

Waiting, Prodigals, and Prayer

As I wait for my prodigal to return, I am learning. I'm learning about family dynamics, addiction, and culture. I am learning about nights awake, bargaining, denial and anything to forget. I'm learning about doubt and all those things never spoken on "Christian" television. I am learning about how deep in the bones we are connected to our kids. And yet I know love is greater than anything else I've experienced. Love mixed with wonder not the wonder of the Rockies, of sunsets, or breathtaking moments. No, this is a different kind of wonder. I wonder if I will see the day he is free. I wonder if he'll disappear one day taking a greyhound to the new far country. I wonder if all these days of praying will be climatically halted by the sound of door, a phone or a siren. Or will I just wait and wonder and wonder and wonder...

Everybody waits...

You've waited, mesmerized by the thought you might someday arrive. You ask- When am I going to find His will? Do I have to wait until? You've waited for your son to turn to God. You've waited for that love of a lifetime to show up. You prayed for a baby you could hold in your arms. You agonized over how that one word "*malignancy*" could shatter, scatter, all your preconceptions about God. Alone, you've wept bitterly. You've prayed consistently. You say, "It doesn't make sense to me." You laugh whimsically, about dreams you buried long ago. Every yes turned to no. So you are a Christian- but you have nothing to show. You wonder, "Why is everything so difficult for me?" You cry out to a silent God and wonder,

"Does he care?"

"Is He aware?"

"Why am I stuck here in a line that doesn't move?"

"Who stole my groove?"

"God, sometimes You just don't make sense."

Sometimes. Many times. I wince at the thought that this whole thing is a joke on me Not any sort of divine destiny.

Waiting...

Praying...

Faithing...

But you *fear*. You fear that you've missed out

You shout: Are you even listening?

"I'm tired of watching sand fall through the hourglass."

"When will I be free from pain?"

"Will I ever love again?"

"Why don't you do something?"

"I'm in prison."

"I'm stuck."

"Where is this promised land?"

"All I ever see is sand."

But as the noisy rush of life winds down. And we stop and listen. When we scan the horizon of our soul, we hear his voice.

Still and small

Over all

He is there.

In the middle of my mess.

In my brokenness.

In his time.

He is ready

We can stand in confidence blest

The teacher never talks during the test.

He IS watching

And I resolve to wait

He is near.

I will surrender my time

To his time

And in His time. I will stand.

Jesus is calling you to give up your temporary life for something eternal.

In a race, many run but only one wins the Gold. Go for the gold! Swing for the fences! Win the prize. If you want to be an athlete you work out, go through the drills, and treat your body like a temple. And if you win, that's great! The crowd roars and the trophy is hoisted in the air. But after all the shouting, the stadium empties and the glory days fade. In the grand scheme of things, you don't hold the crown forever. There will be other races, other teams, and amazing moments, but for us- the crown we get will never fade. This Championship is for the ages.

I Corinthians 9:24-25 (Conversational Bible)

If we really want to hear from God we must be prepared to hear what He says to us. Often, we treat him like Santa Claus. He knows the naughty and nice of our lives and if he checks it twice and we pass, then (as Pedro in Napoleon Dynamite promised) all of our wildest dreams will come true! This is not the economy of Heaven. To change the world we must pray harder prayers. Below is an ancient prayer that often wrecks me when I stumble across it.

The Franciscan Four Fold Prayer

- May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.
- May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.
- May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy.
- And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Here's an important question I have to ask myself as I listen for God's voice:

Am I willing to wait for the call of God?

So many times I try to do things that will somehow orchestrate a response from God. I forget that I am the one who is often impatient and unwilling to respond to His whispers.

God still answers our inquiries this way.

Me: I thought you were going to provide for my needs.

HIM: Yes, but I have something to teach you.

Me: Didn't you say that you'll answer my prayers?

HIM: Yes, but if you'll just wait on me I'll answer questions that are more important than your requests.

Me: Can I really know You more, deeper, with more certainty?

HIM: Yes, but it's going to require everything you have.

We ask questions. He answers with even greater mystery.

The story of answered prayer throughout scripture is a testament to the irony of grace. I've experienced the same unpredictable God that my brothers who died thousands of years ago experienced.

They asked for multitude. God gave them a remnant.

They asked for comfort. God gave them a cross.

They asked for control. God showed them a whirlwind.

And some say God doesn't answer prayers?

Waiting is personal for me as I wait for a prodigal to return to God.

I wait and wonder.

Pray again.

Question.

Pray some more.

Look under the hood.

Pull out the books.

Read.

Listen to way too many stories of other sons and other fathers.

Pray some more and then:

“Oh my! It’s been 10 years of waiting!”

I hear-tell some have waited much longer.