

# PERSISTENCE

## Week 5 | Unceasing

### Deeper Dive

**Read:** 1 Kings 18:41-46

After reading this passage, Elijah's prayer posture in verse 42 might seem a bit odd to us. However, in ancient times this was the posture that a woman would have given birth. The scripture is telling us that Elijah was praying so hard that it was like someone birthing a child. This is truly persistent, laborious, hard fought prayer. Of course, he knew that God would bring the rain. We see proof of his faith in the amount of times he sent his servant to look for the clouds. Then, as soon as a tiny little poof of a cloud forms, Elijah prepares for the downpour. He shows incredible faith, but he doesn't stop praying and persistently petitioning the Lord until God moves. He waits patiently, but persistently, for God to move and then he runs to follow Him! This is exactly how we are called to persistently pray for the things that are in God's Will for our lives. We are called to have faith & hope in His goodness, persistently pray for what He's promised us, wait for God to move and work, and then obediently follow Him!

### Day 1 - Crockpot prayers

In our fast paced lives, with our short attention spans, and the desire to be more efficient in everything we do, it's hard for us to slow down. In fact, for many of us, the word "wait" might sound like a 4-letter word. If we're honest, no one likes to wait. In the grocery store we carefully assess the length of lines, evaluate the fullness of the carts, judge how fast the cashier is working, and then become internally enraged when the person in front of us has a question about a sale item. We can hear it in the immediate horn honking when the light turns green. We love our microwaves & insta-pots, our AI, our Alexas, our DoorDash, and are willing to pay for express lanes to get there a few minutes faster. If you've been to Disney lately you know all the variations of "fast passes" to even attempt vacationing faster. We look for faster ways to lose weight, to get places, to move up in our careers, and the list goes on.

Of course, some things are better with time. There's nothing like a chili that's been simmering all day, or the tenderness of BBQ slowly cooked for hours, or that first bite of fresh bread that took days to make. We probably all have memories of walking in the door to a yummy crock pot meal. There are still some things in life that are worth the wait.

As we have talked about throughout this prayer series, God's timing is often very different than ours. We want instant gratification, while God desires a transformational journey that will build our long-term character through perseverance, persistence, and patience. Those 3-P's are character traits born from waiting on God. Like pains of labor, they are often hard fought, refining, and life changing. It's in those persistent long suffering crockpot prayer moments that faith is built, trust is tested, and God's goodness and promises are proven over time. These are the prayers that have simmered & perfectly rendered. Then, just when we think we can't wait any longer to taste of their goodness, God brings them to fruition in His perfect timing. God's timing allows Him to refine our prayers, align our hearts with His, and gives time for our faith to strengthen and grow in the process.

**DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY:** Are you experiencing a season of waiting? Spend time today prayerfully considering what God is trying to teach you. Ask the Spirit to reveal what He's refining in your character through His timing. Thank God for caring more about your long-term character building journey, than in your instant gratification.

## Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Ephesians 6:18** ~ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people..
- **1 Timothy 2:1-4** ~ I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.
- **Luke 15:20-24** ~ But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

## Day 2 - Persistent prayers for lost people

The well-known pastor & evangelist, D.L. Moody, was known for carrying a list of names in his pocket. He felt called to persistently pray over those in his life that didn't know Jesus. He began with a list of 100 names and prayed over them for decades. He must have been quite the persistent prayer, because when he died there were only 4 names left on his list. Guess what?! Those remaining 4 people accepted Christ at his funeral! Now those are some long suffering, persistent prayers! Of course, we might be tempted to say to ourselves, "Well, he was a pastor and that's his job". However, even though Moody was a well known preacher, his day job was a shoe salesman and he never made it past a 5th grade education. God uses those that are obedient to Him through persistent prayer. He can use each of us no matter our occupation, education, or how "good" we think we are (or aren't). We are ALL called to persistently pray for the lost people in our lives. It may take a lifetime of prayer, and we may never see the results, but we are called to never give up hope that the lost would be found.

Take a moment and think about the person in your life farthest away from God. The person that would shock you the most if they showed up at church one Sunday. Maybe it's a person who has gotten angry when you spoke about your faith, or someone so deep in sin or addiction that you feel like they are way too far gone. Now, imagine that person suddenly telling you that they had found Jesus. For some of us, this probably brings tears to our eyes to even imagine it. Maybe you gave up on this person years ago, or maybe you're still praying but it just seems like a lost cause. Persistent intercessory prayers are often unglamorous, slow, and laborious. The people in our lives that we consistently pray for may not know (or care) that their name is being whispered to the heavens each and every day. These intercessory prayers are the prayers that Jesus Himself whispered over us as well. As with anything God calls us to do, this absolutely cannot be done without His strength. Just like the Father in the lost son parable (Luke 15), God never gives up waiting, watching, and preparing to run & embrace them as soon as they turn towards Him.

**DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY:** Take time today to make a list of the people in your life that don't know Jesus. Maybe it's just one name, and maybe it's 100. Either way, spend time praying over the name(s) on your list and put it in a place where you will see it daily. Commit to persistently pray ~ *Lord, soften \_\_\_\_\_'s heart towards you. Allow the seeds of faith to begin to grow. Bring them to a place where they can say YES to you. Help me to be a light for you when I am with them. Give me the strength to never give up praying for their salvation. Thank you God for never giving up on us.*

- Is there a person, or people, in your life that you've given up on? Surrender that to the Lord today and ask Him to help you to keep on persistently praying for the lost in your life. Ask Him to give you a **2** heart like His for those that need to be found.

## Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Ephesians 3:20** ~ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.
- **Romans 12:12** ~ Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
- **Colossians 4:2** ~ Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.
- **Deuteronomy 9:25-29** ~ I lay prostrate before the Lord those forty days and forty nights because the Lord had said he would destroy you. I prayed to the Lord and said, "Sovereign Lord, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin. Otherwise, the country from which you brought us will say, 'Because the Lord was not able to take them into the land he had promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness.' But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm."

## Day 3 - Persistent prayers for lost causes

Many times we give up praying for something because in our limited humanness we can't see how it could ever be resolved. We falsely think that if we can't figure it out, then there must not be a way for God to do it either. Ironically, this is moment where instead of giving up on praying for it, we need to prayerfully and persistently surrender it to the Lord. God can 100% do the impossible (Ephesians 3:20).

What are the lost causes that you've given up on? Ask the Spirit to reveal where you have given up hope as you read these examples.

1. **Relationships** ~ Is there a relationship with a family member, an estranged spouse, or a deeply wounded friendship that you have given up on? Does it feel too far gone, too difficult, or too painful to repair? Persistently keep praying: *Lord, even though I can't see how this relationship could ever be healed, I know that you can do all things. Help me not to give up on this relationship. Help me to wait on your timing for this wound to be healed.*
2. **Personal Strongholds** ~ Is there a long-term sin you are battling, an addiction, a destructive habit, or even long-standing sense of shame that you have tried over and over to free yourself from? Do you feel like there's no way out? Have you given up asking God to free you from it? Persistently keep praying: *Lord, I know you can free me from anything. I know you want me to be free from this. I have faith in your forgiveness and your goodness. Help me to take the steps I need to take in this situation, and not give up hope.*
3. **Physical Circumstances** ~ Is there a chronic illness, pain or physical suffering that you or a loved one has faced for a long time? Is there a financial hardship, or crippling debt, that has lasted for years? Is there a seemingly impossible obstacle in your path? Persistently Pray: *God, give me the strength to endure this hardship. I want to get past this now, but help me to remain faithful as I wait on your timing. Give me wisdom to follow you & to give this over to you.*
4. **Mental Battles** ~ Have you been facing persistent grief, depression or anxiety in your life? Are you facing loneliness, despair, or a loss of purpose in life? Have you felt spiritually dry or empty for a long time? Persistently Pray: *God, strengthen my heart, mind and soul. Help me to feel your presence as I walk through these challenges and to see you as my refuge. Encourage & strengthen me when I want to give up.*

**DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY:** Spend time persistently praying over any lost causes that were revealed to you today. Ask God to strengthen you as you continue to persistently pray over these areas.

- Can you see areas where God might be working in unexpected ways? Is God calling you to trust in His wisdom and in His timing verses your pre-determined outcomes?

## Deeper Dive

- **John 11: 21-23** ~ "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that **even now** God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."
- **Daniel 6:10-11** ~ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.
- **Daniel 3:17-18** ~ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But **even if he does not**, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."
- **Acts 16:6-10** ~ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus **would not allow them to**. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia

## Day 4 - Persistent prayers for lost hope

Have you ever texted someone and found yourself waiting on those three little dots? We know they are responding, but we're stuck waiting for them press "send". What about when the dots disappear or linger for days? Sometimes our prayer life can feel like this too. Maybe you feel like you are stuck with an ellipsis from the Lord, and you want to scream "just push send God!" Sometimes we get so impatient that we prematurely give up, and lose hope & faith in His goodness.

It's important to remember that God's timing has purpose. It could be our hearts need time to align with His or there's some equipping needed before that next step. How do we keep persistently praying and waiting on His response when hope seems lost?

- **EVEN NOW: when everyone has lost hope - remember who God is** - (John 11) Lazarus, Jesus' friend, became very sick and died while waiting for Jesus. Everyone had given up except his sister, Martha. She says two very important words to Jesus in vs 22, "even now". She has faith that God can do ANYTHING, "even NOW", after death. She doesn't give up hope even when it seems impossible. Instead, she faithfully waits for God's response before she stops asking. Her prayers are well worth the wait, because Jesus' response is raising her brother from the dead! ~ *When all hope seems lost, remember who God is!*
- **EVEN IF: the answer might not be in your time - your prayers still matter** - (Daniel 3 & 6) - Daniel knew that Jerusalem would not be re-built in his lifetime because God had given him a prophecy telling him so. Even though he would never see his prayers answered, he continued to pray three times a day with his windows open towards Jerusalem. Daniel was thrown in a fiery furnace AND a lion's den as punishment for his prayers. His prayers might not have lead to him being able to witness Jerusalem re-built, but they mattered. Daniel's prayers lead to an entire nation worshiping the Lord. ~ *When all hope seems lost, your prayers matter. Even IF, they aren't in your time.*
- **EVEN WHEN - God says "no", changes plans, or when we don't understand - obey Him anyways & always** - (Acts 16) - Paul was sent on mission from God to share the Good News. As he was traveling it says God told him not to go into Asia. Even though he might not have understood, Paul obeys and waits for direction. Once God sends him a vision of where to go, Paul leaves immediately. We still read Paul's words in scripture today due to his obedience in listening & obeying the Lord's calling on his life. ~ *When all hope seems lost, trust Him anyways and obey Him always.*

**DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY:** Use these 3 prompts in your prayer journal today: *Even Now, Even If, and Even When*. Write down the areas that you have lost hope in each. Share with your small group, or close friends, one area your are really struggling with. Ask them to join you in persistently continuing to pray when all hope seems lost.

## Deeper Dive

- **Ecclesiastes 4: 9** ~ Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.
- **Galatians 6:2** ~ Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
- **Luke 18: 1-8** ~ Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

## Day 5 - Practicing persistence

If you've ever had a leaky faucet or roof, then you know the sound of a drop in a bucket. You know that tiny little drip over time becomes a splash, and if you leave it long enough it will eventually overflow. This is exactly the way our persistent long term prayers build over time. They may seem like a drop in a bucket right now, but each and every drop matters. It's not the volume of water from a single drop, it's the consistent non-stop flow of drops that comes over time.

How do we keep those drops coming? How can we stay consistent when our prayers feel small and insignificant? How can we keep hope alive when it seems like the bucket will never be filled?

Prayerfully consider these persistent prayer practices this week:

1. **Remember that waiting isn't waste** - We learned yesterday in the story of Daniel, that he waited his whole life and didn't see his persistent prayers answered the way he wanted. Even so, his prayers made a difference in the waiting. God miraculously rescued from the fiery furnace AND a lions den, which resulted in an entire nation worshipping the Lord. When you are waiting for God to answer, prayerfully seek the ways that He is moving, teaching, equipping, or growing your faith as you walk with Him.
2. **Get a prayer partner** - In Ecclesiastes 4 God tells us that two are better than one. In Galatians 6 God tells us we need to help carry each other's burdens. These long term laborious prayers are certainly burdens. We weren't meant to carry these alone. Share your persistent long term prayers with someone you trust, and have them share theirs as well. Intercede for each other daily with continual persistent prayers. Check in regularly and ask: *"What are you still praying for?"* & *"Where have you seen God at work?"*
3. **Fast and pray** - There are times that God calls us to fast while praying for something specific. Jesus Himself fasted, and we see examples throughout scripture where God calls His people to fast and pray during difficult seasons. Fasting trains our minds in perseverance, and can help to align our desires with our dependence on God. Choose a meal, a day, or an activity to fast from. Every time you feel hungry, or the desire to do that activity, use it as a prompt to pray.
4. **Make a "Long Haul" list** - Create a separate list in your prayer journal for persistent "long haul" prayers. Let this list be an invitation for an ongoing partnership with the Lord in prayer. These are the prayers that might take months, years, or even a lifetime to see answered. This can be any of the lost things we spoke about this week, or even big huge dreams that God has placed on your heart. Just as Jesus taught His disciples in Luke 18, we are called to pray and NEVER give up!