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Living Deeply in Prayer

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Luke 18:1—8

Prayer is the first Treasure of a transformed life.

- Can you imagine your life without it?
- It's simple. We talk to God, and God talks to us. God listens to us, and we listen to God.
- A two-way conversation between us and the creator of the universe? Wow.
- And Jesus says prayer can move mountains. Prayer can heal the sick, bind wounds, set captives free, calm storms, and even bring the dead back to life.
- The Bible says *"Rejoice always, Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* 1 Thessalonians 5:16—18

We've said "Prayer is a priority" around here. So, Church, **Why do we stop?**

- Unsustainable schedules—We've packed so much crud in our lives we can do nothing but skim through a day, barely connecting with people we live with.
- Current events—How can we pray when the Sudan is about to move back into civil war? When Iraq is still so war-torn? When justice gets so convoluted? When our congress can celebrate Ramadan, but can't send our certificates with the word 'God' on them? When people go on killing sprees.
- Our sin—We think we can do it on our own. We're so messed up we have *sins for friends*.
- We don't see answers—so many prayers...so few answers!
- We get bored—We stop praying because it takes too long.
- We get mad—We stop praying because we don't like the answers or lack of answers God gives us. Where's the justice?
- We get tired. (When Leigh and I were dating, I fell asleep on the phone with her. I don't recommend it for living deeply with anyone. My only excuse is I was on Chicago time and she was on Denver time!) ☺
- We forget prayer in the midst of prettier, shinier stuff that the world calls treasure. (Eve saw that the fruit was good for eating and pleasing to the eye).
- We think God stops first. (We don't realize God's still on the line! We don't even have to dial. We just turn our focus to Him. He's still on the line).
- We don't know what to say to God. We think we don't know what God really likes. We're too embarrassed to ask. (Like we should know by now!)
- We take prayer for granted—We think "We've always got God. We can always pray." But we never do.

Around here, we say "Christianity is not a religion. It's a relationship. So, if Christianity a relationship, not a religion, let's ask it this way: Why do we stop communicating with a friend or a spouse?

- Unsustainable schedules. We don't build time to connect.
- Current events. Because of our schedules, we can't even deal with them. So we run for entertainment rather than trying to make a difference. We decide to live well-insulated lives.
- Our sin—We try to medicate ourselves, rather than let God meet our needs through our spouses. We still think of ourselves as individuals, rather than as half a unit.
- We don't see answers—They're going through their own stuff. How could they possibly help us?
- We get bored—We stop praying because it takes too long.

- We get mad— We don't like the answer they give us. We don't really want our spouse to have an opinion. And if we do, we'll give it to him (or her!)
- We get tired. It's that schedule problem again.
- We forget our spouse in the midst of prettier, shinier stuff that the world calls treasure—and we fall for it. Did you ever think, you are the only legitimate source of romance in your spouse's life?
- We think our spouse stops first. We forget they are our best friend.
- We don't know what to say to our spouse, or we don't know what they really like; and we're too embarrassed to ask. (We should know by now!)
- We take our spouse for granted—We think "I've always got my friends. I can always talk to them." But we never do.

Jesus knew this. Jesus knew His followers stop. Living in prayer. Living out of that always-present relationship. Breathe in, breathe out. Jesus is our next breath. Breathe in God's Holy Spirit, breathe out our sin and distractions. Prayer is a treasure. So why do we stop? Jesus is going to teach us. Are you ready? He told us this parable:

2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. Can you picture him? All authoritarian. All bad. All tough. But smart. Plays his cards right. Realist. Gets what he wants.

3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' Can you picture her? Totally needy. Weak. But wiry and persistent! One of those annoying people who really cares about justice. Wants to not let sleeping dogs lie. Probably wears a babushka. Or a hair net. Probably has a piercing voice. Could drive you crazy. Also a realist.

4 "For some time the judge refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" It worked! Her pestering him.

6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 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? 8 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?"

At first this one is confusing to a lot of people. Jesus picks funny people to be the hero in his teaching stories. But you gotta admit they're colorful characters: an crooked, arrogant judge and a humble but persistent, possibly annoying woman. The judge ignores her at first, but finally grants her justice because she is so persistent. She won't give up and she won't go away. So eventually he gives in and comes through for her.

Is God like the judge? No. But we make Him out to be, don't we? But Jesus was pointing out that God is as different from the judge as day is from night. Jesus is contrasting them. He says "will not God?" It's one of His "How Much More" parables. Jesus was saying: If a selfish arrogant, unfeeling, unjust judge can help you if you ask, then *how much more* can God who loves you intensely help you when you ask.

Look at what this parable tells us:

- There will be injustice. The widow faced it. And so did all those who may have been stepped on by the judge for him to get where he got.
- Life will not be fair. It seemed the woman's adversary didn't relent.
- Our rights will be violated.
- We'll have adversaries.

But Jesus is saying "That's no reason to stop." He says "Don't stop praying."

- I think He also points out how often we've made God into an unjust judge, rather than the loving Father He is. God would never grow tired of her. She was little, but she didn't belittle herself.

- Why is prayer so hard? One of the main reasons may be because we may know our adversary so well. We may be in the skin of the one who violates our rights.
- What if the adversary is you?
- The one violating your rights is you?

Here's what I mean.

- Our failure to deal with injustice, especially injustice we're committing against ourselves, is the root cause of the injustice in the world as well. Your feelings that constantly tell you you're not good enough, should be better, and farther along, can be your greatest adversary.
- There are hurts in our lives that need healing. Hurts that need forgiving. We were born with an emptiness that God wants to fill. Only God can heal that way and forgive that way and help *us* forgive that way. But we try to find some other way to get fixed. And you become your own adversary when you DON'T ask God to do what only God can do. You violate your rights to the treasure God has for you. Instead, you will forever go around asking other people to do what they can't possibly do! Like your friends, or your spouse, or your job. You become like a tick on a dog, and you start using other people.
- Don't seek for justice from people who can never give it! Go first to God. Never stop praying. Why do we keep looking for justice from people who can't possibly give it? Because we forget that *God paid the price for justice to be done* when he sent His Son Jesus Christ to die. That we would NOT receive the justice *we* deserve, but would receive the justice He desires to give us.
- Jesus says "how much more will God bring about justice than this unjust judge?" We forgot who we're praying to. It's NOT our spouse. It's NOT our friend. It's NOT our children. (Turn to the person next to you and tell them "You're off the hook!") Here's the great tragedy Jesus thought: **How much torture do you endure when you project fallen human reactions and realities on God the Father in prayer?** We live in the prison house of guilt, despair, and resentment, and we stop praying because we believe some caricature of God, rather than understanding we're praying to the God who sees. The God who loves us. The God who heals. The God who merits out justice.
- We stop praying because it takes too long. Justice is worth the time it takes. Nelson Mandela, coming off of Robben Island prison for 27 years said "Ending Apartheid is a cause for which I will gladly invest every day of my life, and for which I would gladly die."
- We don't know what to say to God. We think we don't know what God really likes. We're too embarrassed to ask. "*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.*" Romans 8:26
- The only answer to your deepest anger against the injustices of life is forgiveness. Often times this means your parents and family members. Jesus says even the unjust, uncaring judge understood and acted. **HOW MUCH MORE** will the living God act, who experienced every injustice there ever was on the cross?

The world is *made* for forgiveness, and for justice. It is made for grace. It is made for love, in all of life. The need for these things has been built into our human natures and personalities. It is in every cell of our bodies. **This week**, every day, seek God. Keep an ongoing dialogue with Him. Allow God to be the healer of *every* situation. Let Him use you at work or at school. Keep seeking Him. Keep praying for justice. Keep working for it. Give up your old caricature of God. Don't pray for more *stuff* God can give you, pray for more of *God*. Grace, love, faith, healing, and hope, are not commodities, they are our Lord Himself.

Imagine if we were *all* like the widow who sought God. She didn't mess around with other people who couldn't meet her deepest need for justice. Imagine if we each knew God was the One who could meet our deepest need. Picture letting the people around us off the hook. Imagine if each of us made prayer our invitation to become a partner with God—a prayer partner with God, a life partner with Jesus. Imagine our world when Christians truly live deeply in prayer.