

You Can't Stop Praying Now!

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 prayer 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 experience God's amazing love.

I've been in this school for a long time. I think I may have failed a few classes and been required to repeat them. 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 requests to the Lord, yet the answers seem impossibly distant. My faith wavers from calm assurance to frustrated doubt. In my weakest moments I panic and say stupid things that I regret later, such as: "I'm quitting!"

Yet when I bring my complaint to the Lord, He always reassures me. He recently 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 just no way around the fact that prayer requires persistence. One friend of mine even coined a phrase to summarize this painful fact: "God is in the waiting."

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 many years for a son.

Prayer is not a magic formula. Your job is to ask, not to dictate or control. You must let God be God. You must let patience have its perfect work. You will eventually 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 this promise to term, you must wait—and then 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 asks 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 and full of anguish; it is not formal or sophisticated.

When we truly pray in the Holy Ghost, we surrender our agendas and allow Him to 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—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. Or if you are really adventurous, you may be praying for the evangelization of a city or a nation that is currently in spiritual darkness.

Keep on knocking. Don't give up. The God who moves mountains has heard your cry. You're closer than you've ever been to a spiritual breakthrough.