

## ***The* BATTLE PLAN for PRAYER**

FROM BASIC TRAINING TO TARGETED STRATEGIES

### **1**

## **Your Heart: Persistence vs. Impatience**

*Indeed, none of those who wait for You will be ashamed. (Ps. 25:3)*

Persistence is a necessary part of praying effectively. Whether God answers in twenty minutes or twenty years, we should never give up on Him. In Scripture, God reveals that He wants us to trust Him patiently on our knees.

He delights when we walk by faith and show our dependency on Him as we come before His throne. In fact, He may use delays in our life to reveal our hearts and our level of trust in Him. In the meantime, we must wait upon the Lord in faith.

When King Saul became impatient with God, he unwisely took matters into his own hands and paid a heavy price, losing God's blessing in the process (1 Sam. 13:8-14). But when Zechariah waited on the Lord for a child (Luke 1:5-13), he was shocked and delighted when the Angel of the Lord told him he would have a son . . . likely decades after he began praying for one.

Jesus said, "Watch therefore, and pray always" (Luke 21:36 NKJV). Paul wrote that we should "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) and to "continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it" (Col. 4:2 NKJV). Devoted to it.

Scripture teaches this recurring lesson, time and time again, so we would catch the absolute importance of it. Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-9, "Keep asking, and it will be given to you. Keep searching, and you will find. Keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who searches finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened" (HCSB). He further taught in Luke 18:1 that we "ought to pray and not to lose heart."

Do you get the picture? We are not meant to pray one time for our needs or desires, and then quit or throw the prayer out the window if it's not immediately answered. God works on His timetable, not ours. But He is clearly pleased when we exercise faith and persistence because it reveals a heart that is acknowledging Him and dependent on Him.

So don't get discouraged in prayer. As in the parable of the persistent widow (mentioned in an earlier chapter)—if an ungodly, uncaring judge will respond to

a persistent request, how much more will a loving, willing God respond to the persistence of His children?

The problem is never God; the problem is our lack of patience. We are so accustomed to immediate responses. We can get a fast-food meal minutes after we order it. We can get a response seconds after we text a friend. We can upload a family photo to the Internet the minute after we take it. But God is not our bellhop and doesn't owe us an immediate response. Sure, He can answer immediately if He wants, but usually He waits. For the perfect time. And His time is always gloriously better than ours.

Elijah is a good study in persistence and the various lengths of time God waited to answer prayers. When he was facing the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Elijah prayed *once*, and fire fell from heaven (1 Kings 18:37-38). When he was praying for the dead son of the widow, he prayed *three* times before the boy came back to life (17:21- 22). When he was asking God to send the rain, he ended up praying *seven* times (18:41-44).

The point is, we don't know if God's answer will come immediately, after several days, or even years. But we do know He's on the throne and operates from a perfect vantage point. Sometimes He waits. And sometimes He says, "Even before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isa. 65:24 HCSB). He may be more glorified to wait until Abraham's a hundred years old before giving him Isaac, but God can also send Rebekah out to fetch water even before Abraham's servant finishes the "amen" of his prayer asking for God to provide Isaac with a wife (Gen. 24:15).

We spoke in a previous chapter about how George Muller, one of the greatest praying men of all time, documented fifty thousand answers to prayer in his lifetime, including five thousand answered on the same day he prayed them. But even at that astounding rate, this means ninety percent of his answers to prayer came later—sometimes *decades* later. He prayed for one man's salvation for sixty-three years and never gave up. Even at Muller's death the man had not been saved. But touched by the faithfulness of this servant of God, he prayed to receive Christ by the time of the funeral service.

George Muller once said, "I live in the spirit of prayer. I pray as I walk about, when I lie down and when I rise up. And the answers are always coming. Thousands and tens of thousands of times have my prayers been answered. When once I am persuaded that a thing is right and for the glory of God, I go on praying for it until the answer comes. George Muller never gave up!"

And like him, we must believe God can answer a prayer quickly while also acknowledging God's sovereignty, enough to know that He knows what's best for us and for His glory. Yet we are not to lose heart in seeking Him, for He blesses those who do so.

"Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him" (Ps. 37:7). "Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD" (Ps. 27:14). "I wait for the LORD, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope" (Ps. 130:5). "Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isa. 40:31 NKJV).

God is very patient and will not delay responding to our prayers even one more day beyond what is right. His timing is perfect. Not just to the year or day, but to the second and minute. We can trust Him and should continue casting our cares upon Him with persistence and patience.

"As for me, I trust in You, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in Your hand" (Ps. 31:14-15 NKJV).

**PRAYER:** Lord, I don't wait well. But You have proven in Your Word that what seems like delay is actually evidence of Your care and love. So I ask You to help me apply the peace, trust, contentment, and perseverance that distinguish us as children of a good, heavenly Father. Where my flesh demands immediate action, may my heart accept Your answer on Your terms. I choose by faith to believe You can act in a moment, yet I also choose to wait. And to keep praying.

### **A PEARL OF PERSISTENCE**

One of our favorite stories of persistence in prayer is about a dear lady in our church named Pearl. In 1964, Pearl gave her life to Christ at the age of thirty-five. And one of the first prayers she began praying, along with her husband, Richard, was that God would save her sister Mary, who lived in Long Island, New York. Pearl and Richard prayed for decades but saw no evidence of any change in her. Anytime they brought up the subject, Mary was highly resistant and would quickly say, "I'm not interested in that. I don't want to talk about that."

After Mary's husband died in 1994, she moved to Albany, Georgia, to be near Pearl and Richard. Five years later, Richard also passed away. But even without her prayer partner, Pearl and her Sunday school class at church continued to reach out to Mary, regularly interceding for her salvation. Yet

nothing changed. She remained completely closed, always communicating that she wanted nothing to do with God.

Eight more years passed. In October 2007, Mary was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at ninety-one years of age. She suffered multiple strokes and started fading away mentally. By March of the next year, doctors advised she be placed under hospice care. Pearl stayed with her every day. And continued to pray.

In April, Mary stopped eating. She became dehydrated. And one day, with her body showing all signs of shutting down, she was taken to the emergency room. That night, Pearl prayed with more passion than ever—"Lord, be merciful"—begging God for her sister's salvation. She called church members, asking them to join her in prayer, sharing how she couldn't stand to see her sister die without Christ. But Mary's body could fight no longer. Around 10:00 p.m., her heart stopped beating. She died in her bed, right there in the emergency room, still having never trusted Christ.

It was over. Or was it?

An alarm went off in her room. Doctors rushed back in. Despite the previous confirmation that her heart had stopped, they gave her a shot, shocked her system, and revived her. Pearl started to wonder: maybe God wasn't finished with Mary even yet.

Meanwhile, the senior adult minister at our church—a man named Tom—was lying in bed trying to go to sleep, then he felt as though God was telling him something. He had gotten to know Mary through the years, as a result of his interactions with Pearl. And he knew, of course, through his role with the senior adults, all about Mary's physical condition, including the fact that she'd been taken to the hospital that day. Although it was late, although he was tired, he allowed the restless urging in his spirit to prevail. He and his wife, Pat, got up, changed clothes, drove to the hospital, and walked into the room where Mary was being cared for.

She was unusually awake and coherent when they arrived, especially in light of her brush with death in the last few hours. She recognized Tom immediately, greeting him with the words, "Tom, I kicked the bucket today." He took her by the hand, saying, "Mary, you know it's the late hour. God is still willing to save you. Don't you think it's time you gave your life to Jesus Christ?"

What could she say? She said yes. She was ready now to do that. She

prayed with Tom and gave her life to Christ in the emergency room . . . to the indescribable joy of her patient, prayerful sister.

Mary remained very ill, however. A few days later, she died. But the hospice workers, who'd always noticed the sad, tired look on her face, said they'd never seen anyone with a more peaceful expression as she passed away.

This story was a huge encouragement for the people in our church. The church family heard the good news and rejoiced over God's faithfulness to answer prayer. Pearl still reminds people to never give up in prayer. "We just cannot give up or stop," she says.

### HOMEWORK:

1. Name one is a necessary part of your prayer effectively?
2. Y N NS: Have you persistently pray effectively?
3. Whether God answers in 20 minutes or 20 years, you should \_\_\_\_\_ give up on Him.
4. Y N NS: Are you admitting to give easily up on God?
5. God reveals that God wants you to trust Him patiently on your what?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. T F: God delights when you walk by doubt and show your independent from Him as you not come before His throne.
7. In fact, God may use \_\_\_\_\_ in your life to reveal your heart and your level of \_\_\_\_\_ in Him. In the meantime [meanwhile], you must wait upon the Lord in DOUBT or FAITH.
8. Four people in the Biblical stories:
  - ✂ When King Saul became \_\_\_\_\_ with God, he unwisely [foolishly] took matters into his own hands and paid a heavy price, \_\_\_\_\_ God's blessing in the process. (read 1 Samuel 13:8-14)
  - ✂ When Zechariah waited on the Lord for a child, he was shocked when the angel of the Lord told him he would have a son...like \_\_\_\_\_ after he began pray for one [a son]. (read Luke 1:5-13)
  - ✂ Jesus said, "Watch therefore, and pray \_\_\_\_\_." (Luke 21:36)
  - ✂ Paul wrote that we should "pray \_\_\_\_\_ ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and we should to "\_\_\_\_\_ earnestly in prayer, being \_\_\_\_\_ [ever awake and alert, sleeplessly watchful] in it [prayer]." (Colossians 4:2)
    - \_\_\_\_\_ to it.

9. The Scripture teaches this recurring [to occur again, to return to the mind, to come up again for consideration] lesson, time and time again, so we would catch the absolute 100% importance of it.

✍ Matthew 7:7-9 HCSB quotes, “ \_\_\_\_\_ asking, and it will be given to you. \_\_\_\_\_ searching, and you will find. \_\_\_\_\_ knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who ask receives, and the one who searches finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

✍ Luke 18:1 that you ‘ought to pray and not to lose heart’. Other translations: ‘...they should always pray and never give up.’ (SEB) or ‘..they ought always to pray and not to turn coward [faint, lose heart, and give up]. (AMP) or ‘Jesus was telling them a parable about their need to pray continuously and not to be discouraged.’ (CEV) or “One day Jesus told His disciples a story to illustrate their need for constant prayer and to show them that they must keep praying until the answer comes.” (TLB)

10. Do you get the PICTURE?

☞ You are not meant to pray one time for your needs or desires, and then \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ the prayer out the window if it’s not immediately answered.

☞ God works on: your timetable or His timetable

☞ God is clearly pleased when you \_\_\_\_\_ faith and persistence because it reveals a heart that is \_\_\_\_\_ Him and \_\_\_\_\_ on Him.

☞ So you DO or DON’T get discouraged in your prayer.

☞ The problem is never God [God is not the problem]; but the problem is your lack of what? \_\_\_\_\_

❖ We are so accustomed to \_\_\_\_\_ responses.

✓ We can get a fast-food meal minutes after we order it.

✓ We can get a response seconds after we text a friend.

✓ We can upload a family photo to internet the minute after we take it.

11. Y N NS: God is your bellhop and owe you an immediate response?

12. Sure, God can answer immediately \_\_\_\_ He wants, but usually He \_\_\_\_\_.

☞ For the \_\_\_\_\_ time.

👉 T F: Your time is always glorious better than God.

13. Elijah is a good study in persistence and the various lengths of time God waited to answer prayers.
- 👉 When Elijah was facing the false prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, how many times Elijah prayed and there fire fell from heaven upon the altar?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - 👉 When Elijah was praying for the dead son of the widow, how many times Elijah prayed before the dead boy came back to life?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - 👉 When Elijah was asking God to send the rain, how many times Elijah ended up praying for raining? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Y N NS: Do you know if God's answer will come immediately?
15. We do know God is on His throne and operates from a perfect vantage [a position, an advantage or superiority] point.
- ✓ Sometimes God \_\_\_\_\_.
  - ✓ Sometimes God says, "Even before they call, I will answer; while they are speaking, I will hear." (Isaiah 65:24)
  - ✗ God may be more \_\_\_\_\_ to wait until Abraham's 100 yrs. old before giving him Isaac, but God can also send Rebekah out to fetch [get] water before Abraham's servant finishes the 'amen' of his prayer asking for God to provide Isaac with a wife.
16. George Muller—one of the greatest praying men of all time:
- 👉 In George's lifetime, how many George's documents answered?
  - 👉 How many George's documents answered on the same day he prayed them?
  - 👉 How many percent of George's answers to prayer came later, sometimes decades?
  - 👉 George prayed for one man's salvation for how many years? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 👉 Y N NS: Did George easily give up on this man?
  - 👉 How this man became saved through what?
  - 👉 Interesting George said, "I live \_\_\_\_\_ the spirit of prayer. I pray \_\_\_\_\_ I walk about (around), when I lie down and when I rise up. And the

answers are \_\_\_\_\_ coming. Thousands and tens of thousands of times have my prayers been answered. When once I am persuaded that a thing is \_\_\_\_\_ and for the glory of God, I go \_\_\_\_\_ praying for it until the answer comes. George Muller never gave up!"

17. And like George Muller, you must \_\_\_\_\_ God \_\_\_\_\_ answer a prayer quickly while also \_\_\_\_\_ God's sovereignty, enough to know that He knows what's best for you and for His glory. Yet you are not to lose heart in seeking Him, for He blesses those who do so.
18. T F: God is very impatient and will delay responding to your prayers even one more day beyond what is wrong.
19. Y N NS: God's timing is perfect?
20. Y N NS: Can you trust God and should you continue casting your worries upon Him with persistence and patience?