Waiting for Answers

Charles F. Stanley - In Touch Ministries
For everything, a season, and in everything, prayer.
Fervent Prayers

It’s so hard to wait. “How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?” wrote King David thousands of years ago (Psalm 13:1). Even as a man after God’s own heart, he, too, clearly felt the sting of unanswered prayers at times throughout his life.

But in those seasons of longing and long-suffering, we, like David, can and ought to continue to take our hopes and tears to God in prayer. Our heavenly Father is always ready and willing to listen to the petitions of His children and to care for those His Son sacrificed His life to save.

Constant prayer can help preserve our faith even in the toughest of circumstances. Although we never know when or how God will act, our dedication to prayer proclaims our faith in the only One who can meet our needs and reveals our belief that “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16, NKJV).

God’s Word is clear: persistence pays off when it comes to prayer. That’s why we’ve compiled this booklet full of Dr. Stanley’s teachings on the subject. We pray it will help you in this season of life as you wait on God to answer your prayers and lead you in His way, in His time.

From your friends at
In Touch Ministries
WAITING ON GOD

Of all the principles I’ve learned in the Scriptures, the one that stands out to me the most is the concept of waiting upon the Lord. This is a critical issue because God’s will includes His timing. He has an awesome plan mapped out for each of us, but He only reveals it one step at a time. When we follow His plan, He is glorified, and we are fulfilled. However, if we don’t seek the Lord’s guidance each day, we’ll end up automatically following our own course. As a result, we’ll be confused and dissatisfied because we’ve missed what God intended to give us and do through us.

The wisest thing we can do is connect with almighty God every day. Although we have already been united with the Father through Jesus Christ at salvation, we still need to communicate with Him daily in order to develop an intimate relationship. Instead of only coming to Him in times of emergency or need, we should begin each morning by asking Him to help us walk wisely, not lagging behind or getting ahead of His plan.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WAIT ON THE LORD?

King David was a man who chose to live according to the Lord’s plan and schedule. Although he was anointed at the age of 16, he didn’t actually become the King of Israel until 14 years later. God’s promise was sure, but the timing of its fulfilment was unknown. David had to wait, and much of that time was spent hiding and running from King Saul, who was continually trying to kill him. Here are a few principles that we can glean from his season of waiting:

- **GOD USES DELAYS TO PREPARE US FOR HIS PLANS.** David learned valuable lessons during those difficult years that equipped him for his future role as king. In the same way, God uses our hurts, losses, and disappointments to produce character qualities we’ll need to accomplish His plan for our lives.
• **WAITING ON GOD IS AN ACTIVE STILLNESS.**
  It doesn’t mean we abruptly stop all activity and do nothing. When the Lord is bringing about a change in our lives, He wants us to continue being productive while watching and waiting for further direction.

• **WAITING ON GOD IS PURPOSEFUL.**
  We often think the Lord’s plan for our lives is on the other side of the delay, but in His eyes, the process of waiting is an essential part of His purpose. Knowing this allows us to wait with a sense of direction and expectancy.

• **GOD KNOWS WHEN WE’RE WILLING TO ACCEPT HIS ANSWERS.**
  If we’ll listen, He will reveal the next step when we’re ready. If He delays, we must recognize that His timing is perfect, and the best doesn’t always come quickly.

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Cut out this helpful list of scriptures to encourage you while you wait for answers to your prayers.

**HOW SHOULD WE WAIT?**

**PATIENTLY**
Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him.

"PSALM 37:7"

**QUIETLY**
My soul waits in silence for God only.

"PSALM 62:1"

**TRUSTINGLY**
Do not fret. » PSALM 37:7

**EXPECTANTLY**
I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD.

"PSALM 27:13"

**COURAGEOUSLY**
Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart take courage.

"PSALM 27:14"

**STANDING ON GOD’S WORD**
I wait for the LORD . . . and in His word do I hope.

"PSALM 130:5"
UNANSWERED PRAYERS

Sometimes we don't get the answers we're looking for because we're not asking the right questions.

WE FOCUS ON OUR REQUESTS RATHER THAN ON GOD.

Sometimes, in our deep concern over the issues we bring to the Lord, we lose sight of Him. Our thoughts are focused on the needs and not on the One who can meet them. We must remember that we are talking to almighty God and should therefore center our thoughts on His character, power, and promises, expressing our confidence, gratitude, and praise to Him.

WE PRAY WITHOUT THE WORD OF GOD.

In John 15:7 Jesus said, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” When Scripture fills our hearts and minds, our thoughts and prayer requests align with God’s will, and our faith grows strong. But if we neglect God’s Word, there is no light to guide our path or to give us understanding and assurance (Ps. 119:105). Together, prayer and the Word of God should be our priority. As we open the Word, we find guidance regarding how to pray, and as we pray, our understanding of Scripture increases.

WE WANT TO HELP GOD ANSWER OUR PRAYERS.

After laying our petitions before the Lord, too often we don’t leave them with Him, trusting that He will answer them in the best way at the right time. If the answer doesn’t come as soon as we’d like, our faith in Him begins to waver, and we try to fix the situation ourselves. In reality, feelings of helplessness are good because they remind us that God alone has the power to intervene and the wisdom to know what’s best. The acid test of faith is being willing to keep our hands off the situation until God deals with it. Our attempts to help Him only result in confusion and compounded problems.

Sometimes it’s all too easy to fall into these ineffective patterns of prayer. But with a little effort, we can transform our prayer lives. So let us come to God in faith, knowing that He is and always will be in control, as we put our focus on Him and pray according to the guidance of Scripture. Then, we can watch as our heavenly Father works in great and mighty ways in our lives.
WHAT IF WE FAIL TO WAIT FOR GOD’S TIMING?

When we insist on going our own way, we can experience unwanted consequences.

- WE STEP OUT OF THE WILL OF GOD.
  Disregarding the Lord’s clear direction is an act of rebellion and will result in His loving discipline.

- WE DELAY HIS BLESSINGS.
  When we go our own way, God doesn’t bless our disobedience.

- WE BRING PAIN AND SUFFERING UPON OURSELVES.
  Trying to adjust the Lord’s plan by stepping ahead or doing what we deem reasonable never improves the situation, but instead, causes more problems.

- WE EXPERIENCE CONFUSION.
  When we don’t follow God’s will, we wonder what’s happening in our lives.

- WE CAUSE OTHER PEOPLE TO SUFFER.
  A decision to sidestep the Lord’s way affects others because they share in the consequences of our disobedience.

- WE SUBJECT OURSELVES TO FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES.
  If we don’t wait for the Lord to provide in His way and time, we may make unwise decisions we can’t afford.
OUR CHOICE

When confronted with delays, we have three options. Every time God requires us to wait, we can respond in the following ways:

1. MANIPULATE THE SITUATION. We’re often tempted to maneuver around obstacles until we get our way. The problem is that our manipulations place us outside of God’s will, and we eventually have to live with the negative consequences that follow.

2. QUIT PRAYING. When the Lord doesn’t answer our requests, we can simply give up and never pray about it again. However, some of the best things in life require the longest waiting period.

3. WAIT AND WATCH GOD WORK IN OUR BEHALF. After making our requests, we could choose to trust the Lord, let Him accomplish His will in His own time, and watch Him work it all out.

THE BLESSING

God loves us and has promised to meet our needs, but He doesn’t give us everything we desire when we want it. Otherwise, He’d take second place in our lives because our main concern would be the things He could do for us. Furthermore, our requests aren’t always in accordance with His will. Even when they align with His plans, we may have to wait until they fit His schedule. Instead of seeing delays as obstacles, we should look at them as loving interventions of our heavenly Father. By rushing ahead, we miss His very best blessings.

Isaiah 64:4 tells us that the Lord acts in behalf of those who wait for Him. Since He’s omniscient, He knows all about us and works in every aspect of our lives to accomplish His will and conform us to the likeness of His Son. Throughout our lifetimes, He’s committed to removing anything that hinders His good purposes, adding what truly blesses us, and guiding us through every situation.
WHAT CAN WE EXPECT AS WE WAIT FOR GOD’S TIMING?
WHEN WE WAIT UPON THE LORD, BELIEVING HIS WAY IS BEST, HE’LL FULFILL THESE PROMISES IN OUR LIVES:

• **GOD WILL SHOW HIS GOODNESS TO US.** Lamentations 3:25-26
• **HE WILL ANSWER OUR PRAYERS.** Psalm 40:1-3
• **WE’LL SEE THE FULFILLMENT OF OUR FAITH WHEN WE OBEY HIM.** Isaiah 49:23
• **HE WILL HELP US CONQUER OUR STRUGGLES.** Psalm 37:9, 34
• **WE’LL EXPERIENCE GOD’S PEACE IF WE WALK IN HIS WILL.** Philippians 4:4-7

Finding Answers
Are you convinced that God will answer your requests, or do you feel uncertain or frustrated? Once we have entered into a relationship with the Father through Jesus Christ, we can confidently expect answers to our prayers when we:

**MAKE OUR REQUESTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH GOD’S WILL.**
This means we should ask for those things that are consistent with His character, nature, desires, purposes, and plans for our lives or the lives of those for whom we intercede. He will not give us anything that is motivated by selfishness, exalts our pride, contradicts His Word, or leads us into sin.

**ASK IN FAITH, BELIEVING AND EXPECTING HIM TO ANSWER.**
James 1:5-7 tells us, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.” God’s promises in His Word are the basis for our confidence in His willingness to answer our requests. However, if we dwell on our feelings or a sense of unworthiness, doubts will soon overtake faith.
ASK IN JESUS’ NAME.

Oftentimes, the phrase “in Jesus’ name” is tacked onto the end of our prayers as if it were a magic formula guaranteeing an answer. But that is not at all what it means to pray in Jesus’ name. It actually means that our prayers align with Christ’s nature, teaching, and will. Rather than trying to persuade God to answer our requests according to what we desire, prayer in Jesus’ name seeks His will and glory above our own.

ASK WITH A PURE HEART.

If we tolerate or ignore known sin and disobedience in our lives, we have no reason to expect God to hear and answer our prayers (Isa. 59:1–2). That’s why it’s so important to confess and repent of sin when it happens. Having a pure heart means we are committed to being obedient to Christ in every way and living a holy life. However, holiness as applied to mankind doesn’t mean perfection, but sensitivity to the Spirit’s conviction and willingness to deal with sin immediately.

How confident are you that the Lord will answer your prayers? If you need to work on one of these particular areas, start making it a regular practice in your life. Then you’ll find your prayers will be more effective and you’ll develop a richer, more fulfilling relationship with your heavenly Father.

A PRAYER FOR BLESSING

DEAR HEAVENLY FATHER,

It can be so hard to wait. We long to see You fulfill the desires You put in our hearts, redeem the broken parts of our lives, and save the souls of our lost loved ones. We pray fervently that we would keep the faith and trust You in all things; and we promise to never stop bringing our concerns, hopes, and dreams to Your throne of grace. We wait with praise and thanksgiving for Your answers to come. Amen.

IF YOU’D LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, VISIT INTOUCH.ORG/GOD OR CALL 1-800-789-1473.
Abraham (originally called Abram) was a man who walked by faith, and his story is recorded in 14 chapters of the Bible. He was chosen by the Lord to be the recipient of amazing promises and become the father of the Jewish race. This may seem like an unlikely choice because Abraham came from a pagan society and may have been an idol worshipper. However, we must realize that God’s choices are based on His great wisdom and may not always make sense from our perspective.

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (vv. 1-3).

LISTEN

After not having spoken to anyone for hundreds of years, God came to Abraham with a message that included instructions and promises, some of which may have seemed utterly impossible. It sounded like God intended to use Abraham to change the entire world! Yet despite the incredible nature of this message, Abraham listened, and believed.

We too must learn to listen to the Lord if we are going to walk with Him by faith. As Christians, our goal is to follow Jesus, and that requires knowing what He wants us to do. Instead of planning our days and rushing off to achieve our agendas, we should take some time each day to seek the Lord’s guidance through His Word and prayer. This doesn’t mean we can’t make plans, but we should always present them to God and ask what He would have for us each day. If we don’t listen to the Lord, we won’t follow Him, and as a result, we’ll make wrong decisions that will turn out to be costly or painful. God speaks to us internally through the Holy Spirit and His Word, guiding us in our walk with Christ.

TRUST

Abraham trusted God, though the command to leave home must have been difficult to obey given the destination was unknown and the promises appeared unlikely. The proof of Abraham’s faith is seen in the fact that he followed God’s instructions. He was 75 years old when he left Haran (v. 4), yet he was still willing to undertake the journey. Furthermore,
the trip was long and dangerous, but Abraham believed God would fulfill His promises and bring him to the land He’d chosen.

Like Abraham, we don’t always know where the Lord is leading us, and if we doubt Him, we may argue or come up with reasons why His plan will not work. In essence, we are saying to Him that we don’t think He will do what He’s said. It’s easy to follow God when everything seems logical and no risk is involved, but when He leads us in an unexpected direction and doesn’t explain what awaits us, our doubts may stop us from obeying. But if we don’t walk by faith, we’ll miss all that He’s planned for our lives. One way we can measure our spiritual growth is by how readily we trust the Lord and follow through with obedience.

“So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him. . . Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan” (vv. 4-5).

**OBEY**

Having listened to and trusted God, Abraham traveled to the land He’d promised to show him. Obedience is a major theme in the Bible because it’s so important that we learn to do what God says. Most of what we’re experiencing in life right now is the result of either our obedience or disobedience. It is only when we trust the Lord and followed Him faithfully, that we will become the person He wants us to be and fulfill His will for our lives.

“The Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent . . . and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord” (v. 7).

**WORSHIP**

After arriving in Canaan, Abraham stopped to worship and thank the Lord, who had protected him on his journey and had now promised to give his descendants this land. God had been faithful to bring him this far and could be counted upon to fulfill all the rest of the promises He’d made to Abraham.

Worship is the response we too should have when we discover how faithful God is. Each time we step out in obedience and recognize His handiwork in our lives, we have reason to praise and thank Him for all He’s done. The walk of faith is one of listening, trusting, obeying, and worshipping God. It is not without its problems and struggles—but it will yield life at it’s very best.
REFLECT

We have two options in the Christian life—to walk either by faith or by sight. Walking by sight means we must have all the facts and see how God’s plan for our lives will unfold before we step out in obedience. If the outcome is secure, we’ll proceed. But walking by faith requires that we trust the Lord and His will for us, even if it’s risky, unknown, or difficult. God wants us to depend on Him, trusting Him to direct our steps one at a time so we can reach the destination He’s planned for us.

As you examine your life, do you find yourself more prone to walk by faith or by sight? When you walk by sight, where is your focus? In contrast, where is it when you walk by faith?

Have you ever obeyed the Lord even though you weren’t sure of the outcome? What happened? How did that experience affect your trust in God in the future?