

Author Doug Mendenhall writes:

Jesus called the other day to say he was passing through and [wondered if] he could spend a day or two with us.

I said, "Sure. Love to see you. When will you hit town?"

I mean, it's Jesus, you know, and it's not every day you get the chance to visit with him. It's not like it's your in-laws and you have to stop and decide whether the advantages outweigh your having to move to the sleeper sofa.

That's when Jesus told me he was actually at a convenience store out by the interstate.

I must have gotten that Bambi-in-headlights look, because my wife hissed, "What is it? What's wrong? Who is that?"

So I covered the receiver and told her Jesus was going to arrive in eight minutes, and she ran out of the room and started giving guidance to the kids—in that effective way that Marine drill instructors give guidance to recruits. ...

My mind was already racing with what needed to be done in the next eight—no seven—minutes so Jesus wouldn't think we were reprobate loser slobs.

I turned off the TV in the den, which was blaring some weird scary movie I'd been half watching. But I could still hear screams from our bedroom, so I turned off the reality show it was tuned to. Plus, I turned off the kids' set out on the sun porch, because I didn't want to have to explain *Jon & Kate Plus Eight* to Jesus, either, six minutes from now.

My wife had already thinned out the magazines that had been accumulating on the coffee table. She put Christianity Today on top for a good first impression. Five minutes to go.

I looked out the front window, but the yard actually looked great thanks to my long, hard work, so I let it go. What could I improve in four minutes anyway?

I did notice the mail had come, so I ran out to grab it. Mostly it was Netflix envelopes and a bunch of catalogs tied into recent purchases, so I stuffed it back in the box. Jesus doesn't need to get the wrong idea—three minutes from now—about how much on-line shopping we do.

I ran back in and picked up a bunch of shoes left by the door. Tried to stuff them in the front closet, but it was overflowing with heavy coats and work coats and snow coats and pretty coats and raincoats and extra coats. We live in the South; why'd we buy so many coats? I squeezed the shoes in with two minutes to go.

I plumped up sofa pillows, my wife tossed dishes into the sink, I scolded the kids, and she shooed the dog. With one minute left I realized something important: Getting ready for a visit from Jesus is not an eight-minute job.

Then the doorbell rang.

... ..

This morning... our passage is dealing with being ready for Christ's return. The **last** verse of our study today... Luke 18... verse 8... ends with this question: When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?"

Now the passage we were studying last week... the verses just before our verses of study for today... were also dealing with the end times... when Jesus returns...

**Luke 17:34-37 (ESV)**

*I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed. One will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together. One will be taken and the other left.” And they said to him, “Where, Lord?” He said to them, “Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”*

The parable of our passage this morning is the conclusion of this topic that Luke began in last week’s passage... so let’s begin with a little review.

In Luke 17:20... the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming. They meant: *When will Messiah come and overthrow our enemies and return Israel to the glory days when David was King...? It sure is going to be nice to have Rome off our backs... So when is this going to happen Jesus...?*

Jesus' answer was completely unexpected. It must have taken them by surprise. ... Jesus 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... among you...* ... Jesus spoke of a metaphysical Kingdom (one that is beyond all that is physical)... but very real... and very present.

Then in verses 22–24... Once Jesus was alone with His disciples... He warned that this metaphysical Kingdom will produce hardship for them. *“Difficult days are ahead!”* ...And we are still in those days... so this was a warning to us... as well... And in verses 23 and 24 He warned against thinking that the final appearance of the Son of man would be quiet or

hidden. If someone says, "*Psssst... He's over there...*" or, "*Psssst... check it out... He's out in the desert getting ready to make His move...*" ... 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... over the entire planet earth... like a streak of lightning. ... "But first"... verse 25 says... "Jesus must suffer many things and be rejected by **this** generation."

Then in Luke 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 Jesus says that the days before His second 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). ... In all of this *Jesus makes it clear that eternal life hangs on whether we are ready when he comes.*

Today... this is where we pick up. How can we be ready for His return? How can we endure this metaphysical (beyond the physical... invisible... immaterial) kingdom... amidst the hardship Christ warned us about... which includes being considered fools by the scientific modern age that says... only what you can see... taste... touch... hear... or smell... - is real. ... What can be known has to be observed by one or more of our five physical empirical senses. Anyone is a fool who makes their life decisions and commitments on something that is metaphysical... and Christ's Kingdom... right now... is metaphysical.

So... how do we endure...? how do we hold on...? how can we keep swimming against the tide of our modern culture that thinks we are fools...? Many have given up... they have thrown the towel in... they no longer stand for Christ in an evil age that continuously tries to push us down. ... How do we keep **that** from being **us**...?

This is the purpose of the passage that we come to today. It is our instruction for how to endure. We either faint... (and by that I mean fall-away or loose heart...) or follow the instruction contained in our passage today. ... Luke 18:1-8 are all about prevailing to the end... and then it culminates with the very somber question – will Jesus find faith on earth?

This is **not** the only place in the New Testament... where such a somber and bleak picture is given:

**Matthew 24:11-13 (ESV)**

And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

“...False prophets will lead many astray”... “the love of many will grow cold”  
... And our passage this morning is suggestive that faith will be hard to find  
on earth...when Jesus returns with His physical kingdom ...

We desperately need to know the instruction in today’s passage. We don’t  
want the answer of Jesus’ question to be **no**... “No... *there will not be any  
faith to be found here on earth, when You return...*” ... “We all gave in to  
*the enormous pressure from those who made us feel foolish for believing in  
Your invisible... metaphysical kingdom.*”

The instruction for us to endure to the end... boils down to these three  
words... pray... Pray... PRAY !!! Luke records a parable of Jesus to teach  
it to us... and unlike any of the **other** parables... this one has the point of  
the parable given to us – **before** the parable is told. ... Luke does not want  
anyone to miss its meaning.

### **Luke 18:1**

Jesus' answer to the question how to endure to the end is... pray! Pray!  
PRAY! ... And don't let up... don't grow weary.

Whenever Jesus wanted His disciples to understand the deep meaning of a  
truth... He would often use a metaphor... or teach it with a parable. This  
teaching on prayer employs a parable and four metaphors of contrast.

All of us are familiar with the vivid way metaphor can set truth before us.  
Sometimes comparison can be very vivid... as... for instance... one that I  
heard Chuck Swindoll use many years ago... "*as nervous as a long-tailed  
cat in a room full of rocking chairs,*" or... this one that I read just this  
week... "*as helpless as a trombone player in a telephone booth.*" ... My

mentor during Seminary... Bill Perkins... sent this one out in an email this week: *“as useful as an instruction manual for growing tropical plants in Antarctica...”*

Contrast is an excellent way to emphasize truth and make it vivid. ...This is the form Jesus used – **four times** in these eight verses – to drive home the point that prayer is how we endure to the end.

The first contrast is made clear by Luke... as he introduces the parable to us in the first verse.

### **Luke 18:1**

...And if you happen to be reading this from the King James version... you would have read: *“He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not **faint**.”* ... “Faint” or “loose heart”... they both mean the same. ... But let’s use the word “faint”.

We must either pray or faint... one or the other. ... Either we learn to cry out to an **unseen** Father... Who lives in a metaphysical world... and allow our culture to call us... “crazy”... “nuts” ... “living outside of reality” ... or else we lose heart... and faint. ... If we do not pray... there is nothing left for us... then... but to muster up the best front we can... and make our way through life without **any** fire in our Christian walk... we simply fall back without much hope of any kind. ... It is one or the other - there are no other alternatives.

The next contrast is found in the parable. It is between a widow and a judge. ... What is more proverbially weak and defenseless than a widow?

In story after story... in books and movies today... it is so cliché to depict the ultimate victim... as a poor... defenseless... widow... who needs rescuing. (“My hero!”) ... But in this parable... at the other end of the spectrum... in contrast to the widow... there is the judge. He is a tough... hard-bitten... self-centered old coot... with a heart... (Are you ready for this) ... as cold as a bathroom floor at two o'clock in the morning!

### **Luke 18:2-5**

A judge with no fear of God... who recognizes no universal ethic outside his own self-interest... has a mistaken belief that he will never stand before God... And having no sense of accountability to God... relieves him of any burden to render justice to anyone. ... The judge in the parable was such a man. ... History's worst villains... disingenuous as they were... even Hitler and Stalin... professed love for humanity. But not this man.

He had no regard for his fellow human beings... and there was no political pressure that could be brought upon him... to influence him. ... In view of the judge's hardness of heart... the case for the widow was absolutely hopeless. ... Nothing she could do would move this man to take any kind of action on her behalf.

But never-the-less she pleaded and she pleaded with him... until he finally gave in. Verse five reads... “because the widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that” (and the Greek literally reads) “she won’t blacken my eye...” ... This judge was concerned about how this woman’s incessant pleading might make him look bad among his peers... it could blemish his reputation... it might blacken his eye. “...*My friends are*

*starting to notice... This woman is stalking me... I can't even enjoy a nice dinner out on the town!..."*

### **Luke 18:6-7**

Now at this point... I need to say something that is very important. If we fail to recognize the contrasts here... we will misinterpret the parable. I hate to admit this... but I have misinterpreted this parable for years. And so have the multitude of sermons I have heard preached on this parable.

Contrast number two is a **contrast** ... (make no mistake about it) it is a contrast between God and the judge. They are **dis**-similar... they are NOTHING like each other. The woman had to relentlessly plead and plead... she had to beg... and beg... because the judge was nothing at all like God.

If you make the mistake and consider the judge and God to be alike... you will think the point being made is that God is like the judge and therefore we must beg and beg... like the woman had to.

If God is like the cold and heartless judge in this parable... then you and I have to try and embarrass God into giving in to our pleading. We have to manipulate God. We have to find a way that threatens Him and could blemish Him.

But the second contrast here is that God is not at all like the judge... and the third contrast in this parable is that we don't have to ask like the woman did.

When... like the widow... life appears to us to be hopeless and useless... when we are victims of forces... which are greater than we can manage...

(and who of us has not felt life to be this?)... when no openings appear in the wall of pressure which presses in on us...when there is no answer to the inescapable problems before us... and there is no end in sight... but certain failure of loss... Jesus says there is one way out. ... . There is a way to the place of power... there is a way to a certain solution of our problems... there is an answer to the unbearable pressure.

It is the answer of prayer... of simply crying out to a God we cannot see but whom we may rest upon... a Father with a father's heart and a father's tender compassion and a father's willingness to act.

As I was writing this message... I received a phone call from a lady in our church... who a few weeks ago had described to me some horrifically unfair circumstances... that she was facing. From what she told me... justice was eluding her... it was way beyond her grasp... and there was nothing apparent that she could do. ... My human nature likes it when I have some advice to give... some concrete steps of action to take. But in this case all I could do was listen. We prayed and we believed that praying was a very significant action to take.

Over the course of several weeks... God had given her a new perspective toward her situation that included humility. And in a surprising manner... the unjust situation was completely dropped. That was the purpose for the call (to tell me about the new perspective and the miraculous change of circumstance.)

The parable teaches us that... Prayer... always stirs the heart of God... it always moves God to act.

But believers have often taught... (and I think I have mistakenly taught...) that Jesus is here encouraging what is called "prevailing prayer." ... Prevailing prayer is basically an attempt to belabor God... to give Him no peace... to picket the throne of heaven... until we get the request we want. This is an absolutely un-Biblical and totally un-Christian attitude in prayer.

Several years ago a story made national news about a man who announced that he was troubled about moral conditions in this country... so he determined to fast and pray until God sent a great awakening. He was praying for a sweeping revival to correct the moral degeneracy of the day. He announced that he would keep on even until death... if necessary... expecting God to move. ... The news media carried the story day after day. His strength began to fail... and he grew weaker and weaker... and finally was confined to his bed. ... Bulletins were issued each day following his condition. He was evidently a man of unusual determination... for most of us would have quit after the third day but this man did not. ... He went on with his fast until he actually died. The funeral was widely covered and many glorified his remarkable persistence.

Was that really prayer? ... No... it was not! ... It was an attempt to blackmail God. This man was holding his own life... as a pistol to the head of God... and demanding all his money! ... He was insisting that God move on his terms and according to his time schedule. That is not prayer.

The point of this parable is that God is not an unrighteous God. He is not demanding that we try to cajole... coax... and struggle to persuade Him to move. ... God is not grudging. That is the point of the parable! ... Therefore prayer is much more like the cry of a beloved child to his father.

In the parable the woman was an insignificant nobody. ... But in contrast... as Believers... we are God's elect... His chosen ones... created in His image and redeemed by the Son of God. ... Because of who God is... and who we are... there is no reason to frantically assault His door or nag Him for a response.

- Do you ever repeat a request because you think that the quality of a prayer is dependent on the quantity of words?
- Do you ever repeat a request because you think that God is ignorant and needs to be informed... or if not ignorant at perhaps He is unconcerned and therefore needs to be aroused?
- Do you ever repeat your prayers because you believe that God is unwilling to answer and you must prevail upon Him... somehow transforming a hard-hearted God into a compassionate and loving One?
- Do you ever repeat a petition because you think that God will be swayed in His decision by your putting on a show of zeal and piety... as if God cannot see through the thin veil of hypocrisy?

Don't let the point of this parable go to waste. All of that is unnecessary... it is wrong... It is not prayer.

Author... Kent Hughes... gives us an important perspective in his commentary on these verses:

Does this mean we must never engage in persistent prayer, fervently beseeching God? Not at all. The teaching of the parable is that we must continue in our prayers, even when there seems to be no answer, because God, unlike the unjust judge, is loving, good, and gracious. We persist in prayer not because we have not yet gotten God's attention, but because we know he cares and will hear us.

The Apostle Paul engaged in such prayer when three times he pleaded with the Lord for the removal of his thorn in the flesh (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-9). These were three sustained, passionate times of

intercession. Paul did not think that his repetitions were due to a defect in his faith—"Sorry, Lord, but I'm back. Please forgive my lack of faith! My prayers will be better this time." There was none of that. And in the end, the thorn was still there, but God gave him something better to go along with it—*more grace!*

There are times for unrelenting prayer—times when tragedy strikes or when critical decisions are at hand. But we know that God knows what we need before we ask, and we know that he hears us, and we know that he will answer.

Enduring to the end... as we live right now in God's metaphysical Kingdom... it is easy to become discouraged by God's sometimes-seeming silence. We need to learn that in the silence... our loving God **is** answering... whether we see His working or not.

Sometimes the silence means that God's answer is a loving "no."  
...Perhaps we asked inappropriately... or for the wrong thing. Perhaps the request was good... but a **better** way is coming.

For the Apostle Paul... the better way was God's sufficient grace... than the removal of his thorn. God's grace was being perfected in his weakness. This is why he could write:

**1 Corinthians 15:10 (ESV)**

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*

So... sometimes the silence of God is meant to instill dependence upon him. In the case of Paul... he was left with his thorn... so that he would lean entirely upon God. ... We are so prone to independence... that the granting of certain of our requests... would lead us to self-sufficiency... pride... and independence. There can be no better way to cultivate a sense of

dependence upon God... than the need for persistent or determined prayer.

Oswald Chambers offers this insight:

"Some prayers are followed by silence because they are wrong, others because they are bigger than we can understand. It will be a wonderful moment for some of us when we stand before God and find that the prayers we clamoured for in early days and imagined were never answered, have been answered in the most amazing way, and that God's silence has been the sign of the answer."

Our parable today teaches us that we are not to engage in persistent prayer... treating it as though we will (perhaps) change God. ... Instead prayer should change **us**! Pray while you offer your heart and its desires to the Lord... for Him to modify or enlarge it... or simply to grow in your dependence to Him.

Jesus ends His parable with a sudden word that comes as our fourth and final contrast. The last verse contrasts the **presence** or **absence** of faith... when Christ returns.

**Luke 18:8b (ESV)**

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

I'm sure you noticed how this was phrased. ... He does **not** say, "*When the Son of man comes, will He find men **praying**?*" No, it is "*When the Son of man comes, will He find **faith**?*" ... The reason for this... is that prayer is faith expressed.

True prayer is not pleading or cajoling a reluctant God... never! ...That is never prayer! ... Prayer is believing... prayer is faith... prayer is thanking

instead of complaining... trust instead of trying... rejoicing... accepting... seizing... receiving -- **that** is prayer.

*"Well," someone can easily say (and perhaps you have thought)... "If God is so eager to give... and if He already knows what we need... and if we're so prone to pray the wrong prayer anyway... why bother to pray? ... Why doesn't God just give it to us without prayer?"*

The answer is... that the function of prayer... is to bring us to an understanding of the program... and the purpose of the Father.

This is simply illustrated... All of us know couples that have stopped speaking to each other. Such a marriage is a disintegrating union... it is a dead relationship... the bleak ruin of a love that once was there... but now is gone. ... Living relationships require communication... there must be an interchange... a flow of words... for it to be a live...and vital relationship.

Well... prayer is the interchange of a child's heart with their Daddy. Abba Father. Gods wants and asks for this kind of relationship with us. This is why Jesus asked the question. When He comes... will He find men exercising this blessed privilege? ... Will he find them expressing themselves... pouring out everything without hesitation or hindrance?

Within our present culture that thinks we are looney for following an invisible God...our risen Lord is still saying, "The Kingdom of God is among you." ... Keep in mind that as you go about as followers of Christ in this generation... you will face difficult days of rejection... persecution and injustice for His name's sake. ... We must develop a lifestyle of prayer... otherwise we will faint over the many difficult situations.

Pray or faint... as a believer you have no other option. Prayer is our means for enduring in this metaphysical Kingdom.