

04 | Faith and Patience

GOD ANSWERS PRAYER Series

Welcome back to our Walk with God series entitled God Answers Prayer. Today we are talking about the importance of faith and patience. To begin, let me draw your attention to Hebrews chapter six versus ten through 12, in the new King James version. He says, "For God is not unjust. You forget your work and labor of love, which you have shown toward His name and that you have ministered to the saints and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who, through faith and patience inherit the promise." The writer of Hebrews reminds us that God is not unjust, to forget a believer's work of love, and desires each of us to continue in this diligence and not become lazy or sluggish or dull or indifferent. Instead, we are to follow the example of those who inherited God's promises because of their faith and patience. The Greek word translated patience is also translated endurance in the English Standard Version, and can be rendered consistent, forbearance, or long suffering. It carries the idea of not just to wait for something over time to happen, but to hold on to, continue with something despite the difficulties that you might face, to not

exhibit patience or endurance after praying to receive God's promised answer to your prayer is to exhibit signs of sluggishness, laziness and spiritual and natural dullness. A popular saying is that prayer is the key to heaven's blessing, but faith unlocks the door. I would add to that, and your patience, or your endurance, keeps the door open for you to receive your promised blessing.

Faith is defined in Hebrews chapter 11, verse one of the New King James as a "substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." The word substance is also rendered assurance or realization. And the word evidence can be translated conviction or confidence. So faith is both by assurance and evidence that gives me confidence about things hoped for and things not yet seen. Hebrews 11:6 adds that "without faith, it is impossible to please Him." Him being God. Where does this faith come from? The Apostle Paul in the book of Romans says in chapter ten, verse 17, "So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Another way to say this is to say that faith comes by hearing God and hearing God through His word. Faith believes or trusts, and the Word of God is what faith in God believes or trusts. And therefore, we are called to walk by faith and not by sight, in second Corinthians chapter five and verse seven. In Mark 11, Jesus cursed a fig tree, and the next day Peter remarked that the fig tree that Jesus cursed had withered away. In that exchange, Jesus tells His disciples and us to pray and believe. Believe that you receive

what you ask for. And he says, "And you shall have it." He says in Mark 11:24, "Therefore, I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them." This means we are to pray and believe that we receive what we're praying for. We can have confidence that we will receive what we're praying for if we ask. According to first John 5:14 and 15, which says, "Now this is the confidence," reading out of the New King James, "Now, this is the confidence that we have in Him. 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 the petitions that we have asked of Him."

God's will is found in His Word and is revealed by the Holy Spirit. First Corinthians Chapter two verses 11 and 12 says, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him. Even so, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God that we may know the things that have been freely given to us by God." Yet even to pray God's will does not always result in a quick answer. And that could be for a variety of reasons. Some reasons have to do with us, some with others, and some with God. But we are sure that God will never violate His Word. When things do not happen right away, we need to wait, have patience. I like to say it like this, when I pray to receive a promise of God, in between my prayer, which lays hold of the promise,

and the receiving of the promise, is the waiting on the promise. It is the waiting on the promise that tends to weigh on my mind. This added weight on my mind wants to make me compromise, or let go of my requests, or hold it in fear, and doubt. James says in James chapter one verses 6 to 8, "But let him ask in faith with no doubting. For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double minded man, unstable in all his ways." This is where my initial faith to believe and go after the promises needs support, and we find the support in Hebrews chapter ten, verse 36, which out of the New King James version, says, "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." If prayer is the will of God, and Luke 18 one says, Men always have to pray and not lose heart. We often need endurance to receive the promise. This takes us back to where we started, that is, we need to imitate those who, through faith, believe in God, in His word, and patience, endurance, consistency, long suffering, perseverance, inherit the promise.

One such person who illustrated inheriting the promise by faith and patience was the patriarch Jacob. In Genesis chapter number 32, starting at verse number nine, in the New Living Translation, it says, "Then Jacob prayed, Oh, God, of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac, O Lord, You told me, return to your own land and to your

relatives, and You promise me I will treat you kindly. I am not worthy of all the unfailing love and faithfulness you have shown to me, Your servant. When I left home and crossed the Jordan River, I owned nothing except the walking stick. Now my household fills two large camps.” Jacob had worked some 20 years for his father-in-law, Laban, outside the land of promise. He believed the promise God made to him when he left his mother and father in the land of Canaan. But though he believed, he needed patience, or endurance, to receive the promise after some 20 years of hardship under his father in law, who deceived Jacob and changed his wages some ten times over those 20 years. Jacob could have been discouraged and given up, saying that he would not have the money to return home, or his father-in-law would never let him go, or if he tried to return, he would not be able to bring his whole family. But instead, Jacob demonstrated endurance, remaining steadfast and patient, despite the things that were coming against him. Though, he was taken advantage of, he worked hard until he received a word from God that it was time to go home. God telling Jacob, “I am the God of Bethel. Where you anointed the pillar, where you made a vow to me. Now arise, get out of this land and return to the land of your family.” In Genesis 31, verse 13, with that word, Jacob got up and got going, sometimes kicking and screaming, but he let God direct his path and he came home safely, and with the blessings of his brother, whose blessing he stole, and the blessing of his father, whom he had deceived.

Another person who illustrated inheriting the promise by faith in patience was King David. When Samuel asked Jesse, David's father to persuade all of his sons to Samuel because God had selected the next King of Israel from Jesse's sons, Jesse overlooked David, and did not bring him before Samuel at first. David did not let this discourage him or influenced his later life. But David's greatest temptation was to try to become king on his own timetable, and by his own efforts. One example of this was when Saul chose to relieve himself in a cave that David his men were hiding, unbeknownst to Saul and his army. Though, David's men encouraged David to take this opportunity as being from the Lord and use it to end his enemy's life, David responded to his men in first Samuel 24:6-7 of the New Living Translation, "The Lord forbid that I should do this to My Lord the King. I shouldn't attack the Lord's anointed. For the Lord Himself has chosen Him. So David restrained his men and did not let them kill Saul." We do not know how many years of fleeing and hiding David had already gone through, but he would not lift his hand against Saul, but waited on the Lord to exalt him. He was an example of what it says in Psalm 75, verses six and seven, out of the King James Version, where it says, "Promotion comes neither from the East nor from the West, nor from the South. But God is the judge. He puts down one. He sets up another."

In the New Testament, Jesus told Peter in the company of his disciples, in Luke 21:31-32,

“Indeed, Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat. But I prayed for you that your faith should not fail. And when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren.” Think what that must have felt like to Peter, who loved Jesus and at that moment was willing to give his life for Jesus. But we all know that when he was surrounded by Roman and temple soldiers, by members of the Sanhedrin, when it was taking place during the late night, when he had no sleep and not really knowing what was going on, Peter did end up denying Jesus. Some might ask, “Where was his faith at that moment?” Well, his faith was in what Jesus said to Peter earlier. “I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail.” Peter endured Jesus' disappointment with him. He endured being embarrassed. He endured the possible judgment from the other disciples. But through this, he became an example of faith and patience, even after a failure. His faith waned, but his endurance and perseverance, even after a failure, kept his faith alive. The psalmist wrote of this when he said, “The steps of a good man” in Psalms 37, verse 23 and 24, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way, though He fall, He shall not be utterly cast down. For the Lord upholds him with His hand.” But how do I endure patiently?

Well, let's look at the one who endured the most, which is our Savior, Jesus. In Hebrews Chapter 12, verses one and two it says, “Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. Let us lay

aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame and set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12 says we run with endurance, by first laying aside every weight and the sin which ensnares us. We all know what sins are, and we certainly need to repent of any sins that we might know of. But we may not realize that sometimes it’s not sin that slows us down so that I do not reach the promises the Lord has for me, but weights slow me down. These weights are not sins, but they are the cares and encumbrances that just get in the way. They hinder our progress. They could be family ties or other relationships or material things that I just do not need for what the Lord is calling me to do.

In Mark ten, Jesus responds to a blind man's call for help. The man's blindness was a hindrance that he could not do anything about apart from Jesus. But he apparently had a garment that he wore which also hindered him. So what did the blind man do to get to Jesus as quickly as he could? The Bible says it Mark chapter ten and verse 50, “And he threw aside his garment. He rose and came to Jesus.” He had a hindrance, his garment, which he threw off to reach Jesus. When we pray and want to stand firm on God's words or promise, we need to be careful to confess and repent of any known sins, but also lay aside

weights. Like the blind man, let's throw aside the weights that we know can hinder us. Hebrews 12:2 also says we need to look to Jesus. Since Jesus is the Word manifested in the flesh, we look unto Jesus by looking into His word. For instance, in Psalm 62 and versus five through eight of the New King James, it says, "My soul waits silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation. He is my defense. I shall not be moved. And God is my salvation and my glory. The rock of my strength and my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times you people, pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us, Selah." In Psalm 62, verse five, the Psalms talks to himself, to his own soul, quieting the soul down with words like, "Wait silently for God alone." He reminds himself that his expectation is from God and that God alone is his rock, his salvation, his defense, his refuge. Therefore, despite the expected or unexpected, he shall not be moved.

In our case, we shall not be moved away from our faith or trust in God. There are times when we also need to talk to ourselves, and remind ourselves that our faith is in God. The God who cannot lie in His word and in His promises. When we pray God's will, according to God's Word, we should have confidence. According to the Scripture we talked about earlier, first John 5:14-15, "For this is the confidence that we have. If we ask anything according to His will, He hears, and we know that if He hears we know that we have the petitions that we ask of Him." But often our

prayers are like the prophetic vision that the Prophet Habakkuk talks about in the back of chapter number two, and verse number three. In verse three reading out of the New Living Translation, it says, "This vision is for a future time." It describes the end, and it will be fulfilled. If it seems slow in coming, wait patiently. For it will surely take place. It will not be delayed. In general, the fulfillment of our prayers is future, though that fulfillment can be slow in coming, we are to wait patiently, believing that it will surely take place. And from God's timing, there will be no delay. The Lord is never late. But he is rarely early.

One person who has a prominent role in the Old Testament, particularly in the first five books known as the Pentateuch, is Moses. Moses was called by God to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt, and He thought to bring them into the promised land. But Moses disobeyed God at Mirabeau. And rather than speaking to a rock to bring water out of the rock for the children of Israel, he spoke harshly to the people, and struck the rock, twice. God was angry with Moses and his brother Aaron for failing to believe or trust God and follow His instructions. God's punishment was to deny Moses and Aaron entrance into the promised land. After all of these years of hard work, Moses was so disappointed that he prayed to God to change His mind. But God would not. And He told Moses not to ask Him about that again. He could see the promised land, but he could not

enter it. When it became clear that God would not change His mind, Moses stopped asking. And He sought God for his successor, who would be Joshua. And went back to leading God's people with excellence. Though Moses did not receive what he wanted, he remained, listen to this, consistent in serving God, and the people. It can be argued that he did receive something better, not in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament. In Matthew Chapter 17, as well as Mark nine and Luke nine, it's recorded that Moses set his foot in the promised land, on the mountain of transfiguration with Jesus, our Savior, and Elijah the Prophet. If Moses' attitude at his denial of entrance into the promised land had not changed, if he had not been willing to exhibit extreme patience, and forbearance, and long suffering, had his disappointment. He would not have received an even better reward than he had initially asked for. He was brought back from the dead to have a special meeting with Jesus, along with the mighty prophet Elijah, and Jesus' inner circle, of Peter, James and John, Matthew 17:1-9. "Now unto Him," the Bible says, "who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we ask, or think, according to the power that works in us." That's found in Ephesians three, verse 20 of the New King James Version.

Asking in prayer does not seem to be our problem. Asking wisely may be. But times of waiting can be difficult. However, God's delays are not necessarily God's denials. But remember, our lack of patience and long

suffering can be used by our enemy, the devil to lead us on dangerous and destructive detours and denials. Yes, when we pray faith is the key to unlock the door to God's promises. But patience and perseverance keeps the door open until we receive what is promised. This is why James says in James 1:2-4, "My brethren count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience, let perseverance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete lacking nothing." Let that be our testimony, in Jesus' name, amen.

