



Story of My Life – Week 5 – Parable of the Persistent Widow Spiritual Formation Guide

We hope you'll use this guide to take the teaching from Sunday's service and reflect on it with a few friends or with a group. If you have questions or want to talk more about how to take a next spiritual step, contact us at info@wschurch.org.

Scripture:

One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up.

"There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, 'Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.' The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, 'I don't fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!'"

Then the Lord said, "Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?"

Luke 18:1-8 NLT

Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story: "Suppose you went to a friend's house at midnight, wanting to borrow three loaves of bread. You say to him, 'A friend of mine has just arrived for a visit, and I have nothing for him to eat.' And suppose he calls out from his bedroom, 'Don't bother me. The door is locked for the night, and my family and I are all in bed. I can't help you.' But I tell you this—though he won't do it for friendship's sake, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you whatever you need because of your shameless persistence.

"And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

"You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

Luke 11:5-13

Reflection Questions:

- What is one way (big or small) that you experienced God's goodness this week?
- What have been some of your experiences with prayer? Write down a few of your significant experiences with prayer – and then share one of them with one another.
- Read Jesus' teachings – first the parable from Luke 18, and then Jesus' teaching in Luke 11. What do you notice? Where do you find yourself in this story?
- Do you ever wonder if prayer is real?
 - Read this quote from Dallas Willard: "God's "response" to our prayers is not a charade. He does not pretend that he is answering our prayer when he is only doing what he was going to do anyway. Our requests really do make a difference in what God does or does not do. The idea that everything would happen exactly as it does regardless of whether we pray or not is a specter that haunts the minds of many who sincerely profess belief in God. It makes prayer psychologically impossible, replacing it with dead ritual at best. And of course, God does not respond to this. You wouldn't either."
 - How does this comfort you? How does it challenge you?
- How do you handle unanswered prayer?
- Everything we spend time doing is forming us. Michael challenged us, "What would happen if I participated in deformation from the world?" What do we need to give more of our attention? Does this challenge you? Is there anything that comes to mind for you to practice?
- Michael talked about prayer as being in community with God – that we ask God to bend his will, and we bend our will as we come near to him. How have you experienced this?
- In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus models a way to pray, and he includes, "Give us this day our daily bread." Michael said, "We can trust God with our ultimate, but we can also trust him with the immediate." Are you able to bring your everyday needs to God? Why or why not?
- The major theme of this teaching from Jesus is to keep praying. How can you stay encouraged to keep praying and not give up?
- Do you struggle with guilt when you meet with God? How do you think he feels about that?
- Read through some of the invitations to practice below. Is there one you are feeling drawn to try this week? Share with a trusted spiritual friend.
- If you're discussing with someone, pray together. Put some of this teaching into practice!

Practices:

Here are some simple next steps that you could start with this week:

- Take a moment to be grateful at night (Start to notice the ordinary)
- Set aside a time with God to pray (Quiet time)
- Expand that time (Give something up to make more space to be with God)
- Read How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People – www.wschurch.org/resources
- Use the Lent Guide to reflect on how to make space for God in the season leading up to Easter – www.wschurch.org/lent