

Livin' on a Prayer

Bracin' for the Answer

January 18, 2026



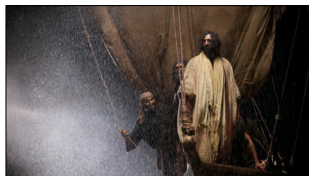
Today we're learning how to **prepare for God's answers to our prayers!** Cuz He's never *not* at work in our lives – but when we ask for His hand in something *specific*, we'd better be ready to cooperate with His plan – no matter *how* it manifests. Cuz when you *get* exactly what you *asked*, only spoiled *brats* complain about how it's wrapped. So, before *you* go asking for God to move Heaven and earth to change your life, answer this question first: **Are you ready for what God's willing?**



Cuz He's got the whole world in *His* hands and if you *invite* those *babies* into *your* little life, you should *anticipate* intense *change* and an *extreme* makeover. Cuz **to the degree that you surrender control, God turns up the throttle!** Not because He's a *maniac*, but because He *loves* us and *doesn't* want us suffering through the *school of separation* one minute more than is absolutely *necessary* – so when *your* prayer makes way for more of *His* work, He's *gonna* take you up on the *opportunity!*



But, when we *grow* enough to willingly *invite* Him to *push* the process – we *need* to be aware we're *also* asking Him to take the kid gloves *off*. We're saying, **"Your will be done, even if it ain't anywhere near mine!"** And *that* means we need to brace ourselves for the *possibility* that God's most *powerful* answer to any of our *simplest* prayers might manifest as *unexpected*, *overwhelming*, *disruptive*, and *confusing* discomfort. Cuz



God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness. **[Yet,] No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful.** Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. – Hebrews 12:10-11 NIV

We tend to think of prayer as a way for God to *save* us *from* our problems, but **Scripture consistently shows prayer as a way for God to speak to us through our problems.** Cuz one way or another, our *hardships* are *already* serving a purpose—and unless *that* purpose is fulfilled *through* our *prayer*, God may choose to fulfill it *through* our *hardship*. Cuz if our *difficulty* was simply meant to get us to *pray*, it may no longer be *necessary* once we *do*; otherwise, **prayer is fulfilled through understanding our experience, not controlling it.**

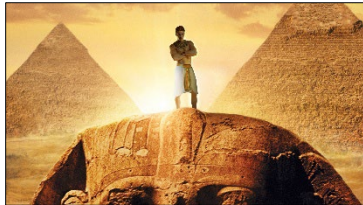


And the *stories* in Scripture make the point over and over to make sure we *get* it: **prayer is aimed at changing hearts – not circumstances.** Take *Joseph*. His story starts with *siblings* selling him into *slavery* before enduring *years* of unjust *imprisonment*. And though we don't *know* his *precise* prayers, they *likely* shared a similarity with his plea to his *cellmate*:

Get me out of this prison. I was forcibly carried off ... I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon. – Genesis 40:14-15 NIV

But even though we're told God was *with* him in everything he did, his *appeal* gets *forgotten* and he spends *more* years in jail! And while it'd be *easy* to assume God left him *unanswered*, it turns out the **hardship was part of a process to answer the right way, at the right time, for the most good**. Cuz when it *happens*, he's not just given *physical* freedom; he gets *spiritual liberty, clarity, and authority*:

[And is able to explain God's *superior* answer] You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is *now* being done, the saving of *many* lives. Genesis 50:20 NIV



And right here, in book #1 of the Bible, Joseph establishes a *foundational* principle of God's *process*: **we don't need to know how God works to know that He works**. And while Joseph had to struggle through a *seemingly* unfair set of circumstances along the way, his *faith* and fortitude *grew* enough for God to use him in a position of *power* and *prominence* that *exceeded* his highest expectations for *freedom*. So, if *your* hardship feels unfair, that *doesn't* mean God's ignoring *your* prayer – it's likely just the *early* stages of an answer that's *training* you to have the *maturity* and *obedience* that you'll need to handle *responsibility* of the *authority* that He's *planning* on providing!

And we shouldn't *act* like that's some *foreign* religious concept, cuz the *common* consensus we *already* believe states, **"You gotta crack some eggs to make an omelet."** So, don't dwell on what *looks* like a bad break in the *present* – fix your *focus* on the tasty omelet in your *future*. After all, seeing where something is *headed* is hard but we *also* agree, **"Hindsight is 20/20."** So, maybe we should look around and see if God's already answering *before* our *asking* turns *angry*.



Otherwise, we might make the *same* mistake as the disciples . Cuz on a boat in the middle of a *stormy* sea, they spoke *directly* to Jesus in one of the *shortest* and most *honest* prayers in Scripture:

The disciples went and woke [Jesus], saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves – Matthew 8:25-26 NIV

But *first*, I'm sure the disciples thought, **"You of little faith, why are you so afraid?! That's not saving anyone!"** To which Jesus could respond, **"Or is it...?"** to drive them *completely* insane.

Cuz Jesus' practice of *answering* with *questions* instead of *straightforward* solutions is exactly the sort of *frustrating* behavior that makes *us* question our answers – even if it's in an incredulous *what-are-you-talking-about* way. And when all is said and done, the disciples *aren't* just saved from *physical* death, they're one step *closer* to truly understanding who He *is* and the *"saving"* they *truly* need. So, if *you're* praying to be *rescued* from *some* form of serious *storm*, remember *waiting* may be His way of *baiting* you into a *higher perspective* where you can see *higher purpose*. Cuz **God allows things to threaten our life if it'll make us question our life**. Cuz *overwhelming* circumstances are often *where* we *start* looking *past* this life – and discover what Jesus *truly* offers.

Cuz, as we all know, **“Smooth seas never made a skilled sailor.”** So, before you try to get God to *settle* your struggle, make sure it’s not the *very vehicle* that’s *bringing* you *His blessing*! Christ may be *using* your chaos to push your perspective *past* this place and *answer* your prayers for *calm* by driving you to a *higher peace*, cuz in both life *and* faith, **“What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.”**



And then there’s David and *his* prayer that gives us a *different* kind of case study. Cuz although his heart had God’s endorsement, it fails him in the whole Bathsheba affair and only *after* he’s found out and feels the *fallout* does he finally *pray* what he should’ve in the first place:

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.” – Psalm 51:10-12 NIV



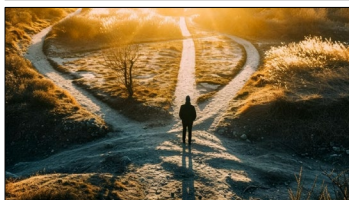
And though I’m sure David wanted his convicting offense to be totally *forgiven* and *forgotten*, God’s answer *doesn’t erase* his past.

Because, **God often uses our past to answer prayers of the present.** And since God *wasn’t* interested in *preserving* David’s *reputation* at the *expense* of his *heart* – He *emphasized* the *outer collapse* David wanted to *forget* to preserve the *inner transformation* David *needed* to *remember*. Cuz *carrying* the consequences and conviction of his mistake not only led him to the real repentance that purified his heart – but made him steadfast by making self-deception impossible. So, if you’ve prayed for God’s restoration but feel you’re still stuck with the painful fallout of sin – God’s intent may not be to shame you but to *heal* you. Cuz we all say, **“failure is the best teacher”** and if that is true, we probably shouldn’t try to forget what it taught – we should **“live and learn”** by telling the whole truth so *thoroughly* that we finally become free.



Which brings us to good ol’ Paul – whose story brings all of this to a theological *climax*. Cuz this New Testament MVP prays repeatedly for flat-out *removal* of *his* thorny difficulty the way most of *us* would:

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’” – 2 Corinthians 12:8-9 NIV



Even God’s holy *ghostwriter* doesn’t get the green light to *his* prayer, *rather*, he’s asked to *stew* in one of our *own* human platitudes, when God *essentially* says, **“The darker the night, the brighter the stars.”**

And you know *why*? Cuz *it’s true* – just like *all* our favorite sayings! But if Paul *already* suspected such a *potential* purpose, why *pray* to take it *away*? Well, again, **prayer isn’t about getting our way, it’s about finding the right way.** So, when Paul prays for *healing*, he’s asking, **“Are we taking the ‘Love conquers all’ miracles happen path; the ‘Let it go’ learn to trust path; or ‘No pain, no gain’ struggle builds strength path?”** And however it happened, after three *no*’s, he heard his answer:

[And says] That is why, for *Christ’s* sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. – 2 Corinthians 12:10 NIV

So, if *you're* afflicted with something you wish *wasn't* there – go ahead and pray for God to *take* it – but if He *doesn't*, do yourself a favor and **find the prayer your present path is trying to answer!**

Cuz **the sooner you see the purpose, the sooner you can start cooperating with God** and *celebrating* your struggle! And you know how I know? Buckle up; *I've got cancer*. I've been getting *tests, scans, and biopsies* all December and two minutes to my birthday last *Tuesday*, we got confirmation: *I have papillary thyroid cancer*. But *before* we all freak out, let me *clarify*, it's one of the most *treatable* types of cancer and once they *cut it out* with a lil' *neck-ectomy*, you'll *probably* all still be *stuck* with me for *years* to come.

So, please don't cry for me – I know many of *you* are dealing with *way* harder circumstances with a *way braver* heart. And my prayer for *you* is that God uses *your* intimidating *path* to reveal an overwhelming *answer* to one of your *past, present, or future* prayers! I *know* He's using *mine*!

Cuz just like the *dozens* of case-studies in the *Bible*, I made the mistake of praying with the expectation of a *shallow, earthly* answer from an *infinite, omnipotent* God. I've been praying, **“Lord, I want to be a better pastor. Give me deeper faith. Make me more disciplined. And grow my compassion.”** And for *some* reason, I thought He'd just *dial back* the *distractions* or something...



But *that's* just *not* who He is. **He doesn't hold anything back when it comes to protecting His kids.** And if you *limit* His character to *cute* and *cuddly* – you'll dangerously *underestimate* His role in *your* life.

C.S. Lewis nailed the character with Aslan the lion as his picture of Jesus in the Chronicles of Narnia. Cuz when the children, Lucy and Susan are preparing to *meet* Aslan, they wonder what it's *like* being so *close* to something so *powerful* and they ask, **“Is he safe?”** and are answered, **“Safe? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn't safe. But he is good.”** Well so is *God*. And that means even the *scary* stuff leads to the *good* stuff, cuz:

All things work together for *good* to those who love God – Romans 8:28 NKJ

And for a minute, I didn't see it, I was like, **“I'm praying for growth – not a growth!”** But the second I calmed down, He led me right *back* to the prayer He was *trying* to answer *with* cancer; cuz when my mortality came into *focus*, so did my *faith*! My wife and I *woke up* in a way we've wanted for quite a *while*! Christmas *presents* didn't matter near as much as the *people*, sharing our *faith* felt like a *delight* instead of a *duty*, and we *prayed* every day with hearts *full* of *peace, joy, and gratitude*. She even let me off the hook for my *year-long* bathroom remodel! And that's *proof* God is good!

[And so,] This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask *anything according to His will*, **[not ours]** He *hears* us. And if we know that He *hears* us—*whatever* we ask—we *know* that we *have* what we asked of Him. **[The way He wants to give it!]** – 1 John 5:14-15 NIV

So, what does this all mean? Well, **be careful what you pray for, cuz you just might get it.** And if you're *not ready* for the answer *God's* willing – it might *hurt* more than it *helps*. Cuz *His way ain't* usually *our way* – but it is the *best way* – cuz it *may not* be *safe*, but it's *guaranteed* to be *good*!

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.