RIVER *Flow*

Seven Days of Devotional Practice
November 8 – 14, 2026

Vindicate Me

Luke 18:1–8

A Note Before You Sit

This week stays with a widow who kept coming to a judge who would not hear her. The question the week keeps asking: what would it mean to bring a wrong done to you before God, name it as a wrong, and keep bringing it?

Go slowly. If the week stirs something heavy, please reach out to me or to someone you trust, or call or text 988.

Ways to use this guide, from the most shared to the most personal:

1. As a group: watch this Sabbath's sermon together (website and YouTube), then walk the week and discuss the questions at the back. No one need share more than they choose.

2. As a group that meets once a week: each person walks the days alone, and you gather one day, in person or on Zoom, to pray that day together.

3. One-on-one: read it with someone you are discipling, taking a day, or the closing questions, as your conversation.

4. On your own, or with your family, a day at a time.

— Pastor Mel Baga, D.Min.
Lead Pastor, Auburn SDA Church

Daily Devotional Guide

SUNDAY, November 8 — She Kept Coming

"She kept coming to him" — Luke 18:3

Read: Luke 18:1–3

Then he told them a parable about their need to pray always and not get worn down. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and had no regard for people. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him. She kept saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' "

Reflect: Luke tells us almost nothing about the widow except that she kept coming.

Luke's verb means she came, and came again. Her words are the language of a courtroom: vindicate me against my adversary, an opponent at law. Someone had wronged her. In Israel's law the widow was the clearest case of a person with no one to speak for her, and God named himself her advocate: if she cries out to me, I will surely hear her cry.

Judith Herman, a Harvard psychiatrist who has listened to survivors of violence for more than forty years, asked them what justice would mean to them. Most did not ask first for punishment. They wanted the truth acknowledged by someone with standing to say it was wrong, and a community that stood with them rather than with the one who did it. That is what *vindicate me* asks. The widow does not ask the judge to feel her pain. She asks him to rule.

Scripture referenced: Exodus 22:22–23 — You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry.

Notice: Notice whether there is a wrong done to you that you have never called a wrong. You do not need to do anything with it today.

Pray: Lord, you made the widow's cause your own before she ever stood in that court. I bring you my own cause, as much of it as I can name today. Amen.

Stay: Find a quiet place and sit before God for twenty minutes, as you are able. Settle into a comfortable posture, kneeling or seated, and begin your silent, wordless prayer. When a thought, feeling, or sensation arises, notice it, let it go, and return to the here and now. A short word chosen beforehand (*God*, *love*, *here*, *return*) or the breath at the tip of your nose can bring you back; once you have returned, let it go too. You are not emptying your mind, only resting it. In that stillness the Spirit does the transforming work he longs to do in you.

MONDAY, November 9 — The Judges Are Judged

"Give justice to the weak and the orphan" — Psalm 82:3

Read: Psalm 82

God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." They have neither knowledge nor understanding; they walk around in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I say, "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals and fall like any prince." Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations belong to you!

Reflect: Psalm 82 opens in a courtroom, but the judges are the ones on trial.

God takes his place in the council and asks the powers that rule the earth how long they will judge unjustly. They were given authority to do justice for the weak, and they used it to favor the wicked. Isaiah brings the same charge against Jerusalem: the widow's cause never came before them. Scripture names the failure of those who should have heard, and places it under God's judgment.

God in this psalm is not neutral. Elie Wiesel, who survived Auschwitz and spent his life bearing witness, insisted that we must take sides, because silence encourages the tormentor and never the tormented. Psalm 82 said it

first. God sides with the weak against the court that would not hear them. A refusal to hear your case was never God's refusal.

Scripture referenced: Isaiah 1:23 — Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not defend the orphan, and the widow's cause does not come before them.

Notice: Notice who had the standing to hear what happened to you and did not. Hold it before God without having to settle what it means.

Pray: God of the council, you hear what lesser judges would not. Where I was not heard, hear me now. Rise up, and judge the earth. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday.

TUESDAY, November 10 — A Verdict Without Remorse

"Even though I do not fear God and have no regard for people" — Luke 18:4

Read: Luke 18:4–5

For a while he refused. But afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God and have no regard for people, because this widow keeps bothering me, I will vindicate her, so that she does not finally come and give me a black eye.'

Reflect: The judge never changes.

When he talks to himself, he repeats the narrator's words about him: no fear of God, no regard for people. Having no regard for people means he feels no shame before anyone. He rules for her without ever seeing the wrong. Luke gives us a verdict without a conversion.

Shakespeare gives us the opposite case. In *Hamlet*, King Claudius kneels to pray over the brother he murdered and cannot repent, because he will not give up the crown and the queen he gained. He wonders whether a man can be pardoned and keep what he took. Remorse that keeps the profit repairs nothing. The parable does not make the widow wait on anyone's conscience.

What was done to her was true whether or not the judge ever felt it, and the truth of what happened to you does not wait on anyone else's change of heart.

Notice: Notice whether some part of you is still waiting for someone to admit what they did before you allow it to be true.

Pray: Lord, I have waited for others to see what happened. Let it be true before you, whether or not they ever see it. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday.

WEDNESDAY, November 11 — First the Truth

"If a brother or sister sins, you must rebuke the offender" — Luke 17:3

Read: Luke 17:3–4

Be on your guard! If a brother or sister sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day and turns back to you seven times and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive.

Reflect: A page before the widow, Luke records what Jesus taught about forgiveness.

The order is plain. If someone sins, rebuke them, which is to say, name the wrong. If there is repentance, forgive. Forgiveness in Luke begins with the wrong being said. In *Hamlet*, the court presses the prince to put away his mourning because loss is common, and he answers that he has "that within which passes show." The wronged are often asked to look finished before they are. It is never the price of belonging, and it never requires silence. Facing the one who did the harm is not always safe, and Jesus does not ask anyone to walk into danger.

Deborah Hunsinger, who taught pastoral care for decades at Princeton Theological Seminary, writes that forgiveness is not finally subject to our will; when it comes, it comes as a gift of God. She recalls a young woman who testified before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission about

her father's murder. Her family wanted to forgive, she said, but they did not know whom to forgive. Forgiveness needs the truth first.

Notice: Notice whether you have ever been asked to forgive in a way that meant pretending, and how your body responds as you remember it.

Pray: Lord Jesus, you did not ask me to pretend. Give me the truth first, and forgiveness in your time, not in anyone else's. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday.

THURSDAY, November 12 — You Have Taken Up My Cause

"You have seen the wrong done to me, O LORD; judge my cause" — Lamentations 3:59

Read: Lamentations 3:55–59

I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit; you heard my plea, "Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief!" You came near when I called on you; you said, "Do not fear!" You have taken up my cause, O Lord; you have redeemed my life. You have seen the wrong done to me, O LORD; judge my cause.

Reflect: The poet of Lamentations prays from the bottom of a pit.

Even there the prayer has an address. He calls on God's name and remembers that God came near and said, Do not fear. Then he speaks the language of the courtroom. The Hebrew behind "you have taken up my cause" is the word for a lawsuit: you have argued my case. God is not only the judge in this prayer. He has become the poet's advocate.

Hunsinger turns to this same prayer when she describes how the church helps the afflicted: by helping them cry out their sorrow, rage, and tears to God. She also recalls the thirteenth-century mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg, who told God her burden was too heavy. In Mechthild's prayer God answers that he will take the burden first and hold it close to himself, so that she can bear it more easily. That is what the poet means: you have taken up my cause.

Notice: Notice what it is like to say one sentence to God that begins, You have seen.

Pray: Lord, you have seen the wrong done to me. Take up my cause. Judge it, and do not let me carry it alone. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday.

FRIDAY, November 13 — Day and Night

"His chosen ones who cry out to him day and night" — Luke 18:7

Read: Luke 18:6–7

And the Lord said, "Listen to what the judge of injustice says. And will God not bring about vindication for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?

Reflect: Jesus promises vindication and, in the same breath, admits the wait.

Luke's word for their crying out means to shout. The last question in verse 7 is hard to translate: will he keep putting them off, or, is he patient with them? From inside a long wait, God's patience can feel like God's delay, and Jesus lets that stand before he answers it. Anna, a widow for decades, worshiped night and day. The souls under the altar cry, How long, using the widow's own word for vindication, and are told to rest a little longer.

Waiting can harden into something else. Hunsinger quotes the pastoral theologian David Augsburger, who asks the injured why they keep replaying the history of an injury, and what they gain by it. The question is not an accusation. It marks the line between a cry that goes up to God and a story that only circles inside us. Ann Ulanov, a psychoanalyst Hunsinger also draws on, says that what we fear needs our attention, in the company of another, without knowing how we will come out. That is how the souls under the altar wait.

Scripture referenced: Luke 2:36–37 — There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having

lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.

Scripture referenced: Revelation 6:10–11 — They cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.

Notice: Notice how long you have been waiting, and whether the waiting has made you quieter or louder before God.

Pray: Sovereign Lord, how long? I am still asking. Clothe me while I wait, and keep my cry alive until you answer. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday.

SABBATH, November 14 — Judgment for the Holy Ones

"When the Son of Man comes, will he find the faith on earth?" — Luke 18:8

Read: Luke 18:8

I tell you, he will bring about their vindication quickly. Yet when the Son of Man comes, will he find the faith on earth?"

Reflect: The parable ends on a question, and the question is not about God.

Jesus has already said that God will vindicate his chosen ones. What remains open is whether the Son of Man will find faith, and Luke's wording points to a particular faith: the widow's kind. In Daniel's vision the Ancient One takes his seat, and judgment is given for the holy ones of the Most High. The judgment Adventists have long proclaimed is, among other things, the day the wronged are finally heard.

Hunsinger cites the psychologist Robert Stolorow: unbearable pain becomes bearable when it finds a relational home, someone to hold what cannot be

held alone. Sabbath gathers us into that home. The wronged do not have to hold their case together by themselves; the congregation laments and waits with them. Hunsinger closes with a prayer that God would turn our mourning into longing, our longing into lament, our lament into hope, and our hope into joy. Rest today in the first steps of that turning.

Scripture referenced: Daniel 7:22 — until the Ancient One came; then judgment was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom.

Notice: Notice what you would set down today if you trusted that your case was being held.

Pray: Lord Jesus, when you come, find in me the faith that kept coming. Today I rest, with my cause before you. Amen.

Stay: As on Sunday.

Group Discussion Questions

1. Herman found that survivors wanted the truth acknowledged more than they wanted punishment. What would acknowledgment mean for something you carry?

2. Psalm 82 places unjust judges under God's judgment. Without naming anyone, what has it been like when someone with the standing to hear you would not?

3. The judge ruled without remorse; Claudius felt remorse but kept what he took. How does it change things to believe that the truth of what happened does not wait on anyone else's change of heart?

4. A family before South Africa's commission wanted to forgive but did not know whom. How was forgiveness taught to you, and what did Wednesday's reading say to that?

5. Lamentations says God has taken up the poet's cause. What would it mean for you to pray as someone whose cause God has taken up?

6. Friday kept company with those who wait. How could our church become a place where people's cries are heard while they wait, rather than hushed?

7. Jesus asks whether the Son of Man will find faith on earth. What might the widow's kind of faith look like in you this coming week?

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