

In Good Time

Expedited Answers to Impatient Prayer

January 22, 2023

Today we're talking about practicing... **patience**. Is there anything more frustrating?! Well, hang on to how you feel – cuz that's gonna help you answer *this* question more honestly: **How long are you willing to wait on the Lord?** Would you wait till tomorrow for a prayer prayed today? *Well I hope so!* That's faster than Amazon!



But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a *day* is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

Wait – does that mean *tomorrow's* answer to *today's* prayer might take another *millennium*?! Or, does that mean He can answer a thousand years of prayer *today alone*? Well, *both*. But – *either way*:



The Lord is *not slow* in keeping His promise, as *some understand* slowness. Instead He is *patient* with you, *not* wanting anyone to perish, but *everyone* to come to repentance. – 2 Peter 3:8-9 NIV



He's not slow, He's *patient*? How does *that* work? Cuz I'd like to go back and have my gym grade changed – I may have had the most *patient* mile time in sixth grade history! Just *how* does *patience* nullify slowness? Well, there's a difference between *time* and *timing*. Something's **time means how long it takes to happen**; its *duration*. While something's **timing means when it happens**; its *beginning*. And we call fast *time* 'quick' and fast *timing* 'soon'. And the Bible makes it clear God gets things done quickly *and* soon. Jesus, Himself reminds us how God works at the end of the *persistent widow* parable:



I tell you, He will see that [His people] get justice, and **quickly**. [that's His *time*] However, **when** the Son of Man comes [that's His *timing*], will He find *faith* on the earth? – Luke 18:8 NIV

Good question. Depends on when that *is*. But if He wants everyone to come to repentance, a time *with faith* on the earth *would be the right time*. And if there's a *right time*, then there's also a *wrong time*; y'know, when it's *too soon* or *not soon enough*! But if, *like He says*, God's committed to giving us *what we need*, *when we need it* so we can be *saved* – well, we can absolutely **know: God does everything as soon as possible!** He can't be *early* or *late*; He *has* to be *right on time*.

You see, at *just the right time* ... Christ died for the ungodly. – Romans 5:6 NIV

So no, God's not slow; He's on time – and slow would mean running late. But make no *mistake*, He *is* willing to patiently postpone all He has promised until the timing is perfect. So when it comes to our *prayer*, we should *trust* that every answer is on its way, with no delay, and will arrive as *soon as possible*. But **He'll wait a thousand years if necessary. The question is, will you?**

NO! I DON'T WANT TO! AND I CAN'T WAIT 1000 YEARS FOR GOD TO ANSWER MY PRAYERS!

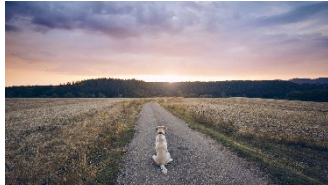
Well, I hate to break it to you, but you might *have* to. As soon as possible is as fast as *fast* can go. I mean, it's *as soon as possible* – meaning God's already exhausted every opportunity to *expedite* the process! The only way to move up *His* timing would be for *us* to make them possible *sooner*. And how can *we* know *when* one of our prayers is *possible*? Well:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that *if* we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him. [It's no longer a matter of *if*, but *when*] – 1 John 5:14-15 NIV

Remember *that*? **Praying according to His will is what assures an answer is possible!** You do *that* and you've got the *guaranteed* power of *God* behind each and every prayer *you* produce.



So *do you*? It's really hard to *tell*; especially for self-centered sinners like *us* who like to paint our portraits a little *prettier* than we are in person. I mean, just look at your profile pics! Well, our prayers 'aint much better... But if we *do* take an honest look at our prayers, we *can* find the line that divides and decides what's possible for God to grant.



Cuz at their core, prayers are either *patient* or *pouting*. And there's an easy way to tell them apart: **patient prayer means you're willing to wait for what God wants** while **pouting prayer means you're wanting God to grant your will**. And if you put your prayers under *that* microscope, it's surprising how few prayers are fully free of pouting.



But here's the good news: you're in control! And in fact, **the path to patience is paved with control**; the most powerful control, the kind of control that gets God to answer your prayers... *self* control. **"Boo! You tricked us, that's not good news! Self-control takes work and it's no fun!"** Well hang on, I'm not done, it's also means exercising *power* – power that *you* control – the kind of power that can change God's plans! **"Oh. I bet its willpower. Like how he tricked us with self control"**



No, and *stop interrupting*; this is where things start to get appealing. Cuz let's be honest, we all know willpower doesn't really work. Not for humans! **We're defined by our weak-will:**

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. – Mark 14:38 NIV

We can't just decide to do what we know we should and deny doing what we know we shouldn't; otherwise we'd all be *successful, healthy, geniuses* who never gave in to our undisciplined desires. But does that sound like anyone *you* know? Of course not, because as *humans*; **we prefer fleeting fancies over lofty goals**. Forget whether they're good for us or not, they're easy to attain and always ready and waiting for us. And because of how our heart handles desire, that's exactly the way we like 'em!

And back in an annoyingly intellectual 19th c. sermon aptly titled, “*The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*” Thomas Chalmers gives a great explanation of why willpower won’t work as the force behind our self-control. **We can’t just shut down what we want**; the heart’s too powerful! He says:

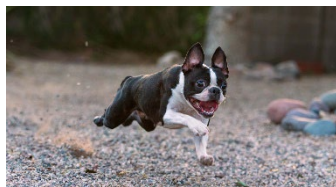
It is quite in vain to think of stopping one of these pursuits in any way else, but by stimulating to another.

Simply put, human hearts *can’t* be empty. Because a heart that wants *nothing* suffers the ultimate pain of *apathy* and *hopelessness*. And we’ll do anything to prevent *that* pain. So **because the human heart needs to be filled with a desire, we can’t just will it empty of its wants – we can only exchange them for others**. And it’s because we’re ruled by our wants that we’re *warned*:

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from *it*. – Proverbs 4:23 NIV

Willpower fails. But, wantpower wins. And that means that **it isn’t willpower that changes us. It’s wantpower.** And therefore, it’s our foolish flesh that gets to call the shots. But *that’s* wonderful news! Because we *also* have a dose of God’s Spirit to outwit the nitwit we have in the flesh; we just have to work *with Him* to convince our human hearts to make God’s will what we want. Cuz here’s the big secret: **self-control is not about repressing desire but replacing it.**

The whole trick to changing our will is changing our want. Because *then*, we’ll *willingly* do the things that serve our *want* – like the **animal** our flesh is! Take Jacob and the years of labor he was willing to work because of his wantpower:



Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. – Genesis 29:20 NIV



Seven years of work seemed like a few days?! That’s the *effect* of wantpower! So imagine if I set my heart on God in the same way; could we get *this* story: **“Noah served his whole life to get to God, but it seemed like only a couple weeks because of his love for Him.”** Absolutely! So how do we get our heart to want the Lord’s will? Well, that’s the easy part, cuz your heart’s a pushover!

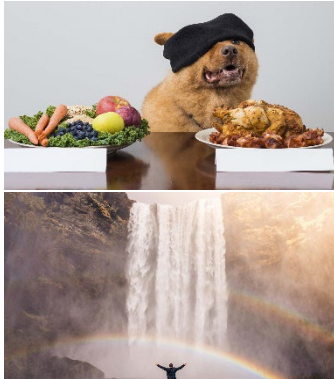


I learned *that* in seventh grade! Because one day at *lunch*, a group of **yo-yo** enthusiasts had been booked to put on a small show and though I had *zero* opinions about yo-yos that *morning*, I was *obsessed* by the early *afternoon*! I needed one now! I *begged* for the money, started practicing every day and hung out with the new yo-yo *group* at school every opportunity I had! And you know *why*? **Our heart is always ready to want – it just needs an opportunity!** And *anyone* can provide it! That’s what *Apple* did in 2007 when *it* convinced your heart that *it* wanted an iPhone more than *anything* in life – even though you’d never *once* heard of such a thing!



And we all have that very *same* power; so **why not sell yourself on God’s will!**

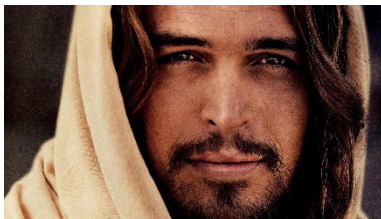
Here's the first pitch: "If we want God's will above all else, He will absolutely answer every one of our prayers!" Pretty enticing, right? But *more* than yo-yos and iPhones? Well, we'll see – because **how you live reveals who's winning the war of wants in your heart.**



Everyday they compete and everyday the rankings change. Tonight's matchup: A good night's sleep v. Finishing that Netflix series; and don't miss tomorrow's *title* fight: Money v. Integrity! So if we want God's will to take the top spot sooner than later – well, **we gotta fix the fight!**

And that means being more impressive than a gang of yo-yo hipsters and more appealing than every Apple ad. We gotta sell our heart on the stuff in God's will that all our *other* wants can't offer. **We gotta steal our heart's attention and wow it into wanting nothing else.** And all that takes is a **glimpse** of God's glory! Good thing:

[God] made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. - 2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV



Because **seeing Jesus as the glory in God's will, makes a pretty good case for wanting that will!** Cuz here's the *new* pitch you get to make to yourself, "If we want God's will above all else, we become perfect. Oh yeah – and we don't die!" And as we saw a couple weeks ago, every *minute* of facetime that we spend with someone draws us *deeper* into love.

So the *whole* strategy to keep *our* heart set on *God's* will is as *simple* as **spending time with Him.**

I had a great thing going with God; Bible was *fun*, prayer felt *positive*, and I noticed some real personal *growth*. **But then I got busy and God got distant.** So I *asked* God to help me find some time. But then, one particularly packed day, after dropping my girls at *school* and after my half-hour commute to the *church*, I realized I'd left my computer at *home*. And I got *mad*. At *God*. I mean, here I am *trying* to do my part and get things *done* for the *right* reasons but *God* sure 'aint making it any easier! And it wasn't until I started on my angry way *back* home that it *hit* me: *this* was the *only* possible way God could carve an hour out of my busy day for just the *two* of us.

He found a way for our facetime while I was letting weaker wants win. I was the one making things impossible! So I apologized and said, "I love You." And we talked about *family* and the concerns I had and on the way *back* to the church, we listened to the Bible. And the *whole* week, I just felt the *fullness* of my heart and the *foolishness* of my flesh.

I *had* to learn what we *all* heard last Sunday: **we don't pray to get God to do our will, but to let Him use us, and teach us, and change us, as we learn to trust His will.** So why not make things a little *easier* on yourself by reminding your *heart* just *how much* you *want* what He has planned for you. And then **pray about it, trusting that it's on its way as soon as possible; and will arrive in good time.**

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.