

Keep On Praying—a Breakthrough Is Near

Don't lose hope. God has promised to answer when we persevere.

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 must not be 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, purify your motives, test your patience and increase your capacity to know and experience God's amazing love.

"Have you ever been around a woman in her ninth month of pregnancy? She is often in a state of agitation—ready to give birth but weary of the strain. I know many Christians today who are in this same uncomfortable stage of spiritual travail."

I've been in this class for a long time, and I don't always make the grade. This past week, in fact, I was whining about God's delays. 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!")

Yet when I bring my complaint to the Lord He always reassures me. This week He took me to Isaiah 62:6-7 (NASB): "On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; all day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

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 night and day (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). Whatever request you have brought to the Lord, and regardless of how many times you have reminded Him of it, keep these points in mind as you trust Him for an answer:

1. The work

of God takes time. Most people in the Bible who asked God for big things waited a long time to receive their answers.

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.

Prayer is not magic. Our job is to ask, not to dictate or control. Let God be God. Let patience have its perfect work. We will eventually reap if we 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 this promise to full-term, you must travail.

Surely this is what the apostle Paul experienced when he told the Galatians he would be "in labor" until Christ was formed in them (Gal. 4:19). We often think of the prayer of faith as triggering instant answers, but this was not the case with Paul. While God can certainly answer immediately, even with fire from heaven, frequently He 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). He is praying the perfect will of God, and we are invited to agree with Him. This kind of gut-wrenching prayer is messy; it is not formal or sophisticated; when we truly

pray in the Holy Ghost we surrender our agendas and let Him pray through us.

And this takes us deeper with God.

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 same uncomfortable stage of spiritual travail. They've held onto promises for a long time. Some are in despair because the gestation period has been so long.

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 are Greek present imperatives, meaning *constant asking, seeking and knocking*. Prevailing prayer requires persistence, but when we feel too weak to press forward in faith the Spirit provides the extra push.

You may be asking for the salvation of a wayward child, the funding of a ministry, the reconciliation of a relationship, the recovery of a business, the reviving of a stagnant church or the healing of a sick loved one. Keep on knocking. Don't give up. You're closer than ever to a breakthrough.

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