



Week Five: Persistent

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Galatians 6:9

Day 29: Introduction to Week 5

To give up or to keep going? Often both paths seem like terrible options. Both hurt. Neither appear like they will get us what we want. Yet, we need to do *something*. Choosing not to act at all is choosing to give up. So, what should we do? What does God want us to do?

When it comes to prayer, what does God want us to do when nothing seems to be happening in response to our prayers? When we are waiting on that breakthrough, what do we do? Give up? Keep praying?

If we're honest, there is only one logical answer. If we give up, there is no hope. If we keep praying, even though it might seem impossible, at least there is a chance. As long as we are still moving, grasping, asking, the breakthrough could come.

God wants us to be persistent in our prayers. He doesn't want us to give up. And the good news is that He doesn't leave us alone in this struggle to persist. We are given all the help we need to keep going. To keep trusting. To keep praying.

Group Video Discussion

Watch Video 5 Persistent

1. God asks us to pray _____ and works in _____ to persistent prayer.
2. The _____ of persistent prayer is just as important as the _____.
3. Through persistence, God will lead us to the _____ that we need.

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Could you relate to any of the examples given in the video?
2. What biblical examples of persistent prayer come to mind?
3. Have you ever persisted in prayer for a long time until God answered? What happened? What door opened? Was it what you expected?
4. Has there been a time in your life when you decided to stop praying? What happened?
5. For what are you persisting now?

Personal Daily Devotions

Day 30

God's persistence precedes ours

"...He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
Philippians 1:6

Sometimes we want to give up persistently praying for a breakthrough because we believe the outcome is simply out of reach. We think, "I've been praying about this for a long time and nothing has happened." Our loved one will never come to know Christ, or we will never get *that* job even though we are more than qualified, or we will never have the relationship or marriage that others seem to have, or our church will never see masses of people give their lives to Christ.

So why keep at it?

One reason is because God never gives up on us. He has promised to complete the work He began in us which, if we are willing to admit it, is quite the task! God has every reason to write us off, and yet He has decided to stand with us to the end.

Whatever we are facing is not as difficult as God's work in us to turn us from sinners to saints. Since He has committed Himself to that work, why not commit ourselves to His work through our prayers? We trust Him to bring us safely to moralistic perfection in eternity even though there are many days that could make us believe we will never make it. Why not also trust Him to bring about the best possible outcome in all other circumstances?

Wherever you have given up hope, turn to God and talk with Him about it now. Even if you've brought it before him a million times in the past, bring it to Him again. And again. He has never given up on you, so don't give up on Him.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

If God has never and will never give up on you, what reason could you have to give up on your prayers to Him?

Is there anything you believe to be more seemingly impossible than your transformation from sinner to saint? Are you trusting that God will definitely complete that work?

Are there any specific prayers that you have given up praying because you haven't seen God answering? Write them out below and lift them up to God again.

Day 31

God's persistence joins ours

“But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

Romans 8:25-26

Sometimes all it takes to make it through a struggle is to know that we are not alone. Having someone in the trenches with us can change even the direst of circumstances into bearable ones. Children instinctively grab the hand of a parent when they are scared because they don't want to face the fear alone, and they believe the parent will know what to do.

As Christians, God never leaves us alone. He is in every trench, every circumstance, and every fear praying with us. Even when we aren't praying, He is. Even when we don't feel like we have the strength to pray for that breakthrough one more time, God never falters.

Seeing His persistence can help our own. Knowing He is laboring in prayer with us can give us the strength to carry on ourselves. When this passage describes how God's Spirit groans for us, it does not depict a passing concern for our welfare. God feels our pains, our hopes, and our longings perhaps even more deeply than we do, and His response is prayer.

Since we have such a faithful Father who holds our hand through every battle, binding Himself to us in prayer, let us continue to cling to Him even if all we can muster are the same wordless groans.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

When are the times you typically feel like giving up in prayer?

On whom can you most depend to pray for you when you are in the middle of one of those times?

If God Himself has promised to pray for you, have you ever asked Him to pray for you like you'd ask a friend to pray for you? Have you ever thanked Him for praying for you?

Day 32

Peace after struggle

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” He said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.” Going a little farther, He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him. “Abba, Father,” He said, “everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.”

Mark 14:34-36

This is one moment when it seems like even Jesus didn't have peace. He knew (better than we will ever understand) how it would feel to pay for the sin of the world on the cross, and the thought of it was tearing Him apart.

So what did He do?

He prayed. When Jesus was struggling with matters as deep as heaven and hell, eternal separation, and atonement for the sum total of all evil, He went to the Father. He pleaded His case, and He listened for God's response.

When He began praying, He was wrapped in turmoil, but by the time He finished, He had peace. Even though the exact same set of events would still unfold, now He had peace.

This is what persistence in prayer will always produce. Peace. The circumstances may not change, but if we wrestle with God long enough, He will calm the storm of our hearts. God invites us to yell and argue, to be angry and desperate, and even to pitch a fit.

But He wants us to do it all with Him in prayer. As He invites us into that type of raw relationship, He wants us to invite Him into the same. He says, “Give me your real thoughts, but let me give you mine as well.” When we listen long enough to hear His voice, we find peace.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

How raw have you been with God? Have you ever told Him that you are angry? Have you ever told Him that you don't know how to trust Him?

How can you invite God to be that raw with you? Is there anything "off limits" that you don't want God to tell you? Is there anything He could ask you to do that you would say no?

Strength After Waiting

“Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted, but they who wait for 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.”

Isaiah 40:30-31

There is no way to have persistence in prayer unless we are waiting. There would be no reason for it. Only when we wait do we need persistence.

But oh how we hate to wait! Days extend to weeks, which drag into months, which form into years, and yet, we still wait. From our perspective, it doesn't seem like we should need to wait because other people aren't waiting. Other people seem to get exactly what they want the moment they want it. More frustrating is when we see other people get exactly what *we* want without much waiting at all.

Why them? Why not us? Why not now?

Isaiah tells us. Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. God makes us wait in order to give us strength. While we can sometimes believe this verse promises the outcome we desire, it does not. It only makes one promise – strength to those who wait. More specifically, it promises strength to those who *wait on the Lord*. Strength may not come if we are simply waiting for our desired outcome.

But for those of us who want the Lord more than we want the chips to fall in our favor, strength is on its way. There are times when God withholds what we want in order to change us into the type of people who only want Him. When He achieves that in us, only then can we run without growing weary and walk without becoming faint.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

What do you find is the hardest part about waiting? Not having what you want? Not knowing if you will get what you want? Seeing others have what you want? Something else?

Do you believe it is worth it for God to postpone His answer in order that you may find Him in a deeper and fuller way?

Day 34

Response After Crying

“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?”

Luke 18:7

God will break through. Why He lingers can certainly confuse and frustrate us at times, but what He has promised will come to pass. Justice for those who cry out to Him – who continue to cry out to Him in persistence.

Where do you see that our world is wrong? Where do you see that our church is wrong? Where do you see that your family and group of friends is wrong? Where do you see that you are wrong?

Have you stopped crying out to God about it? It’s time to start again. God waits for appointed times, but He also waits for our prayers. He tells us we *have* not because we *ask* not.

In the end, He will wrap up the sky like a scroll, wipe every tear from every eye, and execute perfect justice upon all of history. Everything that has been wrong will be set right.

If we know this is what God has planned, let us join with Him in bringing it about through our prayers.

“Lord, come quickly, and do not delay. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. May Your justice come and be a light to the nations, and may Your righteousness draw speedily near as we wait in hope of Your salvation.”

Your Personal Reflection and Application

For what do you cry out for day and night?

If you aren't currently crying out day and night, what would make you pray like that? What do you see that is horribly wrong in the world, in our church, in your family, or in yourself?

Application Day: Reminder Needed?

Persistence takes more than one day. Think of Ralphie in the movie *A Christmas Story*, who worked and worked and worked to convince his parents or Santa or anyone to give him a BB gun for Christmas. His persistence took many forms and was spread out over a long period of time.

So while we can begin persistence today, we won't come anywhere near to accomplishing it in just a day or two.

They say it takes weeks to develop a new habit. While the exact number of days is a bit hazy and differs from person to person, we know it takes longer than we would like – meaning we are going to need some reminders to keep going.

Over the course of this last week, God has probably prompted you to pray more frequently for some specific things. If you have a phone, take it out and set a daily, weekly, or bi-weekly reminder to pray. When your reminder alerts you, take a moment to pray for those specific things. Plan to do this for at least a year or until you receive God's answer.

If you aren't familiar with setting a reminder on your phone, have someone help you do it. Or you can create a prayer event for yourself on a website like Evite that will automatically send reminders to you through email. Or you can break out your pencil and put a post-it by your toothbrush or schedule meetings with God in the calendar you use, in order to pray through the next year.

Whatever you do to remind yourself, take these appointments seriously. If you miss one, be sure to reschedule it the same as you would reschedule any other vitally critical meeting.