

Contending in Prayer

When you need a higher level of intercession

By Carol Madison

Are you willing to contend for it?

I sensed the Lord posing this question when I discovered I lost my chance at buying a new townhome. I had persistently prayed for God's favor regarding this home, but now the Lord was inviting me to a new level of intercession—that of contending.

This was an unusual home-buying situation. I was interested in this particular townhome for one reason: obedience to God. I didn't necessarily want to move, as I was content with my current home. But several months earlier God directed me to this townhome for a unique prayer assignment, so I was willing to move.

Situated on a hill, this townhome has the best view over a community in Minnesota. The deck extends out with an unobstructed view over the downtown and other key places in the city. The third-story windows give an even higher perspective. God was inviting me to a special place of intercession on behalf of the people of this community.

However, when I first felt led to the home, it was not for sale. Yet I felt strongly I was to live in this specific townhome. Other homes in the complex came up for sale, but I chose not to look at them. The Lord placed the prayer

assignment and this home deep within my heart. So for months I drove by the townhome, praying and asking the Lord to make a way for me to buy it.

One day as I pulled up in front of the home to pray, I discovered that it was on the market! I called my real estate agent, only to learn with quick dismay that another offer on the home had been accepted and the sale was pending only a final inspection. Suddenly the home I was praying and waiting for was gone.

I was devastated and expressed my disappointment to the Lord. That's when I heard Him say, "Are you willing to contend for it?" I answered, "Yes," not knowing what that meant. But for the next few days, I was quickly mentored by the Lord in true contending in prayer for His Kingdom purposes.

Contending for Strategic Territory

I had persisted in prayer for many months, asking God to give me the townhome. I was reminded of the "persistent widow" story of Luke 18, in which the widow pursues the judge over and over again, continuing past the normal or expected time.¹ Jesus praises this kind of repetition in prayer by telling the disciples to "always pray and not give up" (vs. 1).

In the same way, I asked the Lord over and over again for the townhome—and then I waited. But now that I had clearly lost the townhome to someone else, I felt the Lord inviting me to a whole new level of prayer.

The idea of contending was new to me. Somehow it seems different; more strategic, desperate, and urgent. Jude uses the term "contend" (vs. 3) when he urges believers to "contend for the faith." This contending admonition refers to an intense effort in a wrestling match.² Watching a wrestling match gives a very vivid picture of contending, as there is an ongoing struggle to maintain control or victory over an

opponent. Neither participant is willing to give up until one is clearly pinned or defeated.

Another definition of contend conveys the idea of “striving against a rivalry or contending with an enemy for the control of a port.”³ That summed up how I felt in my prayers—that I was wrestling with spiritual powers in a battle over strategic land and a desperate community.

For whatever God’s reasoning, this townhome and its location were important. (Just across the road from the townhome is the international headquarters for a cult organization; I knew this was part of my prayer assignment.) Long ago God determined this was the place that I should live and pray on behalf of the city.

A Quick Contending Lesson

With greater understanding that I was involved in a spiritual battle, I began to fast and pray continuously. When I was in my car, I prayed. I turned off my television at home and prayed. I prayed as I fell asleep, and immediately when I woke up. I was consumed moment by moment in desperate prayer. Through daily email updates, I invited family and friends to contend in prayer with me.

My fervent prayer wasn’t because I wanted a new home. This was about God’s Kingdom purposes and His glory! I was suddenly passionate for God to demonstrate Himself in a way that no one could deny. I prayed every way the Lord put on my heart, including spiritual warfare prayers, agonizing prayers with tears, and prayers modeled after biblical giants of the faith.

I pleaded with God to show Himself powerful. Using Elijah’s prayer when he confronted the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18, I implored God to answer in such a way that people would know He was at work in this. “Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so

these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again” (vs. 37).

Stop Contending

At the three-day mark of fasting and praying, these words suddenly flashed through my mind: “It’s over. Stop contending and start worshiping Me with praise and thanksgiving.” I was skeptical that I was hearing the Lord. Again, the same words whispered through my spirit. I asked the Lord to confirm in His Word that He was speaking to me. I opened my Bible “randomly” and it fell open to Exodus 33:17, where God said to Moses: “I will indeed do what you have asked, for you have found favor with me, and you are my friend” (NLT). A peace rushed through my soul, and I knew that God had done it. The victory had come.

Less than an hour later, my agent called to say that we actually had a “long shot” at getting the townhome because of a minor problem with the home inspection. The garbage disposal was too loud, but the sellers were refusing to deal with the current buyer over that little issue.

Eventually, to the surprise of everyone, the buyer defaulted over that insignificant problem—and the townhome was mine. And just to add to God’s favor, the sellers replaced the garbage disposal for me, without my even asking!

Yes, God Was in It!

At the closing, I asked God for an opportunity to tell my story to the unsuspecting sellers. I cautiously shared that I had prayed for months about their townhome. I told them I believed God was calling me to pray over the city from that vantage point.

Their response confirmed that I had heard the Lord correctly. The wife exclaimed in astonishment: "We had no intention of moving, but one day I woke up and told my husband, 'We have to move!' We had just finished redecorating the home, but I felt an urgency to move. In fact, we put the house on the market that day, and then bought the first house we looked at!"

Everyone, including our agents, sat stunned for a moment. Then the sellers' agent spoke for all of us when she said, "I had no idea I was a part of something so big."

For the Glory of Christ

God taught me a lesson in contending prayer. There are times to pray steadily and faithfully with persistence, but there are other times when God stirs within us a passion to contend as though Jesus' name and glory are at stake. More and more challenges are facing believers, churches, and even our nation. We are increasingly aware that intense spiritual battles are confronting us. Greater urgency and determination rise up in us as we pray: "Not my child; not my family; I will not give in to Satan's scorn and destruction intended for my church!" By contending, we are assuring God that we will not accept the current circumstances without a heart-felt fight!

If your heart is broken over a seemingly hopeless situation, ask the Lord if you are to "contend" over it. If God responds by stirring within you a passion to contend in prayer for a specific circumstance (a devastated marriage, a friend with a hardened heart, a child in rebellion), know that there is no "textbook contending." This cry of your soul, this desperate longing for spiritual victory, must be done with a humble heart that is willing to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

A Good Risk!

When it comes to contending in prayer and desperately wanting Christ's glory demonstrated to all, the risk is worth the investment of your heart and soul! A wrestler does not approach the mat with the thought of simply forfeiting because he thinks he is overmatched and might lose. He brings all his training, strength, and heart to the match with the hope that he can overcome his opponent.

In the same way, by contending we are calling upon God to release His power and resources to overcome any opposition. The outcome rests with the Lord, but His invitation always stands: "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?" (Luke 18:7).

For the past five years I have prayed—with the best view over the city. For as long as God keeps me here, I will faithfully pray for revival and spiritual awakening of my community. Often I pray by myself, other times people join me in my living room or they prayer walk with me.

If God calls you to contend in prayer for certain situations, you can trust that He has a greater purpose. You can also trust Him to teach you how to be faithful to that call. He just needs to know that you are willing to contend for it!

¹. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.

². NIV Bible Commentary, Vol. 2: New Testament, Kenneth Barker and John R. Kolenberger III, consulting editors. Zondervan, 1994, pg.1120.

³. Dictionary.com Unabridged

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Note: A new book by Carol on mentoring the next generation in prayer was recently published by PrayerShop Publishing. For more information see *Prayer That's Caught and Taught*.