



THE LOOKOUT

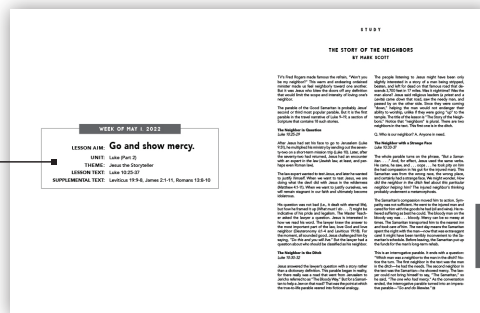
MAY 2022

Unit: LUKE (Part 2) Theme: Jesus the Storyteller

Overview: Bible scholar Kenneth Bailey described Jesus as a metaphoric theologian. Beyond that, Jesus was a storyteller without equal. In this second month of lessons from Luke, we focus on Jesus' parables from the travel narrative section of the Gospel (chapters 9–19). Jesus' stories begin in reality but move to fictional analogy as they subvert our ideas of neighbors, riches, God, and prayer.

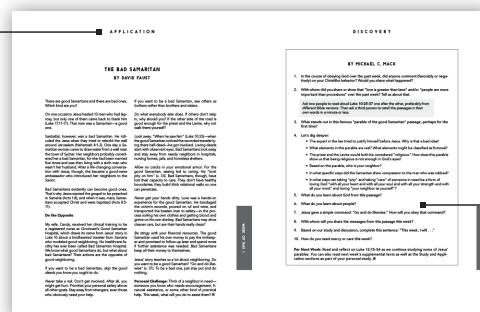
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MAY 29, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Come humbly and yet
boldly to the Father in
prayer to receive the good
things he wants to give you.**

UNIT: Luke (Part 2)

THEME: Jesus the Storyteller

LESSON TEXT: Luke 18:1-14

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Luke 11:1-14

TWO STORIES ABOUT PRAYER

BY MARK SCOTT

All of the parables of Jesus had a context, of course. But not all of them had strong opening and closing lines. Jesus sometimes left his parables open-ended (Luke 15:11-32). But both stories in this lesson text had clear opening and closing lines. That makes their interpretation easier. But that does not mean the applications will be less hard-hitting.

As the travel narrative (Luke 9-19) in the Gospel drew to a close, Jesus was nearing Jerusalem. People wondered if the kingdom of God would appear soon (Luke 17:20-21). Jesus answered that the ultimate kingdom will not come when people are expecting it. It will be similar to the days of Noah when the flood caught people off guard. The chapter division could be confusing. The subject matter of the parables was prayer, but the context concerned the faith and humility necessary for always being ready for the return of the king.

Prayers of Persistence

Luke 18:1-8

The opening line of the parable of the persistent widow and unjust judge is clear enough (v. 1). Not persisting in prayer indicates that one is not ready for the king to return at any moment. The judge in the parable had three strikes against him. He did not fear God, he did not care about people, and he thought of people as an interruption. In short, he was not a good guy. The widow ("silent one" in the Old Testament) would not take no for an answer. She persisted in her pleas to the point of making a pest of herself.

Her persistence paid off. The judge was less than noble, but he finally took care of her need. The widow was *bothering* him to no end, and it seemed he was even afraid of her (she might *come and attack me*). So, he granted her *justice*. An Old Testament story might provide the backdrop here. Elisha encountered a widow who needed similar justice against an adversary (2 Kings 4:1-7). Elisha performed a miracle so that the widow could pay her debt. Jesus might have had something similar in mind.

The widow represented God's people (*chosen ones*). The judge represented God—not in character but in decisiveness. Jesus' statement, "*Listen to what the unjust judge says,*" drew attention to the difference between God and the judge in the story. Unlike the judge in the story, God

will not put his people off. He will act quickly to get them justice. However, he wants his chosen ones to pray with persistence. The parable ended with an interrogative closing line, "*When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*" What kind of faith? The kind that persists in prayer.

Prayers of Humility

Luke 18:9-14

The second parable also contained opening and closing lines. Jesus discerned that people in his audience were *confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else*. In the words of Mark Twain, "They were so proud they could strut while they were sitting down." The closing line concerned humility, and this was all in the context of praying properly before Jesus' return.

Jesus' parables were almost entirely secular. That is why they could sneak up on people. They normally dealt with fishing, farming, cooking, etc., so they did not sound as if they would threaten anyone's sovereignty. Then, *Bam!* The person would suddenly realize the spiritual point. But this parable is different. It is the only parable of Jesus that had a "church context." Its setting is the temple and therefore it is sacred—not secular.

Two men went up to the temple to pray. They could not be more different (about as different as a widow and a judge). One hated Rome (Pharisee), and one sold out to Rome (tax collector). The Pharisee distinguished himself as a "separatist" and distanced himself from *robbers, evildoers, adulterers*, and certainly the *tax collector*. He reminded God and boasted about his spiritual discipline of fasting and his tithing.

In contrast, the tax collector *stood at a distance* (cf. Luke 15:20; 16:23) and not in the prominent places where people could see him (Matthew 6:5). His contrition caused him to not even *look up to heaven*. He also *beat his breast* as a sign of repentance. He cried out for God's *mercy*.

The closing line had to shock the people of Jesus' day. A justified tax collector—could there be such a thing? Heaven puts a high value on humility and reverses earth's view of who gets exalted. The return of Jesus makes our prayers burn white hot with persistence, but they also must be voiced in a humble posture. **L**

ON THE RECEIVING END OF PRAYER

BY DAVID FAUST

Have you seen the movie *Bruce Almighty* starring Jim Carrey, Jennifer Aniston, and Morgan Freeman? The film received mixed reviews upon its release in 2003, but it was popular at the box office. Carrey plays Bruce Nolan, a TV news reporter in Buffalo, New York, who complains about God's actions and then gets a chance to try doing God's job himself. Bruce hears thousands of prayers, but even after setting up an e-mail system to handle the influx, he can't keep up with all the requests. Exasperated, he answers every prayer with an automatic "Yes"—and chaos results.

Despite its flaws, the movie raises interesting questions. What is it like to be on the receiving end of prayer? How does the Lord keep track of it all? How does he deal with requests that contradict one another? What if 10 different workers pray to get one job? What if three different men want to marry the same woman? How does God sort out millions of prayers, respond wisely to each request, and weave it all together for good?

Brilliant and Incomprehensible—Yet Accessible

God's thoughts are infinitely higher than ours, but he has revealed his will in Scripture and made himself accessible through Jesus Christ, who insisted that prayer is more than repeating religious words. Prayer is relational, not transactional. It's not like programming a computer or putting money in a vending machine to get what you want. Talking with the heavenly Father is about building a relationship, not just getting a certain result.

My 1-year-old grandson is learning to talk. I don't criticize him for mispronouncing words. I am delighted he wants to communicate with me. I wonder if the heavenly Father feels that way about my feeble attempts to pray.

A friend showed me a handwritten letter she received from her son, who is in prison. In the letter, he expresses love for his parents and apologizes for the pain he has caused them. My friend treasures that letter. I wonder if that's how the Father feels when

we approach him like the repentant tax collector who prayed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

A football coach doesn't mind if his players consult with him during timeouts; he wants to help them win. A teacher doesn't mind when students raise their hands to seek clarification about the lesson; she wants to help them learn. A doctor wants his patients to explain their symptoms so he can outline a plan for healing. A tour guide doesn't mind when travelers come to her with questions.

We should approach the Almighty with humility and reverence, as servants deferring to our Master—deserving nothing, demanding nothing. But because of God's grace, prayer is also like talking with a trusted friend over coffee. It's like confiding in an empathetic counselor who listens well and offers a fresh perspective. It's like sitting across the desk from a wise lawyer or judge who can help us untangle perplexing problems and find solutions. It's like phoning Dad and Mom to stay connected and seek their advice.

I can't comprehend the brilliant mind of God, fathom the depth of his love, or explain exactly how prayer works. But I know God treasures our communication with him, because heaven contains "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people" (Revelation 5:8). I know that the Lord is for us, not against us. I know that Christ is the "one mediator between God and mankind" (1 Timothy 2:5). And because of Christ, I know that God is our Father, teacher, counselor, friend, and guide. So, even when I struggle to articulate my thoughts—even when I feel unworthy and inadequate—I am determined to keep praying.

Personal Challenge: In a private place, read Jesus' two stories about prayer recorded in Luke 18:1-14. Notice: Jesus told these stories to remind his disciples that we "should always pray and not give up" (v. 1). After reading these stories, pray out loud to the Lord. Talk with him as you would to a loving parent, a wise judge, a trusted friend. Tell him what is on your mind. Then be quiet in his presence. What is the Lord saying to you through his Word? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How have you seen someone close to you being drawn back into a relationship with God and/or with you? (How can we continue to pray?)
2. With whom over the past week did you share God's desire for a renewed relationship?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 18:1-14** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to spend a total of about one minute summarizing these parables.

3. What general principles about prayer do you learn from these two parables?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - Why did Jesus tell each of these two parables? Who was his intended audience for each?
 - What do you learn from this passage about praying for justice?
 - What example can you give for how you recently prayed persistently for justice?
 - How would you answer the question at the conclusion of the first parable, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Why or why not?
 - What differences do you see between the tax collector's prayer and the Pharisee's prayer.
 - Most of us would say we identify with the tax collector rather than the Pharisee in the second parable. But perhaps if we would humble ourselves and honestly assess our attitudes, we may identify some commonalities with the Pharisee. If so, what attitudes do you see in yourself?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people, especially in how we approach God in prayer?
7. In what ways is humble-hearted and persistent prayer a vital part of living in obedience to God as we follow him?
8. What part does humble-hearted and persistent prayer play in sharing your faith?
 - Who will you be praying for this week, that God may draw them to himself?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. The apostle Paul wrote, "Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should" (Ephesians 6:19-20). How can we pray for you as you declare the gospel this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jonah 1:1-17** as we begin a monthlong study of the Early Minor Prophets (Obadiah, Joel, Jonah). You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■