

PRAYING FOR PRUDENCE

By Kathy Widenhouse

“I have a request,” Prudence announced to our weekly prayer group as we gathered around the table. “Please ask God to give me a job.”

When her husband received a job transfer the previous June, Prudence resigned her elementary school teaching position in their former county. Now, school had started again, but she still did not have a job in our district.

No sweat, I thought, as we began to pray. There was a shortage of teachers in our booming area. I knew that Prudence had a master’s degree in education and more than 20 years of classroom experience.

My “this-will-be-a-quickie” attitude lasted several weeks.

But when the weeks became months, I realized that praying for Prudence would entail much more than a few appeals to God and a tidy fix from above. Instead, it became a series of lessons on perseverance in prayer as I interceded, long-term, on another’s behalf. Along the way, I learned a few things.

Pray about the need – not the answer. I fabricated my own logical solution to Prudence’s request, and then asked God to supply it. There was a personnel deficit; Prudence was qualified and eager to fill it; I envisioned an automatic job contract -- especially if we prayed.

Not so. Our Lord holds true to the words in Isaiah 55:8: “ ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.’”

When a call for Prudence from the Board of Education did not quickly materialize, my thinking began to change. Perhaps my agenda did not line up with the

Lord's plan. Mentally, I started over, and assumed only this: God will answer. But the answer would arrive according to His timetable and in a divine manner -- not mine.

Pray repeatedly. "I lay my friend Prudence before You, Lord," I prayed. "Open the doors of employment for her."

Many days I felt silly praying a prayer I had prayed hundreds of times.

Yet Jesus taught the disciples to "always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1). It would be wrong *not* to pray repeatedly.

Praying with the group motivated me. On days when I wearied, Prudence's bowed head across the table reminded me of her need. The burden was on God to fill that need – not me. But it was my responsibility to pray.

Pray through frustration. My impatience with God's silence escalated, and there was no point in sugarcoating how I felt. "How long, Lord?" I whined privately. "I don't see Your hand here. Could we have a little encouragement?"

Prudence applied to be a substitute teacher. One day, she shared this news: "I worked every day this week." Her expertise and dependability catapulted her to the top of our county's substitute list.

Admitting my crummy attitude had been a release for me. It allowed me see that God was answering – just in a different way than I had anticipated.

Pray with praise. Substitute work ferried Prudence to nearly every elementary school in our district. "This has been a fantastic experience," she reported. "I am getting new ideas from working in so many classrooms. Each teacher has a unique way of doing things."

We praised God that Prudence continued to hone her teaching skills. We gave thanks for the opportunities she had had. In keeping with the command in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 to “give thanks in all circumstances,” we even expressed gratitude that she did *not* yet have a full-time job of her own.

Soon thereafter, Prudence received an unexpected call. Would she finish out the school year for a teacher who was going on maternity leave? The principal had specifically requested Prudence as stand-in.

We praised God once again.

Pray deeply. As the months melted into years, our prayers deepened. We no longer simply asked God to “give Prudence a job.” Instead, we prayed that she would know the Lord’s presence during this period of uncertainty. We asked God to use her in whatever situation she was placed.

Our prayers became more detailed. When Prudence filled out an annual county employment application, we asked God to put it in the right hands. When she was in a long-term substitute position, we prayed for the struggling students in that class. We lifted up their parents to the Lord. We interceded for administrators.

Pray after answers come. One summer day nearly four years after her first request, Prudence hurried into our prayer room. “I need prayer,” she said. “I have a job interview at 10 o’clock tomorrow morning with the principal at Beach Elementary School.”

Gasps and cheers rang out around the table, but I sat rooted in my chair. *A coincidence?* I wondered. *My children attend that school.*

At 11 o'clock the next morning, my telephone rang. "I got the job!" whispered Prudence.

When I hung the phone up, my prayers tumbled out in a rush. "Thank you, Lord, for opening this door for Prudence," I prayed. "Help her be organized for this responsibility. Place the children in her class that You desire to be there." And on it went. Now that Prudence's request had been answered, suddenly there were dozens of new things to pray about.

Pray and see surprises. A month later, class assignments were posted on Beach Elementary's front doors. I drove to the school with my children to find out who their teachers would be.

Standing on the school steps, my hand flew to my mouth. The computer-generated printouts unveiled a startling, yet personal, answer to my season of persistence. There, my daughter's name was listed on a sheet titled, "Mrs. Prudence Walz – Grade 3."

The likelihood that this would happen by chance was minuscule. Our county has 12 elementary schools, comprised of hundreds of classrooms, which service thousands of elementary-aged children, yet my child was one of 25 placed in Prudence's first class.

Among the many lessons I learned from praying for Prudence, the biggest was this: God honors the sacrifice of persevering prayer.

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