

# The passionate intercessor

On prayer and fainting

by Dr. Mell Winger, contributing editor

Three times in my life I have fainted. Each time the pain level was so intense that my body responded with an “I’m out of here” attitude. One of the times I fainted in a doctor’s waiting room in front of a little boy. As I hit the floor drifting off into unconsciousness, the last thing I remember was the boy exclaiming, “Mommy, what’s wrong with that man?!”

Fainting is not only embarrassing, but also pictures an attitude that is fatal to our faith. That’s why Jesus tells us that there are two attitudes that are mutually exclusive—prayer and fainting (Luke 18: 1-8). When I am praying, I am not fainting in my soul. When I am fainting in my soul, I am not praying. It is that simple.

The prayer that never gives up is illustrated in the parable of the widow who kept crying out to the unjust judge for justice.

“Also [Jesus] told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not to turn coward (faint, lose heart, and give up). He said, In a certain city there was a judge . . . And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Protect and defend and give me justice . . .’ And for a time he would not; but later he said to himself, . . . ‘because this widow continues to bother me, I will defend and protect and avenge her, lest she give me intolerable annoyance and wear me out by her continual coming . . .’ Then the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says! And will not [our just] God defend and protect and avenge His elect (His chosen ones), who cry to Him day and night? . . . I tell you, He will defend and protect and avenge them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find [persistence in] faith on the earth?’” (Amplified Version).

The main point of this parable is seen in the introductory line, “pray and not to turn coward (faint, lose heart, and give up).” This parable teaches that God will answer prayer, but the emphasis is on the delayed response. James Thomson insightfully commented that both God and the unrighteous judge delay. God delays in order to build faith, for it is tenacity in the face of disappointment that deepens our faith. It is divine love behind the divine delay, (James Thomson, *The Praying Christ*, London: Tyndale Press, 1954, 14). In this parable Jesus clearly teaches that God doesn’t relate to us as an unconcerned judge, but as a loving, attentive Father.

Have you ever prayed for something long and hard without any visible results? When that happens to me, my thoughts are tempted to slip into a state of questioning the very value of my prayers.

I was recently leading a citywide prayer meeting. In a weak moment, I sincerely asked, “Father, is this really making a difference? Am I just wasting my time praying for the city?” I then opened my Bible and verses about endurance and perseverance jumped off the pages. I quietly closed my Bible. Immediately, a pastor walked up to me boldly declaring, “Mell, whatever you do, don’t stop having these prayer meetings for our city!” I humbly looked up and whispered to the Lord, “I got it. I will never doubt the power of prayer for our city again.”

How can we keep praying when the answer is delayed and everything around us tells us to quit? Here are seven principles that have helped me to keep going in prayer:

- Let the Holy Spirit

modify your request. God is not obligated to answer every prayer in the manner and timing that we would like. He answers prayers prayed in His will (1 John 5: 14-15).

- Let the Holy Spirit modify you.

Sometimes our attitude is detaining the answer (James 4:3). For example, I was recently asking God to change one of my children. My motive? As a Christian leader, I didn't want to be embarrassed and I didn't want to deal with more problems in my life. The Holy Spirit altered my perspective to pray with greater purity. My prayers were now focused on my child's personal relationship with God.

- Meditate

on the life of Christ. Hebrews 12:3 instructs us to consider Jesus so that we don't faint in our souls. Reviewing His model of persistent prayer can propel us to greater endurance.

- Keep your eye on the

goal. Revelation 5:8 describes our prayers as collecting in bowls in heaven. That could mean that there is a quantitative element to our prayers--it takes time to fill the bowls. Obviously, this line of thinking could be distorted with thoughts like, if I pray 50 more times then God will hear me. Instead, this verse teaches us about timing, intensity, and faith levels regarding prayer.

- Find others to

agree with you in faith. Sometimes we need the power of agreement to pray something through (Matthew 18:19-20). The prayer of agreement is one of the greatest gifts Jesus left to His Church. Keep faith reminders around you. By that I mean photos of people you prayed for who received salvation or healing, recorded answers to prayer, scriptures God specifically spoke to you, etc.

- Let the Word of God keep you

inspired. Romans 15:4 says that the Old Testament was written to encourage us toward perseverance. Think of Bible characters like Joseph and Caleb. Their example of successful waiting infuses a persevering attitude in me. Once I was talking with Steve Hawthorne about his passion for training people to pray. I can't forget his wise piece of advice: "We must teach the Church to pray persistent prayers of hope. Sadly, many have reduced prayer down to a request-management system." When that happens, people lose heart and quit praying.

When you are praying for a target that you know is God's will, never, never, give up. Someone has said, "Through perseverance we conquer." C.H. Spurgeon humorously illustrated the power of persistence like this: "By perseverance the snail reached the ark." My wife and I persevered in prayer for 25 to 26 years for her father to come to Christ. Trust me, many times I wanted to quit. Today, he is a believer. The ironic thing is that he now prays for me daily.

Pray or faint? The choice is in our hands.

--Dr.

Mell Winger is the Pastor of Prayer at New Life Church, Colorado Springs, CO. We are blessed to have his column as a regular monthly feature in incenseRising.