

The 38 Year Wait

It was just another day around the pool of Bethesda. The usual crowd of weary hopefuls, lingering by the pool with worn faces, stared daily in anticipation of divine intervention. The word on the street was that if you were the first person to get in the pool when the angels stirred the waters, you'd be healed. It doesn't seem fair, does it? The strong one wins every time. Among this collection of sufferers was a man who had been on a 38-year losing streak. He prayed, sought, hoped, and dreamed of health, but for 38 years, there was no miracle. Have you prayed for a breakthrough that long? I have. It's not fun. It can be a test of faith to spend years on the same prayer request. But when we do, we are in the company of Abraham, Simeon, Anna, Sarah, and Noah, to name a few. We ask our friends to pray with us for the first few months, but then we're ashamed to even bring it up after a year or two, and we're left alone to stew in our own misery.

I have to confess, I've got shelves of journals filled with unanswered prayers—page after page, full of whispered longings and steadfast hopes. These prayers are so familiar that I blush when I think of how many times God has heard them. These are liturgies with a limp as I walk with God—waiting, hoping, praying, and trusting one more time. I remind myself that prayer is a warfare of our own attention and persistence. We ask and keep on asking. We understand that it is a dance, not a destination. We follow His lead even in the moments when our steps seem clumsy and the rhythm seems wrong. There aren't scorecards. This isn't a competition. It's an invitation to a relationship. In Graham Greene's play, *The Potting Shed*, Father Callifer says, "Faith is not something that one loses; we merely cease to shape our lives by it." For me, faith is a lifelong journey. I have moments of doubt. I, too, am prone to wander, but the faithfulness of Jesus exceeds my doubts. I can't lose it, but I am always in danger of ceasing

to live my life by it. And I, too, often wait for angels when I am in the presence of the Son of God. I'm with C.S. Lewis, who famously confessed, "I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me." We all come into the throne room broken. That's precisely why we come!

Then, in the middle of Bethesda, Jesus shows up. Suddenly, all those years of waiting vanish. He asks the paralyzed man a strange question, "Do you want to be well?" His question cuts through years of excuses and resignation. It's surprising, until I remember that there are lots of folks who don't want to be well. They're stuck in misery, but at least it's familiar. For this struggler, it's a no-brainer. "Yes! But I don't have any help." Evidently, his friends had given up as well. I'm reminded that I, too, waste time trying to explain to Jesus why I'm a lost cause. That's a waste of breath when you're addressing the One who gave Saturn its rings and carved mountains with His fingers. Jesus doesn't get philosophical with the old man on the mat. He just says, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And the transformation was as swift and certain as sunrise. Instantly, he was whole. It really doesn't matter whether you wait 38 years or 38 seconds from the moment you prayed; when Jesus steps on the scene, He makes it worth the wait.

Every. Single. Time.

Always pray, and never give up..." – Luke 18:1b

Never forget, the answer to every prayer is love. It's always love, and when we pray for that, when we live for that, when we abide in that royal pursuit, we are never left unanswered. Love is always enough, and it is the greatest prayer. ***Make me a lover. Teach me how to love. Let me love in the language of Jesus.*** When we pray this prayer, the answer is certain, because love is the language of heaven.

*"To love or have loved, that is enough. Ask nothing further.
There is no other pearl to be found in the dark folds of life.
To love is a consummation."*

—Victor Hugo