

Pray with Persistence

Have you ever felt like giving up in prayer? As an  intercessor, I admit I've had times when I felt overwhelmed and frustrated—when I've prayed and prayed, maybe for weeks, or even years, and seen no breakthrough. Questions have run through my mind: "What's the use? What difference does it make if I pray?"

It is one of the devil's goals to keep each of us from experiencing the blessings of God that come through intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer is unique because it means, literally, "to stand in the gap for another."

Unlike normal prayer, which is primarily focused on the relationship of God and the person praying, intercessory prayer focuses on the needs of others. If the devil can prevent us from interceding through apathy or despair, he wins the battle—with the lives of others hanging in the balance.

Our intercession is important. We know the Lord is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV).

Can lives be changed if people are not fervently praying? Unlikely. We are told: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7:7-8).

Jesus taught that prayer was essential for the church to see a harvest of souls. "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray" (Luke 10:2).

The devil wants to keep believers defeated and bound. He concentrates his attack on anyone who has made a commitment to the prayer closet. James wrote, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man [or woman] avails much" (James 5:16). Under

the Holy Spirit's leadership, we become effective, fervent prayer warriors.

Some of our prayers are answered immediately, others in a short time, and still others over the years. Yet we can be confident that if our hearts are directed toward the Lord, we will not be disappointed: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7). The Father is looking for those to whom He can trust the secrets of His heart. I want to know the secrets of the Lord. I want to be His servant in prayer.

Realizing the enemy is hard at work trying to keep me from intercession helps encourage me to increase my commitment level. The fact is, you and I are in a spiritual battle for the souls of men and women, boys and girls. But I encourage you to embrace your prayer assignment. You may be led by the Holy Spirit to pray for someone no one else is praying for. And don't let the devil discourage you because you are very important to God and to the advancement of His kingdom!

For 14 years I prayed for a friend of mine to receive Christ. James (not his real name) had been on the front line of battle in the Vietnam War. I could see in his face the trauma of his experience. Death and governmental betrayal caused him to be aloof and distant. During my prayer times, I wept and travailed for James. His wife, Judy (not her real name), was an intercessor also, and together we prayed.

As the years passed, Judy would tell me: "I'm so discouraged. Is God ever going to save James? I don't have any more faith." Over and over I assured her that God was faithful, and the very fact that He continued to burden our hearts for James was evidence that He would one day touch him.

Of course, 14 years is a long time to pray! I too got impatient with the process at times and wondered why it was taking so long.

Yet the lengthy process was teaching us persistence—and that was important to the Lord. I'm happy to report that two years ago my husband, Eddie, and I led James to Christ. It took 14 years—but it was worth it!

When the pressure is on to give up, don't! As believers, we are not to live according to our feelings but according to our spiritual position in Christ. Satan is no match for an intercessor living securely in the following positional truths:

1. You are an overcomer. There is no defeat for those who have confidence in the Spirit of God to give them overcoming life. Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).
2. You are complete in Christ. There is no lack for those of us who are in Christ (see Col. 2:8-10). But if we view ourselves as lacking, we have defined our experience. Look at yourself from God's point of view, not man's.
3. You have been given authority. We have been given the keys of the kingdom. Is it any wonder then that Satan attempts to provoke us to apathy, discouragement and depression? He simply can't afford to ignore a believer who is exercising her authority in Christ through prayer (see Matt. 16:19; Luke 10:19).
4. You have spiritual weapons. Christ, the Mighty Warrior, has given us not only defensive armor but also offensive weapons (see Eph. 6:11-17; 2 Cor. 10:4). These weapons are spiritual, not earthly, and they have but one purpose: winning spiritual wars!

Yet even the most powerful gun is harmless until someone pulls the trigger. We must be willing to pray until the target is in sight. Then we must continue to pray until the target is destroyed!

We win the battle in the prayer closet, on our knees. Let us

be women of prayer who will gladly “stand in the gap.” Let’s intercede for our families, our cities, our schools, our leaders, our nation and others.

After studying the history of revival, popular theologian Walter Wink once wrote, “History belongs to the intercessors.” You and I can help make history—if we don’t give up.

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