisions made in the life of your church, such as, calling a minister, deciding to relocate, building a new building, or starting a new ministry. Reflect on the role of prayer in making those decisions. In decision making, what role should prayer play in the life of the entire church?

## Questions

### Questions about Scripture

- Why do you think God was pleased with Jesus' baptism?
- What temptations did Jesus face in the desert?
- What similar temptations do we face?
- Why do you think some persons were not chosen as disciples?

### Questions for All Adults

- Would you consider thirty a late start for Jesus?
- Why do you think he did not begin at an earlier age?
- What do you know about the lives of the apostles?
- Did God ask them to make mid-career changes?

### Questions for Mature Adults

- What poor choices in your life might have been avoided with preparatory prayer?
- How does age reshape our prayer lives?
- What can we learn from Jesus about teaching others about prayer?

### Questions for Younger Adults

- How are the study of Scripture and prayer connected in the desert experience?
- Who do your friends say Jesus is?
- How do people talk about prayer outside the church?

### Questions for Adults with Children

- What do you think Mary and Joseph's role was in teaching Jesus about prayer?
- How can prayer produce or increase faith?
- Are certain settings more conducive for prayer? Why or why not?

## *Involve Learners*

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

Discuss with your group the role of prayer in their lives and their perceptions of the role of prayer in your church. Discuss reasonable expectations in prayer. What does God care about in our lives? What is appropriate to ask of God?

Distribute writing materials and paper. At the top of the page, suggest that each person write the things for which they should pray in the next week. Tell them in advance that they will not have to disclose their list to anyone.

Then, ask them to make a list of prayer requests for your class and the church. Write these requests at the bottom of the page. Talk about ministry needs in the community and in your church. Compile a master list on the board. Keep it in view for the next several weeks as you discuss the prayer life of Jesus. Then take time to pray; remember to pray for each member of the church staff.

### **○ Modern Disciples**

Consider yourselves modern disciples of Jesus. Think about your life experiences as followers of Jesus. Think about your family, friends, and co-workers and imagine that Jesus has asked you what they are saying about him. Consider also images in the media and discuss how these images portray Jesus. Then compare all these ideas with what the Scriptures tell us about Jesus.

## *Closure*

Ask the class to recall the questions the disciples asked Jesus. Do we ask the same kinds of questions? In the early days of their ministry together, Jesus seems to have done all the praying for the group. Who does our praying? Suggest that members talk to Jesus each day during the coming week not about “holy things” but about everyday concerns. End the session with a prayer. Pray that group members will involve Jesus in every aspect of their lives, especially in the coming week.

# 2

## THE LORD'S PRAYER *Luke 11:1-4*

### *Find Relevance*



**Why do adults care about this session?** The Lord's Prayer provides us with a pattern of priorities for living. It is worth memorizing because it is a summary of Jesus' teachings that can quickly be called to mind in all circumstances. When we are weary, sick, stressed, or confused, it is a prayer that can be a part of us and remind us of the presence of God. We can pray the very words of the prayer or use the ingredients to inform the composition of our individual prayers.

This prayer teaches the relationship one should have with a loving heavenly parent. It demonstrates that personal petition and intercession for others are appropriate for our conversations with God. The prayer suggests the vast range of God's concern, from providing our daily bread to establishing the kingdom of creation. It maintains a tension between what is and what is yet to be. The fact that the prayer is used by persons in different denominations and cultures suggests that its study can help us transcend human barriers to unify God's people.

### *Seek Understanding*



**What do these Scriptures mean?** At the major turning point of his ministry, Jesus responds to the disciples' request to teach them to pray. He has turned his face toward Jerusalem and the cross. The apostles are becoming increasingly perplexed about his teaching and the public's response to him. It is a time of testing for them, and they need all the help they can get. This prayer serves their needs in a number of respects.

This prayer is not a means for selfish personal advancement. The disciples who sought status will be disappointed. This community prayer will serve to strengthen the bond between the disciples. They must understand that their well-being is linked to the welfare of the Kingdom. The prayer stresses the special relationship between God as loving parent and them as children. The prayer acknowledges the reality of evil and temptation, and implies a life of struggle for the disciples. An honest examination of the implications of this prayer makes it difficult to romanticize the Christian life.



## Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

### ○ Content and Relationship are Primary

Years ago I read about two ministers, one quite old and the other very young, who shared the same room at a conference. The older man was on his knees for only a brief minute, but the younger minister tarried a long time on his knees. When they were both in bed, the old man commented, “You spent a very long while in prayer.” “Yes, I always do,” was the proud reply. The old man answered, “Well, I’m with my Father all day long, referring to Him, listening to Him, talking with Him, so that at the end of the day all I feel I need to say is just ‘Goodnight.’” Does not that have a beautiful naturalness and simplicity suggestive of the Master’s prayer life? (Weldon, 10)

### Questions

- Is your prayer continuous throughout the day, more scheduled, or some of both?
- How are you aware of God’s presence in the daily routine of your life?
- For what are you striving in prayer?

### ○ And Forgive Us Our Sins

Read aloud each of these stories and then encourage discussion about forgiveness.

#### Karla

In *Crime: A Time Investigation*, writer S. C. Gwynne Austin reports that “Karla Faye Tucker is the nicest woman on death row. She is so nice, in fact, and so well liked by people who know her that it is virtually impossible to look at this attractive, sweet-natured, born-again Christian and imagine the gruesome crime to which she confessed in Houston, Texas, on June 13, 1983.” At that time, she was a drug-addicted prostitute who, during a weekend with her boyfriend, had consumed an astonishing quantity of

drugs and alcohol. The two then took a pickax and killed her ex-lover, Jerry Lynn Dean, 27, and his companion of the moment, Deborah Thornton, 32, while they slept. Tucker, who left the pickax embedded in Thornton’s chest, boasted of the experience at her trial.

Tucker was convicted and sentenced to death in 1984. On February 3, 1998, she was put to death by lethal injection in Huntsville, Texas. “What makes her case striking was not just her gender but also her apparently profound conversion to Christianity.” Because of her conversion, many unlikely supporters came to her defense, including Thornton’s brother and Dean’s sister, the homicide detective, several former prosecutors, televangelist Pat Robertson and thousands of citizens.” (Austin, 151)

#### Bill

Bill Pelke had come a long way from the day had had a vision of his murdered grandmother while he was atop his crane at a Portage, Indiana, steel mill to the day he told his story to a Gary, Indiana, high school classroom seven years later. He had traveled the distance between a desire for revenge and the need for reconciliation. It remains an unfathomable gap to some, including his close family members. When Pelke finished telling the Lew Wallace High School class how he had come to forgive—and even love—a former student of their school who had brutally killed his grandmother, some shook their heads. Some gasped. “You must have a big heart,” one girl said. Pelke replied, “I have a big God.” (Penn, 38)

The words of the Lord’s Prayer include “forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.” In both these stories, family members of the victims have been able to offer forgiveness to the offender. In these and other similar

circumstances, how might people react to the family members' willingness to forgive? How might people react to the offenders? As the group answers, write their responses on the board. Then consider each response, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each position.

## Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Why did the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray? They were already a part of a culture that included prayer as a daily routine. The Psalms of the Old Testament were prayers offered by individuals and written for the use of the community. Apparently, the Psalms were used in the context of worship and expressed ancient Israel's greatest hopes, dreams, fears, and difficulties.

Consequently, prayer was a part of each person's life. Ancient Jews were required to pause for prayer three times every day. Prayers were offered by the eldest male for the entire family and by the priests for all the people and their sin. Rather than kneel, assuming our traditional posture for prayer, the person in ancient Judaism would generally stand, often on tiptoe, hands outstretched toward the heavens, attempting to be as close to God as possible.

The Psalms and other prayers of the ancient world and the prayers in Jesus' day are strikingly expressive. The Psalmist often cries out against God and speaks of frustration with God's seeming inactivity. The Psalmist expresses fear and anger with the victory of enemies. Jesus seems to follow the Old Testament example. In the Garden, for example, Jesus asks God "to take this cup from me." From the cross, he quotes the Psalm, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Prayer was conversation for Jesus, an uncommonly honest dialogue between Son and Father.

In what ways do the prayers you read or prayers you hear affect your sense of the presence of God? Contrast prayer in Jesus' day with prayer in contemporary American society.

## Questions

### Questions about Scripture

- How might the differences in Luke's and Matthew's versions of the Lord's Prayer be explained?
- What was the time of trial?
- What do you think was the hardest part of this prayer for the disciples?

### Questions for All Adults

- How does the thought that millions of Christians of all denominations pray these words (or the words of Matthew) each Sunday affect your understanding of the Kingdom of God?
- Does God expect people to pray? In what ways do our prayers reflect our understanding of God?
- How can a read or memorized prayer be as authentic and meaningful as spontaneous prayer?

### Questions for Mature Adults

- How has your prayer experience shaped your understanding of the will of God for your life?
- Have your prayers become more ritualized or more personal as you have become spiritually more mature?
- How do liturgical prayers in worship continue to enrich your spiritual life?

### Questions for Younger Adults

- How would you respond to criticism of "written" prayers or the use of the Lord's Prayer as a part of weekly public worship?
- Paul wrote that "we do not know how to pray as we ought but that very Spirit intercedes" (Rom 8:26). Compare this idea with the scene in Luke 11:1-4. How does one passage relate to the other and with your experience?

## Questions for Adults with Children

- Does the example of your prayer life have the same effect on your children as Jesus' example did on the disciples? Why or why not?
- In what ways could your family benefit from memorizing the Lord's Prayer and regularly repeating it?
- In what circumstances, if any, might the use of the word Father be an obstacle to prayer? How might such an obstacle(s), if any, be overcome?

## Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

Give each person paper and a pencil. Ask the members of your class to write a typical prayer they remember hearing in church as a child or a new believer. After a few moments, ask the group to name the elements most often heard in public prayer. Compare these elements with those of the Lord's Prayer. Specifically, compare the focus on God, the nature of intercession, and the purpose of prayer.

Then ask the class to form small groups and write a contemporary version of the Lord's Prayer. After the groups have written their prayers, give each group a copy of the prayer below. Explain that this prayer is part of a New Zealand prayer. Ask the groups to consider the similarities and differences between their prayers and this printed one. Ask them especially to note the strengths of each.

Eternal Spirit,  
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
Source of all that is and that shall  
be,...  
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name  
echo through the universe!  
The way of your justice

be followed by the peoples of the  
world!

Your heavenly will be done  
by all created beings!  
Your commonwealth of peace and  
freedom  
sustain our hope and come on  
earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed  
us.

In the hurts we absorb from one  
another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test,  
strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare  
us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power  
that is love,  
now and for ever.

Amen.

(Church of the Providence of New  
Zealand, 181)

## Closure

Ask each small group to choose a representative to pray the modern version of the Lord's Prayer the group has written. Close your time together by hearing each group's prayer. If you have some good singers in the group, you might want to sing the traditional Lord's Prayer together.

# 3

## PERSEVERENCE IN PRAYER

*Luke 11:5-13*

### *Find Relevance*



**Why do adults care about this session?** Prayer is a popular subject in America today.

Popular and professional magazines and journals print articles about the efficiency of prayer. In 1996, the Journal of the American Medical Association included an article titled “Should Physicians Prescribe Prayer for Health?” Some medical schools now offer courses in spirituality and its effectiveness in the healing process. National surveys report that between 70% and 90% (depending on the survey) of Americans claim to pray at least occasionally. There seems to be an innate sense of a power beyond ourselves that can and will help us. This broad interest in prayer by persons in all walks of life makes it all the more important for Christians to know what the Bible teaches about prayer.

Today’s focus passage is one of the most often quoted and misinterpreted passages about prayer. Some preachers proclaim that prosperity or a kind of new-age power source awaits those who use the right prayer formula. The Gospel of Luke makes no such claims. This passage, like all units of Scripture, must be viewed in the light of the whole Bible. Not even Jesus got everything he asked for in prayer. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate prayer’s power. Many

Christians use prayer like an emergency room of last resort and miss out on the sustaining strength of a continual relationship with God. Prayer should be a part of our daily routine.

### *Seeking Understanding*



**What do these Scriptures mean?** A parable embodies theological truth in everyday life experience. Today’s parable

can be considered a two-point parable. The first point is that those in need should not hesitate to ask God’s help. The second and most important point is that God is more generous and willing to help than even the best of earthly friends (Blomberg, 275-276).

Jesus fills this parabolic lesson with familiar images so that his listeners might easily identify with the characters in the story. With whom do you identify in the parable, the asker or the giver? In a typical Bible study class, there may be friends in need and friends reluctant to be inconvenienced. Jesus teaches that God will not give us those things that God considers harmful to us. Most of us have prayed for things we never received and later were thankful God withheld “the scorpion” from us.



## Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

### ○ Asking for the Right Things

Mimi Rumpp stopped praying for a winning lottery ticket years ago. With a husband, two kids and a full-time job, she didn't have time for trivial pursuits. But after a doctor told her sister Miki last year that she needed a kidney transplant, the family began praying for a donor. This, Mimi thought, was a prize worth praying for. Less than a year later, Miki has a new kidney, courtesy of a bank teller in Napa, California, to whom she had told her story. The teller was the donor; she was so moved by Miki's plight she had herself tested and discovered she was a perfect match. Coincidence? Luck? Divine intervention? Rumpp is sure: "It was a miracle." (Woodward, 57)

### Questions

- What is the difference between praying for a winning lottery ticket and praying for a kidney donor?
- How do you discern what you "need?"
- What do you think God considers our "needs?"

### ○ Images of God Affect Prayer

"I see God as this thing I always pray to for survival—whether on airplanes, long drives or in the middle of the night when I'm working late, whenever I need strength or extra support. I don't have a physical image all the time—I mean, God's everywhere—but that's who God is to me."

—Jennifer, 28

"Sometimes when I pray, I see God as a pair of big, comforting hands. Sometimes I think of Him as a feeling—like crawling into my dad's lap and feeling completely safe, like I did when I was six."

—Carla, 26

"I know this sounds weird—but whenever I pray, I just see God as a big fluffy cloud. Go figure."

—Sarah, 20  
(Bibeau, 36)

### Questions

- What image of God do you envision when you pray?
- How does your image of God affect the way you pray?
- What images of God might encourage your prayer life?

## Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Carl Sagan, the famous scientist, author, and television personality died in December 1996. He was only sixty-two years old. Sagan was an agnostic who scorned prayer. “Does God need to be reminded that someone is sick...or does he know, but he won’t do anything about it unless someone else asks him to?” were questions he asked believing friends who prayed for him. (Adler, 65)

### Questions

- Should Christians pray for such skeptics?
- How would you respond to a friend who exhibited this attitude?
- What in our study of Jesus’ prayer life addresses such questions?

Reviewing the three views of God offered in the “Offer Illustrations” section above, discuss what kind of prayer life you think Jennifer, Carla, and Sarah have. Discuss perceptions of God in your group and how they are reflected in prayer experience.

## Questions

### Questions about Scripture

- Who was “shameless” in the parable?
- How might our sophistication hinder our prayer lives?
- Who is inconvenienced in the story?

### Questions for All Adults

- In the society of Jesus’ day, what is significant about the request for bread?
- Considering vv. 9-13, how might you explain why all requests in prayer by faithful Christians are not granted?
- In today’s passage, what is implied in the gift of the Holy Spirit?

### Questions for Mature Adults

- How do you pray for adult children who are not believers?
- When have you experienced answered prayer?
- How do you respond when you ask and seek, but do not receive?

### Questions for Younger Adults

- How do you pray about vocational and business matters?
- How do you determine the difference between “needs” and “wants” when you pray?
- Is it easier for you to pray to God as friend or father?

### Questions for Adults with Children

- How do you pray for your children? What do you seek on their behalf?
- What are your children learning about prayer at church?
- How do you teach your children about God and God’s role in their everyday life experiences?
- How do you deal with your children’s wants?

## *Involve Learners*

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

Ask the members of your class to form two groups. Ask the first group to paraphrase the Luke 11: 5-8 parable in contemporary language. Ask them to consider who our friends are and what kind of emergencies might evoke a midnight call. Ask the second group to paraphrase verses 9-13, employing modern images.

Then ask the large group to make a list of things for which people commonly pray, or to list things for which people of different age groups (children, younger adults, older adults) commonly pray. Write the responses on the board. Then ask the group to distinguish between needs and wants from the list.

### ○ **Public Prayers**

Discuss public prayer such as pastoral prayers and invocations at public events. What is considered an “appropriate” content for such prayers? Is a public prayer constructed any differently than a personal prayer? As a group project, construct a pastoral prayer for your church. The following prayer of Peter Marshall might be helpful in thinking about the nature of a pastoral prayer on behalf of a congregation:

Our Father, we are beginning to understand at last that the things that are wrong with our world are the sum total of all the things that are wrong with us as individuals. Thou hast made us after Thine image, and our hearts can find no rest until they rest in Thee. We are too Christian really to enjoy sinning and too fond of sinning really to enjoy Christianity. Most of us know perfectly well what we ought to do; our trouble is that we do not want to do it. Thy help is our only hope. Make us want to do what is right, and give us the ability to do it.

## *Closure*

Close with a time of prayer. Allow every member of the group an opportunity to share a prayer concern. Include in the prayer time a period of silence when each person may speak to God about issues she or he does not want to voice aloud in the group.

PRAY

ALWAYS

*Luke 18:1-8*

## Find Relevance



**Why do adults care about this session?** Most people experience times in their lives when they feel all alone. Some people experience this loneliness when they must deal with the loss of job, home, health, or a loved one. Jesus had to deal with physical pain, emotional despair, abandonment by friends, and a sense of spiritual isolation. Because of his experiences, Jesus understands when we feel all alone in the world. The causes of this emotion are myriad, but in today's parable, for this widow, the cause is injustice. She was wronged and there was seemingly no one to help her. That kind of isolation is both frightening and difficult to handle.

At some point in life, we all experience what we believe to be an injustice. Some experiences are minor and have only a small effect on who we are and how we view life. But other experiences of injustice can affect every aspect of a person's life. Though we are called to fight against injustice in our world, the truth is that not all injustice is remedied in this life. Even Jesus failed to receive justice from the courts he faced in this week's Scripture. One lesson of this parable is that there is a higher court with a righteous judge who hears the cries of the downtrodden and responds with care and love and not out of necessity or convenience. Our prayers are not to one who

hears us begrudgingly, only out of self-interest. Our prayers are heard by our heavenly Lord, the very Creator who cares for us and hears our cries.

## Seek Understanding

**What do these Scriptures mean?** This passage implies a comparison between the world as it is and the world as it is becoming in Christ. Jesus asks, "When the Son of Man comes there will be justice, but will there be faith?" (18:8 paraphrased). Jesus wants to be sure that no one misses the point, he encourages his followers that they should "always pray and not give up" (18:1). This teaching was radical in for the early first-century world. God was viewed by the religious leaders of the day as holy and removed from humankind. Only the high priest could enter God's presence (the Holy of Holies) in the Temple. To proclaim that anyone could enter God's presence, like the widow before the judge, would be heard as sacrilegious. According to the priests, a person should enter God's presence in prayer only during the times assigned by religious law: three times a day. Any less was to tempt the wrath of God. Any more could bring about God's anger. The assumption in this thinking is clear: God expects our obedience but has too much to do to hear our concerns. Jesus, on the other hand, teaches that turning to God in prayer, especially in a

time of distress, is an entirely appropriate action. The unfair arbiter in the parable tried to ignore the needy petitioner, but the righteous God seeks the lonely and dispirited to offer comfort and hope. In fact, Jesus seems to assume a depth of relationship between the petitioner and God that is completely absent in the interaction between the parable's characters. Jesus calls his disciples to continual prayer driven by a faith that knows God hears, cares, and will respond.

Prayer is also a constant reminder that the Kingdom of God is both now and in the future. The reign of God has begun in the lives of believers but, at the same time, is not yet fully established on earth. Someone has suggested that being a Christian in the world is like living behind enemy lines. Following this analogy, our survival is dependent on keeping in touch with home base and the general command.

### Resources

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# Outline

## FOR TEACHING

- I. The judge...
  - A. Did not fear God.
  - B. Did not respect people.
  - C. Did not want to be bothered.
  - D. Did the right thing for the wrong reason.
- II. The widow...
  - A. Was powerless in her society.
  - B. Felt she had been treated unjustly.
  - C. Refused to abandon her cause even when it seemed hopeless.
  - D. Received justice.
- III. God...
  - A. Will grant justice.
  - B. Will not delay.
  - C. The Son of Man will come.

### My Teaching Plan

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## Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

### ○ Pray for Justice

“Even though convicted, we will not retaliate with hate, but will still stand with love in our hearts, and stand resisting injustice, with the same determination with which we started out. We need a great deal of encouragement in this movement. Of course one thing that we are depending on, from not only other communities but from our own community, is prayer. We ask people everywhere to pray that God will guide us, pray that justice will be done and that righteousness will stand. And I think through these prayers we will be strengthened; it will make us feel the unity of the nation and the presence of Almighty God. For as we said all along, this is a spiritual movement.” (Washington, 84)

Ask the group, What assumption is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. making about prayer in the above statement? Then ask your class members to consider whether their personal beliefs about prayer would allow them to make such a statement as this one and believe that it would happen in this way. Ask if their prayer life is consistent with what they believe. Talk about why or why not.

### ○ Do It Yourself!

I once saw a cartoon that had in the first box a person kneeling before an altar and a stained-glass window. The person was depicted as saying, “O Lord, heal the division between the races and teach us to live together in peace.” The scene was unchanged in the next two blocks with similar words imploring God to do something about poverty in one and war in the other. The final block showed the prayer in the rabble of the altar as a lightning bolt had crashed through the window and shattered all the religious trappings. Supposedly a word from God, the speech in the final balloon was in bold type: “Do it yourself, you clod!” When we pray for solutions to the world’s problems, should we not offer ourselves as God’s instruments by whom the prayers may be fulfilled? The widow pursued the judge and righteousness. Prayer and action are not opposites but should be as interdependent as a car’s engine and its wheels.

## Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Luke explains that Jesus told this parable in order that we might not “lose heart.” Giving up on prayer is often giving up on ourselves, not believing that God can work with us, in us, and through us. We should stake our lives on our prayers, trusting God for the outcome. Our repeated prayers on behalf of someone who is not a Christian keep us open to ways in which we may be used of God to lead this person to Christ.

Spend a few minutes discussing with the group what prayer changes: God, us, the situation, or all three? Why should we not lose heart (faith) and keep on praying when our prayers seem unanswered?

## Questions

### Questions about Scripture

- How are the events preceding (17:20-37) and following (18:9-14) this week’s Scripture related to the telling of this parable?
- Was the judge just? Why or why not?
- God’s help for the oppressed often comes more slowly than we would like. How do we deal with the delay?

### Questions for All Adults

- Why might the early church have been in danger of losing heart?
- Who might the early Christians have identified as the judge and the widow?
- How should the idea of the coming of the Son of Man affect the way we pray?
- Who are the widows and judges of our day?

### Questions for Mature Adults

- Have you ever felt like the widow in the parable? Who was your judge?
- About what matters have you been persistent in prayer? Are you in danger of losing heart?

- Has your experience in prayer over the years inspired you to pray more or influenced you to pray less? How?
- How important is prayer in your life? What can you do to enhance its position and effectiveness for you?

### Questions for Younger Adults

- What contemporary religious figures claim to speak for God and act like the judge in the parable?
- Why might someone avoid praying for justice?
- Who are the “widows” in your church? How do you pray for them? How is action linked to your prayers?

### Questions for Adults with Children

- How do you teach your children about widows and judges (like those in the parable) who live in our world?
- In what ways do your family prayers raise social consciousness?
- How well can your children understand this parable without being aware of oppression and injustice in society? How can you help make them aware of social injustice?

## *Involve Learners*

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

### ○ **Pray for the Headlines**

Bring three front-page headlines from your local newspaper. Display them for everyone to see. Briefly summarize the articles enough for everyone to have an idea of the issues to be discussed. Ask the large group to discuss what they could specifically pray for each of these issues. Then ask the class to form into three smaller groups. Give each group one of the headlines, and ask them to pray for that issue. Allow the groups about five minutes for prayer. At the conclusion of the prayer time, have the large group reassemble and ask: “Now that you have prayed for these issues, what do you expect to happen?” Encourage large group discussion about how God might respond to their prayers and how they can be moved to action by their prayers. Consider the relationship between what we ask for in prayer and what God expects us to do.

### ○ **Answered Prayer**

Ask the group if anyone is willing to share a personal experience in which God has answered a prayer. Ask the person how he or she prayed and what was expected when the prayer was offered. Similarly, ask for someone to share an experience in which a prayer was offered and an answer was seemingly never received. Ask this person how he or she prayed and what was expected when the prayer was offered. Then discuss how our faith is affected by answered and seemingly unanswered prayer.

### ○ **Further Study**

Ask the class to form two groups. Have one group read Luke 17:20-37 and the other Luke 18:9-14. Ask both to report on the relationship of their respective passages to our focus passage. Consider

how these two passages enlarge our understanding of prayer and if they follow the meaning in today’s parable: “Pray and do not lose heart.”

## *Closure*

### *Option 1*

Ask everyone to close their eyes and, in a spirit of prayer, to visualize God. Invite each to imagine how God looks. Allow time for silent prayer, asking each person to let the image of God they have visualized help them better understand their relationship with God. Have each person pray about the matters in their lives that most concern them. Ask them to pray also for someone in the church they believe to be in need. Ask them to pray for justice in your community for a particular person or group.

### *Option 2*

Have the group name ways of praying. List prayer possibilities on the board. If the group has trouble starting, remind them that Jesus thought of prayer as relationship with God. Ask them how they would build relationship with anyone else such as through: conversation, working on a joint project, running together, sharing a quiet moment listening, painting a picture for someone. When the list is complete, challenge the members of your group to explore at least two of the ways mentioned that they have never tried. Close in prayer, asking God to help in this new prayer endeavor.

## PRAYER IN

## CRISIS

*Luke 22:39-46; 23:34, 46**Find Relevance*

**Why do adults care about this session?** The incarnation is an essential Christian belief. In Jesus, God became one of us. Jesus experienced humanity in its fullness. Nowhere is his identification with us more obvious than on the cross. Every human being must face disappointment in institutions and people, pain, and ultimately death. Jesus knew what it was like to suffer emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Each of us will, at some point, know some of what he suffered on the cross. Richard Foster argues that the experience of Jesus was a universal one in the sense of isolation and pain.

Jesus' experience on the cross was, of course, utterly unique and unrepeatable, for he was taking into himself the sin of the world. But in our own way you and I will pray this Prayer of the Forsaken if we seek the intimacy of perpetual communion with the Father. Times of seeming desertion and absence and abandonment appear to be universal among those who have walked this path of faith before us. We might just as well get used to the idea that, sooner or later, we, too, will know what it means to feel forsaken by God. (Foster, 17)

The experience of the cross probably brought out some of Jesus' greatest fears.

His prayer in the garden, in particular, shows his deep despair over what was about to occur. Prayer, however, was a resource for Jesus at his moment of greatest despair as it should be for all believers.

One of the more difficult aspects of prayer is seemingly unanswered prayer. Individually and corporately we have made requests that were not granted. Sometimes God does us a favor by not granting our foolish requests. In Jesus' prayer in the garden, we see an example of God's awareness of the higher good for both ourselves and creation as a whole. Our prayers, like those of Jesus, should include an expression of willingness to yield to God's plan.

*Seek Understanding*

**What do these Scriptures mean?** Jesus was the Son made perfect through obedience. In the garden, during the most critical moment of his life, he surrendered himself completely to God. He was confident that God cared for him but he was prepared to finish his mission. He sought the mind of the Father and the strength to be faithful. Prayer is a means of uniting one's will with the will of God.

On the cross, we see the strength of Jesus' faith in God. Through both his physical and emotional pain, he thought of others



## Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

### ○ Effective Unanswered Prayer

“Adoniram Judson, Massachusetts-born missionary of the last century, prayed to be sent to India, but he was compelled by circumstances to go to Burma. He prayed for his wife’s life, but buried her and their two children. He prayed for release from a Burma prison, but was kept there eleven terrible months, chained and miserable. The missionary’s petitions were not answered, but God answered the man. Judson rendered immeasurable service to the Kingdom of God in Burma, and his Burmese-English dictionary is a monument to fine scholarship. This is what Judson wrote on the subject of prayer: ‘I never prayed sincerely and earnestly for anything but it came...no matter at how distant a day. Somehow, in some shape—probably the last that I should have devised—it came.’ How wonderfully the man was answered!”

(Fisher, 146-147)

### Questions

- How does answered prayer affect your faith?
- How does seemingly unanswered prayer affect your faith?
- Someone once said that their major frustration with God was that God works too slowly. How might the discipline of patience positively affect our prayer life?

### ○ Prayer As a Last Resource

Harry Emerson Fosdick was one of the greatest preachers of the twentieth century. In his last year in seminary, he suffered an emotional breakdown that resulted in a new understanding of God, prayer and self. He wrote about the experience as follows:

This whole horrid experience was one of the most important factors in my preparation for the ministry. For the first time in my life, I faced, at my wit’s end, a situation too much for me to handle. I went down into the depths where self-confidence becomes ludicrous. There the technique I had habitually relied upon—marshaling my wit and my volition and going strenuously after what I wanted—petered completely out. The harder I struggled, the worse I was. It was what I did the struggling with that was sick. I, who had thought myself strong, found myself beaten, unable to cope not only with outward circumstances but even with myself. In that experience I learned some things about religion that theological seminaries do not teach. I learned to pray, not because I had adequately argued out prayer’s rationality, but because I desperately needed help from a Power greater than my own. I learned that God, much more than a theological proposition, is an immediately available Resource; that just as around our bodies is a physical universe from which we draw all our physical energy, so around our spirits is a spiritual Presence in living communion with whom we can find sustaining strength. (Fant and Pinson, 6-7)

## Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

The question is sometimes asked, “Does God play favorites?” It seems a reasonable question based on various biblical stories and our own experiences with God. But anyone who attempts to deal with this question must also ask what it means to be one of God’s favorites. Read 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 and compare this prayer experience of Paul’s with Jesus’ in the garden. What do these two experiences of two of God’s favorites teach us about prayer?

## Questions

### Questions about Scripture

- What is implied in the phrase “as was his custom?”
- For what did Jesus ask the disciples to pray?
- What did Luke mean when he wrote that they were sleeping “because of grief?”

### Questions for All Adults

- Have you had an experience where your ability to stay awake and pray was hindered by grief?
- Of the three prayers included in today’s session text, which would be most difficult for you to pray?
- How can you pray “if you are willing” and mean it?

### Questions for Mature Adults

- What customs for prayer have you developed?
- When faced with a crisis, how has prayer strengthened and sustained you?
- When have you felt your friends had fallen asleep and could not understand your burden?
- Do you pray for anyone the way Jesus prayed for the disciples in the garden?

### Questions for Younger Adults

- When you are in crisis or facing a difficult decision, where does prayer rank in

your list of resources for support and counsel? What resources do you put ahead of prayer?

- How might talking about your pain with others who are suffering from the same troubles help both you and others?
- What would you say to skeptical friends who questioned the effectiveness of prayer?

### Questions for Adults with Children

- How do you teach children the limits of prayer?
- What would you say to children who pray that someone will be healed and the person dies?
- When our society stresses competition and winning, how can you teach children to follow Jesus’ example of praying for forgiveness for those who had put him on the cross?
- Can you teach children that non-Christians fully understand what they are doing when they behave in unchristian ways? How?

## *Involve Learners*

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

### ○ **Responses to Prayer**

From today's passages, identify people who stood around the cross. Ask several people from your group to role-play a character from the passages and their response to the prayers of Jesus. Consider role-playing weeping followers, mockers, and those like the centurion in Luke 23:47. After the role-plays, ask group members to identify "despisers of religion" in their circles of contact. Ask how these people might be affected by our prayer practices.

### ○ **Learning Discernment**

Ask the group to consider people over the past few years who have claimed to be a messiah (for example: David Koresh, Jim Jones). Many people scoffed at their self-proclamations of being sent by God or having a message from God. A majority of people easily disregarded these people as fake. Might the citizens of the first-century world have seen Jesus in a similar way? How can we tell the difference between someone from God and someone on a mission for themselves?

## *Closure*

Briefly review the focus of the sessions in this series on prayer in the life of Jesus. Ask the group if they can identify one helpful lesson from each session. Ask if this series has altered in any way their understanding of Jesus and his relationship to God. Ask what practical lessons for personal prayer they have learned.

End the session by saying or singing the Lord's Prayer in unison.