

## 10. When God Moves Slowly

Contributed by LG Parkhurst Jr  
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Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. --  
2 Thessalonians 3:1

After the Schaeffers moved to Champéry in 1949, Dr. Otten became their family doctor and friend. He was an unbeliever, and did not have the time to attend Bible studies or talk much with Fran about Christianity. He did not see the value of spiritual concerns as he carried on his busy practice. However, something about the Schaeffer family drew him to them, and his highly intelligent mind began to appreciate Fran's wisdom and approach to faith.

The whole family began praying for Dr. Otten and asked God to help them find a way to reach him with the truth. Finally, Fran thought of asking Dr. Otten if he would read some Bible studies that he would write personally for him, so he could read them at his convenience rather than coming to his home for weekly Bible studies. Dr. Otten agreed; so Edith typed them and Fran delivered them to his office. Then the Holy Spirit began to move on Dr. Otten as he studied Fran's lessons, but he made no commitment to Christ.

As time passed, he got to know the Schaeffer family better. He saw how they cared for the villagers and the foreign students attending the schools around them. He learned they cared much like a doctor would care for his patients. They not only shared their faith, but they practiced their faith by helping the needy. From some of the villagers, he learned about the Christmas Eve when the Schaeffers had taken a complete American Christmas dinner to an old woman who lived in small, drafty, broken-down chalet and lived only on bread and cheese. She was amazed to see foods that she had never eaten before and kept asking, "Is this for me? Is this for me?" They explained the meaning of Jesus' birth, and told her the meal was a gift from God to her for Christmas. As Dr. Otten learned about their expressions of love in the village, he began to take Fran's lessons more seriously. He treated them more as friends, but chose not to follow Christ.

After more than two years, the truth they shared and the example they set influenced Dr. Otten to come to their home for a serious after dinner discussion with Fran. Edith needed to leave the room, and later she wrote home, "I knew they had Bibles out and that Fran was progressing toward asking Dr. Otten for a decision...I prayed fervently that this might be the night of salvation for dear Doctor Otten. I had a strange experience, because as the voices were low, I could not know what was being said, and during my fervent and earnest pleading with the Lord, I suddenly was filled with a peace--and even as I attempted to continue my praying--my mind was filled with the phrase, 'It is finished.' I became convinced that the Lord had answered and the need for that particular prayer was finished." Fran later reported that Dr. Otten had given his life to Christ.

We might ask why the Holy Spirit sometimes takes so long to answer our prayers. Why did God take so long to apply the truth persuasively to Dr. Otten? Could it be that God wanted a deep and personal relationship of mutual love and respect to be built between Dr. Otten and the Schaeffers? God knew only much time and many prayers would forge that association into a thing of lasting value. In praying for others, we often need to look beyond the immediate concern to learn why God will sometimes take longer than we expect to answer our prayers.

As we think of why we must often pray a long time for some things, we need to remember that receiving speedy answers all the time can make us arrogant and fill us with pride. We can come to believe that God's answers are our accomplishments, that the conversion of sinners is our work, that our faith is the basic reason for God's answers instead of His love for us and others. We can come to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. When God moved and Dr. Otten was converted, the Schaeffers praised God instead of complimenting themselves.

The time that Fran and Edith spent praying for Dr. Otten and preparing his lessons drew their hearts closer to him. He could sense their sincere love for him and saw their concern for his salvation. He was not just another number to be won to the Lord, but a real person whose eternal salvation meant much to them. Their prayers enabled him to sense the personal love and concern of Jesus Christ for him through them. Much prayer for sinners brings about a bond of unity and love that nothing else will.

If God had answered their prayers quickly, Fran might never have finished the many Bible lessons he wrote for just one person. Eventually, Edith typed these lessons over and over again for others, and God has used them to lead countless numbers to saving faith. Hence, we learn that God's delay will often bring blessings far beyond the original intention of our prayers. Many have been blessed because Dr. Otten waited until 1952 to commit his life to Jesus Christ.

When God is slow in answering our prayers, we need to keep on praying until we receive a yes or no answer. When God is slow in answering our prayers, we need to ask Him if He wants us to do more than pray. God inspired Fran to write his Bible lessons for Dr. Otten, and then led him to read them. When God is slow in answering our prayers, we can pray that more people will be blessed through His delay than if He had answered quickly. It may be that God wants to spread the gospel net wider and wider as we pray, and that He is slow only as we count slowness.

Sometimes God will reveal directly to us by His Spirit that our prayers have been answered, and then we trust in faith that He has heard. But Edith did not stop praying until the Holy Spirit gave her the sense, "It is finished." If we stop praying too soon, God may choose not to complete the work we have been praying to see accomplished. Some work in us and others He will accomplish only through much prayer. If God removes our burden to pray for someone and gives us peace, we need to praise Him for this special revelation as well as the answer. Edith did not seek the experience God gave her regarding Dr. Otten's conversion. He spoke to her in an unusual way that would strengthen her faith and teach her more about the power of prayer in the conversion of sinners.

As we pray, God will sometimes give us strong feelings for someone's salvation. As we pray for them, we will draw nearer to God and to the person God has placed on our hearts. When the person is converted, we will rejoice in God for what He has done. These experiences in prayer flow naturally from the benevolent concern for others God has placed in our hearts. Satan cannot counterfeit these benevolent, spiritual experiences, for he is the bringer of death, not the giver of life. Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, encourage me when I am tempted to give up and not pray for others--especially for their salvation. Show me anything more that I may need to do besides pray, and then give me the courage and wisdom to do it. Show me the abundance of blessings that can flow from my prayers, so I will pray more and more and praise you for hearing my feeble words. In the power of the Holy Spirit, help me to bless as many people as I can by everything I do. From time to time, please encourage me by showing me some of the effects through history of the work I do in your Way and Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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