

24. Prayer and Self-Examination

Contributed by LG Parkhurst Jr
 Thursday, 24 January 2008
 Last Updated Thursday, 24 January 2008

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. -- 2 Thessalonians 1:11,12

Living by faith and prayer does not guarantee that everything will go smoothly and that we will receive immediate results from every prayer. When we learn about the Schaeffers' prayer lives and others at L'Abri, we do see God sometimes answering a prayer on the very day they prayed. In most of these cases, God had prepared the answer in advance and then by His Spirit inspired them to pray for that thing or a specific amount of money so He could assure them that He was endorsing their ministry by meeting their needs. But if some begin to think that God will always automatically or mechanically work this immediately in answer to their prayers, or that He answers immediately because they are special or more faithful or more holy or more Spirit-filled or have placed God under obligation to them, God may need to teach them that His answers always flow from His grace by delaying His answers and using other ways to humble them.

And yet, Paul wrote that we should pray and work so God will find us and others "worthy of His calling." Our days of prayer or fasting should include our pleading for God's help so we and others "may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). When God delays in answering our prayers, we need to persist in prayer, but also examine our attitudes and actions to see whether or not we are still in the faith. Days of fasting should include obeying Paul's admonition: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5). If we think our prayers are not being heard by God, we need to examine our lives and ask ourselves:

• Am I still living worthy of His calling?

• In making these requests, am I asking God to fulfill good purposes?

• Are my actions and prayers prompted by faith?

• Do I really want the Lord Jesus glorified in me?

• Do I have good reasons to pray for this courageously (see 1 Chronicles 17:25)?

We need to be careful, however, that we do not think all delays to our prayers indicate we are unworthy or have committed some great sin and that God is punishing us by being slow to grant our requests. L'Abri has sometimes gone for more than a month with funds so low that Worker allowances could not be paid and more water had to be added to the soup to feed hungry students and guests; and yet, this has not meant that someone in the community had sinned or that they needed to find "the Achan in the camp" (see Joshua 7 and 22:20). They used the delays to draw closer to the Lord and each other, and encouraged one another to spend more time in prayer. Some would sign up to pray for 2 hours instead of 30 minutes, so the delays brought great spiritual blessings. In some cases, after weeks of prayer, God would inspire the one who prayed the extra hour to pray for a specific amount of money and then send that amount in that day's mail. God would use the delay and His specific answer in order to encourage those He was teaching to persevere in prayer and look for other reasons for His delays rather than think they lacked faith or had sinned.

In the Scriptures, we learn that Daniel was a righteous man who prayed several times a day, but at least on one occasion he had to pray for twenty-one days to get his answer because a demon had wrestled with the angel God had sent with his answer (see Daniel 10). We need to remember that with every prayer we enter a spiritual battle, and many delays will have no relationship at all to our faith or character. The Book of Job also teaches this lesson, for even though he was blameless he suffered.

As we think of why we may need to persist in prayer for certain things, sometimes for years, we need to remember that God does not always prepare people in advance to meet our needs in answer to prayer. Indeed, a speedy response may be the exception to the rule with regard to prayer. Otherwise, our prayers could lose their significance. Many times God will only move people to answer our prayers as we pray and as we pray more prayers. In some mysterious way, the process He uses to motivate people, and the number of people He motivates to send money or food or clothing or books

or whatever we need, depends on how many prayers people pray and for how long they pray and by how many people actually pray. All of this has some significance in the spiritual battle that we do not see clearly. When God answers prayers, He builds up faith and encourages as many people as possible, and His delays often allow Him to bless and influence far more people than He otherwise could. So, even as we pray in desperation at times, we can praise God and ask Him to use the times of delay to bring more glory to himself and bless more people when we receive the results of our prayers. Through delays, God teaches how important our prayers really are in the supernatural realm and in history.

Sometimes our answers to prayer are delayed, because those God is motivating are refusing to obey His leading. The sin of others, rather than our sins or the community's sins, may be the cause of our continuing to suffer. And yet, the Holy Spirit needs to point out this failure to someone rather than our saying, "Our suffering or lack is the result of you not giving us your money." L'Abri has demonstrated that the Holy Spirit is perfectly capable of moving people to help us without our trying to make people feel guilty or manipulate them in other ways.

Sometimes God wants to meet our needs differently from the way we expect, and on His timetable instead of ours. When L'Abri desperately needed more room, they prayed for about \$17,000.00 to buy Chalet les Sapins, which was very close to them. They had several days of fasting and prayer in one month alone, but God said "Not yet." He allowed a group with Hindu-type teachings to buy it instead. But the very day L'Abri learned it had been sold to someone else, they received a check for \$2,000.00 "for more room," which they used to enlarge Chalet les Mélézes. If the check had come a day sooner, they might have mistaken God's leading and bought Sapins then. With Hindu teachings taking place nearby, the L'Abri Praying Family persevered in prayer with greater fervency. And some who were drawn first to Sapins found Christ as Savior at L'Abri. They prayed for 12 years to buy Chalet les Sapins, but were not allowed to until after the woman who bought it was "hopefully converted" as she lay dying and Edith spoke to her once again about Jesus Christ, the Savior. God will sometimes delay an answer to prayer so someone else can be converted, and meet our needs in other ways in the interim. Prayer

Dear Father, please keep me from getting discouraged, if others accuse me of lack of faith when I pray and the results seem delayed. Teach me why you delay in answering sometimes, so I can teach others about your faithfulness and love. Amen.

© Copyright L. G. Parkhurst, Jr. Revised Edition 2008
Write For Permission To Reprint Any Parts Or Chapters
Use the Contact Us address or e-mail address form on tihs website.