

Knock Knock, Who's There?

So you pray for something for years and then you wake up one day, breathe a big sigh and say to yourself: *This is crazy. Nothing is happening. God is not listening.* 

Congratulations! If this has been your experience, you are not alone. You've been enrolled in the School of Persevering Prayer, and it's not a one-semester class. It's a lifelong journey designed to stretch your faith, develop your character, test your patience and increase your capacity to know God intimately.

I've been in this class for a long time, and I don't always make the grade. For many months I've been bringing the same request to the Lord, yet the answer seems impossibly distant. My faith wavers from calm assurance to frustrated doubt. In my weakest moments I panic and say stupid things to my wife (such as, "Honey, I'm giving up and getting a job parking cars at Disney World!")

There's no way around the fact that prayer requires persistence. Jesus told a parable about an unrighteous judge who granted a poor widow's petition because she badgered him incessantly (see Luke 18:1-8). Jesus asked: "Will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night?" (v. 7, NASB). Regardless of how many times you have reminded Him of your request, keep these points in mind:

1. The work of God takes time. Abraham turned gray waiting for his promised heir—and he is called the father of our faith. Joshua and his remnant company wandered in the wilderness 40 years before they possessed Canaan. Hannah endured taunts from Peninnah and insults from Eli while she prayed for years for a son. Big requests often require long waits.

Prayer is not magic. Our job is to ask, not to dictate or

control. Let God be God. Let patience have its perfect work. You will reap if you don't grow weary.

2. Authentic prayer involves a holy process. Prayer is often compared to birth. When God gives you a promise, you essentially become pregnant with it. If you plan to carry your promise to full term, you must travail.

We often think of the prayer of faith as triggering instant answers, but this was not always the case with Paul, who told the Galatians he would be "in labor" until Christ was formed in them (Gal. 4:19). While God can certainly answer immediately, even with fire from heaven, He frequently calls us to carry a promise until we are mature enough to handle the answer.

3. You have a Helper who is praying for you. You are not in this process alone. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us, Paul wrote, "with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). This kind of gut-wrenching prayer is not formal or sophisticated. It's messy. When we pray in the Holy Ghost we surrender our agendas and let Him pray through us.

Have you ever been around a woman in her ninth month of pregnancy? She is often in a state of agitation—so ready to give birth but weary of the strain. I know many Christians today who are in this uncomfortable stage. They've held onto promises for a long time. Some are in despair because the wait has been so tedious.

Jesus said: "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7:8). The verbs used here are Greek present imperatives, meaning *constant asking*, *seeking* and *knocking*. Prevailing prayer requires persistence, but you don't have to provide the strength. When we are too weak to press forward in faith, the Spirit provides the extra push!

You may be asking for salvation for a wayward child, funding

for a ministry, reconciliation of a relationship, recovery of a business or the reviving of a stagnant church. Keep on knocking. Don't give up. You're closer to a breakthrough than you realize.

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j. lee Grady was editor of Charisma for 11 years. He now serves as contributing editor while devoting more time to ministry. You can find him online at [http://www.jlee.org](#). His latest book is *10 Lies Men Believe* (Charisma House).