

## **“Pull into the Rest Stop”**

Luke 18:1-8

*Series: Too Busy Not to Prayer Week 1. The Purpose of All Prayer*

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Busy. Everyone’s busy. Ask someone, “How’s it going?” the answer is usually, “Busy.” And when it comes to finding time to pray we are definitely too busy. Here are the top 5 reasons you are too busy to pray today:

1. You wake up feeling rested, then realize the alarm didn’t go off and you missed your flight.
2. Your teenager shaved...the left half of her head.
3. You’re waiting for a crucial call, and your toddler hid your cell phone.
4. You accidentally deleted your quarterly report ten minutes before a meeting with your boss.
5. Your toilet's overflowing, but at least you found your cell phone.

What are the top five reasons you really should pray today? See the list above.

We are just too busy. Everyone, from children to teens to adults are overscheduled. While snapping class pictures at an elementary school, a photographer asked a first grade girl, "What are you going to be when you grow up?" She said, "Tired."<sup>1</sup> Even retired people tell me they are busier than when they worked. I guess that’s why it’s called re-tired.

Just as rest stops are essential for all car trips God designed the road trip of your life to have rest stops. There is a weekly one called worship and a daily one called prayer. The Bible even has a special word for this rest stop: Sabbath. The Hebrew word – Shabbat – means “rest” and “cessation.” In other words: rest stop. Rest is the first lesson He taught us after He made us. He even showed us how to do it.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Genesis 2:2-3)

When He gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He said it again.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall

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<sup>1</sup> J. R. Love, Rushton, Louisiana

not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

Rest is God's gift to us. Just as your car needs frequent stops for maintenance and refueling, God designed us to periodically pull into the rest stop. Yet over the history of humanity we misused this gift.

1. We turn rest into a rule. The Pharisees did this. They dreamed up countless rules about what you could or could not do on the Sabbath. When Jesus came they criticized Him for breaking the Sabbath. Now think about that: Here is God, who invented the Sabbath, being told, "You're doing it wrong." That's like the clerk at Best Buy telling Bill Gates he doesn't know how to work Windows 10. Jesus said,

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27-28)

God intended the Sabbath to be a gift not a cause for guilt. It's supposed to be a blessing not a burden. It is intended to give us refreshment not restrictions.

2. We turn rest into work. How many of you return from a week or two away and say, "I need a vacation to recover from my vacation"? We are driven people and it is getting worse. Why? Through the miracle of cell phones and tablets, there is no escape. That must be the reason why a 5 year old who was praying the Lord's Prayer said, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from e-mail."

3. We turn from rest to rush. We tell God, "No thank you. I don't have time." We are too busy to stop, to worship, to pray. We need to make lunches, make beds, make deals. We need to commute, cook dinner, cross things off our lists. When each day's sprint is done, we cross the finish line, flop into bed and start the race all over again.

God says, "STOP!" I did not design you to work that way. You will either burn up or burn out if you do not regularly pull over and take the ramp for the rest stop. Between weekly times for worship, the Lord wants you to take a daily rest stop and pray.

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 what people thought. 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 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!'" (Luke 18:1-5)

Why does Jesus tell this story? He knows his disciples will face persecution in the future. In those times it will seem to them the world is winning while God is napping. He predicts there will come moments when they will be hauled before judges and unjustly

condemned. They will sit in dark prison cells and cry out “How long O Lord?” Who can blame them if, in those dead ends of utter despair, they give up and stop praying.

But that’s not our story. So why are we too busy to pray? Why do we pray only a few minutes in the morning, a quick blessing over a meal, a few sleepy words before we put out the light? Here are few explanations I’ve heard:

1. Prayer is not worth it. You prayed for something – your spouse to change, your child to stop rebelling, your friend or loved one to be healed, your financial burden to lighten and it just hasn’t happened. You spend so much time on your knees you’ve worn holes in your jeans. Yet nothing changes. Why not invest your time in something that does work?

2. You’re not worth it. You feel afraid to approach God because you’ve made so many promises to Him and broken each one. You’ve heard all the stuff about God’s grace, unconditional love and forgiveness. Yet you have this sinking feeling you just wore out your welcome. A friend sent me this email.

You, [recipient name], are hereby notified that under the forgiveness recommendations set forth in the Holy Scriptures - namely that we are to forgive one another 7x70 (equivalent to 490 times) - you are now at 478 and have only 12 free passes remaining.

3. God is not worth it. You would probably never say that. Yet the way we spend our time reveals our priorities. You know God will be there so you’ll spend time with Him when you get around to it. The clock is ticking. The pressure’s on. There is work to be done. “I’ll make time for the Lord later.” But there are always more demands waiting to eat up your time. You might also be angry at God for not answering your prayers in the past. Perhaps you feel like the widow in Jesus’ parable.

In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 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. (Luke 18:2-4)

This judge’s heart is so hard nothing can penetrate it. Think of Simon Cowell. He does not care about God or people. He has no compassion for this poor widow. He may even be taking bribes from the adversary who is cheating her out of her inheritance.

The widow has one weapon to get her way: persistence. She visits his courtroom every day. She wakes him up in the middle of the night. She leaves messages on his voicemail. She fills his inbox with emails. She posts on his Facebook page. She tweets.

...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!’” (Luke 18:5)

The literal meaning of that last phrase describes a boxer who hits an opponent in the eye. This widow is pummeling him with her persistence. She wears him down until he says, "Enough. I'll give you what you want."

Is that what it takes to get through to God? Does prayer require us to badger God until He gives in, gives up and gives us what we want? If prayer is just bothering God, why bother? But that's not what Jesus is saying.

**Prayer is more about a Relationship than Requests.** Jesus gives this application to His parable:

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? Luke 18:6-7

The judge in this story is not a symbol of God. He is a negative example. Rabbis in Jesus' day often used a teaching technique called "from the light to the heavy." If something happens in one situation (light), how much more will it happen in another (heavy). If this corrupt, cruel judge will satisfy the plea of this persistent widow, how much more will our loving Father hear and answer the cries of his beloved children.

One of the radical teachings of Jesus was His encouragement for us to begin our prayers by calling Almighty God "Our Father." We measure the value of prayer by how often our requests are fulfilled. We view it like a vending machine. Prayer, for Jesus, is primarily a way to deepen our relationship with our loving Parent. That, alone, is the best reason to pray. All week long I looked forward to seeing my children and grandchildren on Saturday. Since they no longer live with me I treasure every moment I get to be with them. You do not have to convince me that I really should spend time with them. Nor do I measure the value of our time together by how well they fulfill my requests. It is a joy just to be with them. The time together deepens our relationship and strengthens the bonds that tie us together.

"That's fine," you say, "But what if I feel unworthy to be with the Lord? What if He's angry with me?" Jesus reassures us. There is a phrase in this passage that is difficult to translate.

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?* (Luke 18:7)

New Testament scholar Ken Bailey says it is better to translate this last part as a statement: "And he will put his anger far away." In other words, you can always approach the Lord in prayer because He has already forgiven your sins. Any righteous anger or judgment against what you've done has been put so far away it's forgotten. Come to your Father without fear. He longs to spend time with you.

I want you to think of the one person you long to see, with whom you love to be. For whom would you rearrange your schedule and lay aside your to-do list? If you feel that way about someone here on earth, imagine how much more wonderful it will be to spend time in prayer with your Father who forgives you and loves you unconditionally.

**Prayer is more about Alignment than Answers.** Often, we treat prayer like it is a magic 8 ball, a Google search, or that eerie SIRI woman who talks on your Iphone. The main purpose of prayer, we think, is to get answers. It's true. Jesus did say God responds to our prayers.

And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. (Luke 18:7-8)

God is always working in the world. Yet for Jesus, the goal of prayer is not to get God to do things our way, but for us to align ourselves with God's will. At the beginning of His ministry, when Satan tempted Jesus to make the world go His way,

Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Matthew 4:10)

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prays,

your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

And at the end of His ministry, on the night of His arrest, Jesus prayed,

"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39)

The most important prayer is "Not my will, but Thine be done." Prayer is not getting God to do what I want but aligning myself with what God is doing. Every morning I read Oswald Chambers' devotional book "My Utmost for His Highest." In one reading titled "What's the Good of Prayer" he wrote,

Our ordinary views of prayer are not found in the New Testament. We look upon prayer as a means of getting things for ourselves; the Bible's idea of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself. It is not so true that "prayer changes things" as that prayer changes *me* and I change things. Prayer is not a question of altering things externally, but of working wonders in a man's disposition.

Let God realign you with His will through prayer.

Above all, **Prayer is about Rest if we give up the Reins.** Jesus said,

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and

you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.  
(Matthew 11:28-30)

If you turn over the reins of your life to the Lord, if you let Him reign in your life, you will find rest. Prayer is your opportunity to put the reins in God's hands. Prayer is the way we weary and burdened people find the rest God longs to give us. What will it take to get you to slow down and pull into God's rest stop?

On Ash Wednesday I asked everyone to commit to spending some time alone with God in prayer every day until Easter. I hoped 200 people would commit. So far, 202 have signed up. I prayed over every slip. I prayed for each name and asked God to bless you and help you to receive God's rest in prayer. I challenged you to spend twenty minutes alone with God and to not do this in the car, on the train, or while you are running. The point is to slow down, stop multi-tasking, and give God your full attention. Immediately after the service several people came up to me and said, "Why can't I pray while I'm commuting? I want to pray while I'm doing my run or jogging on the treadmill." Pause a minute and think about that word: treadmill. The point of this is to get off the treadmill, stop running, and focus on God. You can pray during those times. In fact, the way some people drive I think you should be praying...just don't close your eyes. Give God focused, quantity and quality time. That is the way relationships grow.

As I prayed over the slips I was filled with joy to see children, teens and adults, husbands and wives and whole families commit to pray. On one slip a person wrote, "I'll pray...but not for 20 minutes." That's fine. You decide. On another slip a 9 year old said, "I promise for even an hour anything for the Lord." If you made a commitment to pray daily until Easter, I am praying for you and with you. We will be sending you encouragement and through these messages we will be giving you ideas on how to pray. If you did not yet make a commitment, please join us today. You and I are too busy not to pray. What is it going to take for you to pull into God's rest stop and pray?

For Mary it took a death sentence. For 11 years, Mary Leonard of Louisville, Kentucky, has dealt with polymyositis, a rare inflammatory tissue disease that invades the muscles. There is no known cause or cure. As serious as it was, the disease suddenly turned deadly when it invaded her heart muscle. In March of 2010, Mary was told by doctors she had 24-48 hours to live. She prepared for the end by going to hospice. But after 20 days in a hospice center the end did not come. She transferred to a rehab center. But after 51 days in rehab the end did not come. She went back home and still the end did not come. By some miracle, Mary survived. Yet the experience of being told you have only hours to live changed her perspective on living. She says,

I call myself an average Christian. I don't know exactly why God has done this for me, but I do know that life looks different now. Here are five life lessons I've learned through this ordeal:

1. Mend fences now.
2. Release the reins of life to God.
3. Know that God is able—more than able.

4. Put your focus on what really matters.
5. Know that prayer is powerful.<sup>2</sup>

It took a death sentence to show Mary Leonard how to live.

What will it take to get you to pull into God's Rest Stop?

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<sup>2</sup> Ruth Schenk, "What Changes When You Only Have 24 Hours to Live?" Southeast Outlook (7-1-10).