

Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost – October 20, 2019
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

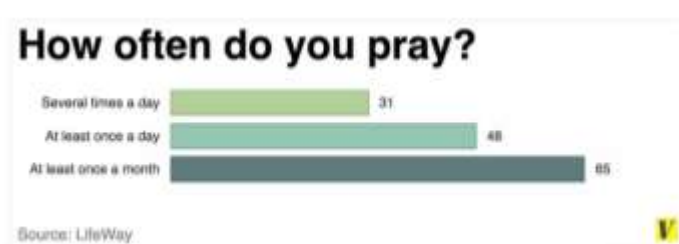
Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 18:1-8 (NIV)

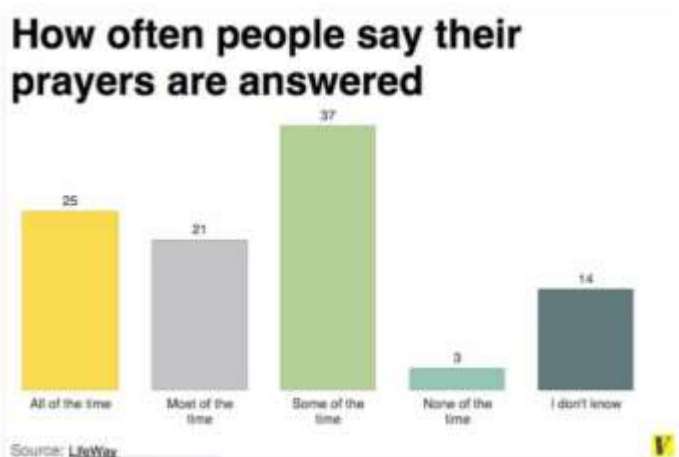
Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 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!'" 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? 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?"

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, dear friends,

Religious polls consistently show that Americans are a “people who pray.” Here’s one example from 2014.¹



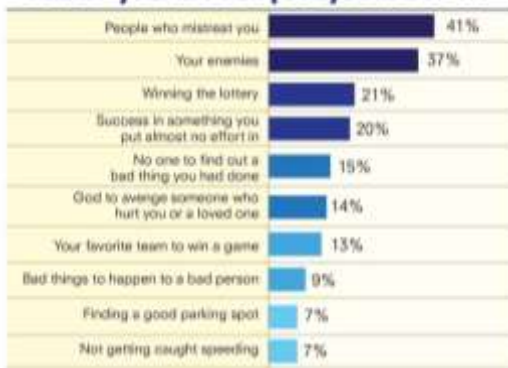
The data from that poll also indicated many Americans believe God answers their prayers. Among praying adults, 1 in 4 say God answers all their prayers, and 37 percent say God answers some of them. Only 3 percent of those who pray think God answers none of them.



So what do people pray for?

¹

Have you ever prayed for ...



Obviously this way of looking at whether or not prayer works isn't a Biblical approach to the subject of prayer. It presumes that if someone receives what they ask for, then prayer works. But if not, then prayer doesn't work. Those who take the Bible at face value, and believe the words and promises of God recorded in it, don't need a poll to figure out if prayer does any good.

Sadly even though Jesus taught at length on the subject of prayer, it's obvious that many people base their opinions about prayer on whether or not a person receives what they ask for. Many people also have doubts about the effectiveness of prayer based on their experience that sometimes their prayers seem to go unanswered. And so they look for some reason to continue to believe that God answers prayer. Sadly there are some who just plain give up on prayer.

Rather than turning to popular opinion to support our belief that God answers prayer let's turn to God's own teaching regarding prayer. Today our Lord reminds us that prayer and faith are closely linked and He encourages us to keep on praying and not to give up so ...

LET US PRAY

1. To a loving God
2. With Persistence and Faith

Immediately before Jesus told the parable in our text he had been asked a question regarding the coming of the Kingdom of God by the Pharisees. In response Jesus had warned that the times before his return would be evil times – like the times of the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah. As evil increases it may seem as if God no longer cares about his people and that the prayers of his people are accomplishing nothing. But in spite of how things appear Jesus will return. The increase in evil and his promised return serve as an encouragement for us to always pray and never give up.

Jesus' parable spoke about an unjust judge. It appears that he was the only one responsible for administering justice in his community. This judge apparently was immoral. He didn't care about right and wrong (which is the primary purpose of a judge). He didn't fear God, who made it clear that He won't tolerate injustice or prejudice. Nor did he care about people. It seems he only cared about himself.

Now the fact that God is also a Judge does not mean that we should compare God with this cruel hearted unjust judge. As Jesus will explain later God deals with his people in just exactly the opposite way. The focus and point of comparison in this parable is on the actions of the widow not the actions on the judge.

A widow came before this judge. She felt that she had a good case that deserved to be heard. But the unjust judge either ignored her or refused to hear her out. But she wouldn't give up. The judge was her only chance at receiving justice in regard to her adversary and enemy. So she kept coming to him with her plea until he finally gave in and heard the case. Persistence was her only weapon against this cold-hearted judge who had no concern for her plight.

Anyone who has ever dealt with children can understand how this works. How many times have you given in to your children because they wouldn't take "no" for an answer? How many times has the whining and begging gotten to you, until, for the sake of a little peace around the house, you finally gave in?

Jesus shares the key to understanding this parable when he tells us to listen to what the unjust says. Why did the unjust judge give the widow her day in court? It wasn't because he cared about God or men but only because he didn't want to be worn out by her persistence. *Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 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!"*

I suppose that there may be people that have an opinion that if there is a God in the heavens, He must be like an unjust judge. He must not care about people and He must not be interested in what is right. They conclude this because they have come to Him for help at some point, and been disappointed with Him. Either He didn't answer their pleas at all, or they didn't see why they had to keep coming to an all-knowing and all-loving God in the first place.

Jesus teaches us that God's delayed answer to prayer is not an indication that prayer is worthless. Those delays are an encouragement to be persistent. Now the point of Jesus is not that we should all turn into a bunch of whiners before God. But it is true that all too often we give up on prayer too easily. If the helpless widow, by her sheer persistence and conviction could cause this judge, the very epitome of injustice, to plead her cause and vindicate her, how much more will not our holy and just and loving God hear the prayers of His people?

Jesus asks, *"And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?"* Jesus' application of his parable points out a contrast between God and the judge. God has a loving interest in us. He has called and chosen us to be his own. That is why we call him Father. There is also a difference between God's children and the widow. The widow came to the judge as occasion allows. God's children can cry out continually to him night and day – they have constant access to his throne of grace. His love invites and encourages our prayers.

The school nurse had just completed her health talk about the flu. There were still a few minutes for a brief review. "Tell me, Sam," she said to one bright little 6-year old, "What is the first thing we do when we get the flu?" Without hesitation Sam responded, "We pray to Jesus."

That wasn't exactly the answer the nurse expected, and for a minute she was at a loss for words. But one thing she knew for sure -- Sam was from a Christian home. Looking into the eyes of that boy with such an honest faith, the nurse simply said, "Yes, Sam, we pray to Jesus." She could have added that we

2. PRAY WITH PERSISTENCE AND FAITH

Unbelievers misunderstand the patience of God in delaying his justice. They think that He is mean or unconcerned or else powerless when He doesn't seem to hear or answer our prayers. But that is simply not true. The sacrifice of Christ proves that God cares about us. His word reminds us that He can do anything we ask, when it says, **"God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine"** (Ephesians 3:20).

In Jesus' application to his parable he suggests that God in his wise dealings with his children will at times put them off – delaying his answer. It is for this reason that we will pray with persistence and faith in his promises.

God's faithful people of long ago learned to appreciate the "little whiles" of God. They understood the importance of waiting patiently and persistently seeking the answer to their prayers. The psalmist David wrote, **"I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry"** (Psalm 40:1).

Isaiah also reminded the people that they would spend seventy years in exile for their sins, and that they would pray for seventy long years before the Lord would grant them their requested return to the homeland. **"In that day they will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.'"** (Isaiah 25:9).

What caused the widow to persist in coming to the judge? It was her conviction that justice was on her side. What causes a Christian to keep on praying, even when it seems that no one is listening? The conviction, borne of faith in Christ, that God is on his or her side and that this has been the case from all eternity.

There are times when we feel like giving up, when we are ready to say; "What's the use?" But remember the widow! Be persistent, and keep on praying. God will hear and he will answer.

Jesus reminds us that we are God's "chosen ones." He chose us as His own dear people. He sent His dear Son to keep the commandments we had broken and then to die in payment for the wrongs we commit. He chose us, set His love on us. He wants us to belong to Him for time and eternity. In faith we continue to cling to those promises as we continue to pray persistently.

Jesus assures us: **I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.**

God's answers to prayers cannot be measured on a chart that says the date and time on which we got what we wanted, any more than a parent's love can be measured by the gifts received. Love sometimes says "no." Love sometimes says, "I have something better in mind." Love sometimes says, "Now is not the best time."

When God delays his answers it is always for our good. Sometimes the delay gives us the opportunity to evaluate our requests and set aside our selfishness and greed. Perhaps his delay causes our longing and desire to become more intense. A quick and easy answer will not strengthen our faith. Our children appreciate the gifts we give them more when they have to wait for them. God's children will also treasure his gifts more if they have to wait for them. No matter how long it seems we must wait God's response to our prayers is a quick one. It comes at the time that is right and best for us.

We have a God who will never leave or forsake us. His mercies are new every morning. He is full of compassion. And since we don't understand anything about eternal timing or what is for our best, we submit to the will of the God who loves us, and we trust in Him.

And we also keep on praying. We keep on praying because He invites us, commands us, promises us, and answers us. Prayer is an expression of our faith and trust in God. It is not a vending machine for God's blessings.

And when we pray, we conclude by saying Amen. This word doesn't mean, "That's it for now;" rather it expresses the confidence it shall be so!

With this parable Jesus teaches us to pray to a loving God with persistence and faith so let us pray with persistence and faith. Amen.