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Always Pray and Do Not Lose Heart

Resource by [John Piper](#) 

Scripture: [Luke 18:1–8](#) Topic: [Prayer](#)

And he told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

The last verse of our text, [Luke 18:8](#), refers to the second coming of Christ: "I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" I think this ending of the parable shows we should read it as a conclusion to the section on the coming of the kingdom just before it, [Luke 17:20–37](#).

Being Ready at the Coming of God's Kingdom

In 17:20 the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming. They meant: When will Messiah come and overthrow our enemies and establish the throne of David and bring peace and righteousness to the world? Jesus' answer was baffling to people who didn't acknowledge him to be the Messiah. He said in effect: If your only way of recognizing the kingdom of God is by miraculous signs that bring down the Roman tyranny, then you will surely miss it, because the kingdom of God is already in the midst of you (v. 21; 11:20—it should not be translated "within you" because Jesus would not have said that to unbelieving Pharisees). Jesus is the King, and wherever he wins people into allegiance, his reign is established.

Then in 17:22–24 he warns against the opposite mistake. In verse 21 he warned against looking for catastrophic signs and said the kingdom was quietly but powerfully in their midst. But in verses 23 and 24 he warns against thinking that the final appearance of the Son of man could be anything but catastrophic. It will not be quiet or hidden. If someone says, "Lo, here," or "Lo, there," then you know they are wrong. "For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of man be in his day" (v. 24). The second coming of Christ will not be a hidden thing which one person sees and then shows to another. It will be obvious to all from horizon to horizon, like a streak of lightning. "But first," verse 25 says, "he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation." The difference between the first and second comings of Christ is the difference between a little candle and a bolt of lightning.

Then in 17:26–30 Jesus describes what the days will be like leading up to the coming of the Son of man. He compares the coming of the Son of man to the flood in Noah's day (v. 27) and to the destruction of Sodom by fire and brimstone (v. 29), and he says that the days before Christ's coming will be like the days before those two catastrophes, namely, full of busy, ordinary life. Verse 27: "They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built." Verse 30 says, "So it will be on the day when the Son of man is revealed." In other words, we can expect that most of the world will be engaged in business as usual when the lightning of the Son of man flashes from sky to sky.

Then in verses 31–37 Jesus warns us not to be like Lot's wife (v. 32). That is, in the hour of crisis, don't love the world. Don't turn back with longing, or you'll be unfit for the kingdom (9:61). Remember, when the Son of man comes, he will separate the sheep and the goats, even if they are sleeping together or working side by side at the mill. One will be taken into safety, the other left. "Left where?" the disciples ask. "Where the body is, there will the vultures be gathered together" (v. 37). Not

to be gathered to Christ at his coming is to be left for destruction. *Jesus makes it clear that eternal life hangs on whether we are ready when he comes.*

Growing Cold in the Last Days

Now we can see that Luke 18:1–8 is really part of this end-time teaching. It closes in verse 8 with the question, "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Will the warnings of Jesus to remember Lot's wife, to keep the heart fixed on Christ, and to not love the world—will these warnings secure the faith of the disciples? Will they endure to the end? Will the Son of man find us trusting him, or busy securing our lives in this world?

I think a natural question the disciples would ask (and which we should ask) is: How can we endure to the end? How can we make sure that we don't become like Lot's wife, too much in love with this world to go all the way with Christ? How can we resist the relentless temptations of Sodom to be desensitized to God's kingdom by the ordinary pressures of daily life? Did you notice back in verse 28 that Jesus doesn't mention sodomy in the list of what characterized Sodom just before its destruction? In fact, he doesn't mention anything in itself sinful: "they ate, drank, bought, sold, planted, built." Judgment didn't come upon Sodom merely because it had practicing homosexuals in it, but also because all the good, ordinary activities of life were godless. *The good things in life can make us just as insensitive to the reality of God as the gross things in life can.* So the disciples of Jesus are left in a tremendous battle, which most people don't even know is going on: the battle to maintain radical, heartfelt, self-denying faith in Christ not only in the threat of persecution (21:12–19) and sinful temptations, but also in the threat of ordinary home life and business life which can blunt all our sensitivity to God's eternal kingdom.

The danger we face as disciples of Jesus waiting for his return is stressed even more clearly by Matthew 24:11–13 (which provides a sober link to last week's message on lukewarmness). Jesus says concerning the last days before his coming: "Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, *most men's love will grow cold.* But *he who endures* to the end will be saved." So in Luke 18:8 Jesus could have asked, "When the Son of man comes, will he find fervent love on earth?" The danger we face is that our faith in Christ and our love for him and for each other will be swallowed up by opposition or by the sheer ordinariness of daily life. So the question is: How can we endure? How can we be found with faith and love? How can we avoid being like Lot's wife and like

those who are left in judgment?

Pray! Pray! Pray!

So Jesus tells a parable to give the answer. And it is one of the few parables which he interprets for us lest we miss the point. [Luke 18:1](#) tells us the point of the parable: "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart." Jesus' answer to the question how to endure to the end is, Pray! Pray! Pray! And don't grow weary of praying.

The parable goes like this (18:2–5): "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor regarded man; and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.'" We must not be offended that Jesus compares God to an unjust judge. It's the same as when Jesus' own coming is compared to the coming of a thief in the night ([1 Thessalonians 5:2](#)). The point of comparison is not that Jesus is a thief but that his coming is sudden and unexpected. So here the point of comparison is not that God is an unjust judge but that he responds with help to those who cry to him day and night. In verse 7 Jesus draws out the lesson which he intends: "*Always pray and don't lose heart.*" If you cry to God day and night, if you always pray and don't lose heart, you will *not* be like Lot's wife: you will *not* be left in judgment; you will endure in faith and love, and God will vindicate you when the Son of man comes. Therefore, *always pray and don't lose heart.*

Here I should make plain the concern that drives me this morning. This is the end of a week of concerted prayer. Some of us have prayed over 20 hours this week; we prayed in the morning; we fasted and prayed at noon; we prayed all night Friday. But now what? The word from Jesus to us this morning is: don't stop praying; don't peter out; don't be fickle; but "*always pray and don't lose heart.*" And this word increases in urgency as we see the end of the age drawing near. As Peter says ([1 Peter 4:7](#)), "The end of all things is at hand; therefore, keep sane and sober for your prayers." The pressures of worldliness will become greater as the end draws near, therefore, all the more must we watch and be sober unto prayer, and not lose heart.

God and the Unjust Judge

Now how does Jesus' parable in [Luke 18:1–8](#) encourage us to keep on praying earnestly when prayer week is over? A widow comes to an unjust judge and pleads for help. She is being oppressed unjustly and wants him to use his authority to seek her relief. That's us, the widow. Weak, poor, and no husband to speak up for us. Her only source of help, the judge. Our only source: God. She comes again and again until he gives her the help she needs just to get her off his back. But the argument of the parable is *not* that if you can wear out an unjust human judge, then you may stand a chance of wearing out God so that he helps you just to get you off his back. That would contradict [Luke 12:32](#) where Jesus says, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

But even more important is that the parable itself shows that everything hangs on God being *different* from the judge. Jesus tells us two things about the unjust judge in verse 2: "he neither feared God nor regarded man." These are repeated in verse 4: "though I neither fear God nor regard man, yet . . . I will vindicate her." In other words, these two marks of the judge are obstacles to his helping the widow. First, he has no fear of God and is, therefore, prone not to help her. This means that the fear of God would prompt a judge to help a needy widow. And if the fear of *God* would prompt a judge to help a needy widow, then *God* is not like the unjust judge but is the kind of God whose heart inclines to help those who cry to him. So when Jesus tells us that the obstacle that almost kept the judge from helping the widow was his failure to fear God, he makes it crystal clear that the fear of God inclines a person to give heed to cries for help, and therefore, God himself is right in mercy to all who call upon him. Therefore, if a judge who has no fear of God can be swayed by persistent petitions, how much more certain we can be that God will help those who cry to him day and night.

The second mark of the judge was that he had "no regard for man." The widow was unknown to him, and he had no interest in her. The assumption is that if he cared about this widow, if she were his mother, he would help her. So we must ask: Does God have no regard for us? Is he indifferent to our needs? In verse 7 Jesus gives us the answer: "And will not God vindicate *his elect*?" Disciples of Jesus are not in the category of strangers to God. They are *his elect*. He has chosen them. He has set his favor on them. He has adopted them to be his children. As Paul says in [Romans 8:31–33](#), "If God is for us, who is against us? . . . Who shall bring any charge against *God's elect*? It is God who justifies." There is no condition of man more precious to be conceived than to be chosen by God. It means he has set his

favor upon us fully and freely. He is for us with all his might. Therefore, Jesus argues, if an unjust judge can be moved by persistent petitions to help a stranger for whom he has no regard, how much more "will God help his own chosen ones who cry to him day and night!"

Persevering Prayer and Faith

So this parable is intended to be an encouragement for us to pray continually until Jesus comes back. When Jesus asks at the end of verse 8, "When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?" he means, "Will the Son of man find that his disciples have kept praying, or have lost heart and given up?" So the implication seems to be: prayer and faith stand and fall together. *If we lose heart and drift away from prayer, then the Son of man will not find faith in us when he comes.* Faith is the furnace of our lives. Its fuel is the grace of God. And the divinely appointed shovel for feeding the burner is prayer. If you lose heart and lay down the shovel, the fire will go out, you will grow cold and hard, and when the lightning flashes from sky to sky and the Son of man appears in glory, he will spew you out of his mouth ([Revelation 3:16](#)). Two will be sleeping in one bed; one will be taken, the other left. And the test will not be whether you once walked an aisle, or prayed a prayer, or made a vow, or were baptized. *The test will be whether you continued in prayer and did not lose heart. God's elect will most surely be saved; and, as verse 7 says, the sign of the elect is that they cry to God day and night.* Those who endure to the end will be saved ([Matthew 24:13](#)).

O, how essential, how crucial it is that we not leave prayer behind with prayer week. If you are saying to yourself that daily earnest prayer for more power to live a fruitful life of Christ-likeness is only for spiritual heavyweights, and that you intend to make your way to heaven without such pious excesses, then you are greatly deceived. Somewhere along the way someone has put the deadly, unbiblical teaching into your head that you can be saved even if you don't persevere in prayer. But you can't. First, because without persevering prayer, faith and love become lukewarm, and we saw last week that lukewarm faith does not save. Second, because Jesus commands us in [Luke 18:1](#) always to pray and not to lose heart. Therefore, prayerlessness is disobedience. And if we do not repent and begin to pray as Jesus taught us, we will not be saved. For [Hebrews 5:9](#) says, "He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him." Therefore, not only in this week, but all through the year please don't lose heart, but always pray.

Of all the practical helps mentioned last Sunday night, let me reinforce just one. Reading the inspirational literature of prayer is a great stimulus in the life of prayer. One little book in particular has moved me deeply: E.M. Bounds' *Power Through Prayer*. I think its 128 little pages would give you a great boost.

Now in closing remember, the word of Jesus to us this morning is that we ought always to pray and not lose heart. First, because if we grow weary and leave off praying, our faith will wither, and the Son of man will not gather us with the elect. But second, and more positively, we should not grow weary in prayer because God is not like the unjust judge, but much more kindly disposed to us. As verse 7 says, he will surely vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night. Confirm your call and election, brothers and sisters (2 Peter 1:10). Always pray and do not lose heart.