

I wanted to share a topic that would be appropriate for a couple of weeks, since the boys and I will be taking off soon for a much-needed vacation. I can't think of anything better than to leave you with the subject of prayer. The following is from Rick Warren's Daily Hope. I hope you will enjoy the read, but more importantly, I hope you will learn more about the purpose of prayer, and why you need to pray without ceasing. God bless you and remember that I continue to keep you in my prayers.

Why be persistent?

Why is it that answers sometimes don't come immediately?

Why should I keep on praying when the answer doesn't come in my timetable?

A purpose of prayer is to turn our focus toward God and away from our circumstances—Take our eyes off the problem and fix our eyes on Him, so we can talk **to** Him and not **at** him. Prayer will help us maintain a positive outlook of hope, gratitude, patience, and peace in the midst of our trial.

Col. 4:2 says *Prayer does not require eloquence, but earnestness.*

Prayer is essential. The Bible says, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Phil. 4:6-7

Begin by Praising God. Why should we praise God? Because he is worthy of our praise. Matthew 6:9 (TEV) *This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven: May your holy name be honored; We can all find things in our lives for which we can praise him.*

Pray with a clean heart. Confess your sins and ask God to bring to your mind any unconfessed sin so you can deal with it with Him, and He will hear your prayer.

Isa. 59:2 *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.* Also see 1 Peter 3:7.

Even when we're 'at our wits end' and don't know how or what to pray...

Remember, as believers—those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior—God sends his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, into our lives. When we don't know what to pray, the Holy Spirit will pray *for* us!

Romans 8:26 (Msg): *God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter; He [the Holy Spirit] does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans.*

Be forgiving. In your life, you will be hurt by others; sometimes intentionally; sometimes unintentionally. How you handle that hurt determines your happiness. The Bible says forgive and be forgiven. In fact, Jesus says "if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done." (Matthew 6:15, TEV) They're inter-related. You might say, "I just can't forgive that person! They hurt me too badly." If that's the case, then I hope you never sin.

For your own sake, let go of the past. If somebody hurt you, let go of it, release them. That's one of the values of prayer. It helps you unload. Forgiveness is the only way to get rid of the past. Forgive them and let it go. Get on with life. Forgiveness erases the videotape of that hurt memory that keeps playing over and over in your mind. You must learn to forgive. If you're struggling with forgiving, tell God you want to forgive but need his help in letting go.

God already knows your needs. Matt. 6:7-8 [Jesus speaking] *"When you pray, don't babble on and on as some people do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. ⁸Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!"*

God wants us to see Him alone as the source of our needs. When we have to pray about something over and over, who do we look to? We look to the Lord. Persistent prayer focuses our attention. Have you discovered that we like to look to everybody else to solve our problem except the Lord? We look to our friends, we look to our family, we look to counselors, we look to the government, we look to anybody—except the Lord. **God often delays an answer to force you to focus on Him.**

Keep on praying when there's no answer because persistent praying helps me focus on God. God wants me to remember that He alone is the source of my answers to prayer. The Bible says in Philippians 4:19, *"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."*

- If your request is wrong, God says "no."
- If your timing is wrong, God says "slow."
- If your character is wrong, God says "grow."
- If your request is right, God says "go."

Persistent praying also clarifies my requests. A delayed answer a lot of times gives me time to clarify 'what do I really want?' Time separates deep longings from mere whims. I've prayed for things and sometimes during the delay decided I didn't really want or need them after all.

God sometimes delays the answer to test you. It's not that He doesn't want to give it to you, He wants to know if you really want it. Do you want it enough to keep praying?

Jeremiah 29:13 *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

Nothing worthwhile is accomplished with half-hearted prayers.

Persistent prayer will prepare me for the answer. God usually wants to do more than you are praying for. Surprise! God wants to do it **greater**, and He needs time to get you ready for it. There are changes God wants to make in you.

Ephesians 3:20 *"Now glory be to God, who by his mighty power at work within us, is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes."*

It's been said, "Prayer changes things." Of course, we know it is God who does the changing. But praying changes you. And God is more interested in you than He is in circumstances. Often as soon as you've made the change in your life the doors of heaven open, and the answer comes. Expect a miracle.

Persistent praying strengthens and develops your faith. A mark of maturity is how long can you wait.

Galatians 6:9 *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."*

God is saying, "Hang on! Be patient! The harvest is coming. Don't give up! Look up!"

And pray "according to Your will, God." *This is the confidence we have in approaching God --that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us* 1 John 5:14.

We should always desire and strive to be in the *center* of His will.

Recruit others to help in prayer support. Contact other believers and ask them to be praying for you. Be proactive; you'll otherwise be depriving yourself of prayer support. Let others be blessed by both involving them and keeping them updated.

Keep a Prayer List. Write down your prayer requests and note by each item the date you began praying; you'll see God answer your prayers as you trust him fully.

Pray Believing. The person who asks trustingly does not determine how God will answer, but he or she can be confident in knowing that God will answer. The person who asks doubtfully should not expect to receive anything from the Lord because the request was not genuine. When our loyalties are straightened out, God's answers to prayer are restored to us (see James 1:6-7).

With God all things are possible (see Matt. 19:26).

Listen for God's responses. God speaks to us through His Word, through prayer, devotionals, through Christian speakers, Christian radio, and TV, through circumstances and events he brings into our lives, and through nature itself, his beautiful creation.

When you receive an answer and wonder about it, ask God to confirm it.

The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer. So, I encourage you to take time daily to focus on God, reading His word, The Bible, and talking to Him. Relate this to dating, where we spend time with someone to learn more about them, to get to know them better. Likewise, we need to spend time with God daily to get to know Him better.

In Happy moments, PRAISE GOD; in Difficult moments, SEEK GOD; in Quiet moments, WORSHIP GOD; in Painful moments, TRUST GOD; in Every moment, THANK GOD

(1 Thes. 5:16). No matter what, we should always pray, as Jesus did, "Not my will, God, but Yours" (Mark 14:36)

As we approach the celebration of the birth of our nation, it is my prayer that we reflect on the sacrifices that were made on our behalf so many years ago. Our forefathers didn't sign the Declaration of Independence because they had nothing else better to do. Our predecessors were an oppressed people, who just wanted to be free to worship God without someone else telling them how to do it. They wanted to be free to make their dreams for their families a reality. Dreams to farm their own land, dreams of building homes, towns, and businesses. Small or grand, these ideals were the beginning of what we now celebrate. A beautiful America, where God shed His grace on thee.

May we all try to imagine what it must have been like back then and try to rediscover hearts on fire for what is right and what is pure. May we live our lives in such a way that brings pride and glory back to God, and once again be the light on a hill to a darkened world. Happy Birthday, America... Land that I love.

