

THE PUSHBACK AFTER PRAYER



PAUL JOSEPH

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PART ONE — WHAT IS HAPPENING

CHAPTER 1

The Answer Left on Day One

You know the moment I am talking about. You were reading your Bible and a promise jumped off the page like it had your name written on it. Something lit up inside you. You went into your room, shut the door, and poured your whole heart out to God. You prayed with real, rock-solid faith. You laid your burden down, you stood on what He said, and you walked out of that room practically floating. Peace was sitting on you like a warm coat. You knew, deep down, that everything was going to turn out right.

And then, twenty minutes later, you hit a wall.

The Wall After the Mountaintop

Maybe it was a thought that came out of nowhere, dark and heavy: Who are you kidding? The car started making that noise again. The bank account took a hit you never saw coming. The person you had just prayed for said something so cutting that you wondered whether you had made things worse by praying at all. Something pushed back, hard, against the very thing you had just put into God's hands.

It feels like a punch in the stomach right after a hug. The questions come fast. Did I pray wrong? Did I miss some spiritual formula? Did God even hear me, or did my words just bounce off the ceiling and land on the carpet?

A lot of sincere people look at that sudden wave of trouble and decide it means God has crossed His arms and said no. I want to

tell you, as plainly and as joyfully as I know how, that the Bible says something completely different. What you ran into after that prayer was not God resisting you. It was the enemy opposing you. And he is opposing you for one reason: because something has already happened that he cannot undo.

The pushback after prayer is real and predictable, and once you understand it, it will never again rob you. But first we have to settle what happened when you prayed. If you are not sure God answered, you will not stand. You will fold.

Heard Before You Finished

Here is the first thing to get down deep into your heart. Jesus said:

“For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6:8)

Before you ask. Your Father is not waiting to be informed. He is not surprised by your rent, your diagnosis, your teenager or your loneliness. He knew about it before the words formed in your mouth. Isaiah says the same thing from the other side of the Bible:

“It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer; And while they are still speaking, I will hear.”
(Isaiah 65:24)

While they are still speaking. You had not even said "Amen" yet, and heaven was already moving.

Daniel prayed, and for three weeks nothing visible happened. We will walk through his story later. For now, listen to the first thing heaven's messenger said when he arrived:

“Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words.” (Daniel 10:12)

From the first day. Not the twenty-first. God did not sit on Daniel's request for three weeks to see how miserable he could get. The answer left the throne room on day one. Whatever happened after that was not about God making up His mind.

The apostle John puts the whole thing into a sentence you can stand on:

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, 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 the petitions that we have asked of Him.”

(1 John 5:14-15)

Notice the tense. Not "we will maybe have." We have. When you pray according to what God has promised in His Word, the matter is settled in heaven the moment you ask. You may not be holding it yet. But it is yours.

The Package Is Already on the Truck

Let me put it in Tuesday-morning terms. You order something on your phone. The second you tap "Place Order," the deal is done. The warehouse gets the message, someone pulls the item off the shelf, packs it in a box, and a truck pulls out onto the highway with your name on the label. The supply is in motion. You do not have it in your hands, but it is coming.

Now imagine a thief hiding in the bushes at the end of your driveway. He cannot cancel your order or unload the truck. He has exactly one trick: to jump out, scare you half to death, and convince you to call the company and cancel the order yourself while it is still out for delivery.

That is the devil's entire strategy after you pray. He cannot stop God. He cannot cancel a promise. So he goes after the one person who can let go of it: you. The twenty-minute crash is the thief jumping out of the bushes. It is not a cancellation notice

from heaven. It is a scare tactic from a thief who knows the truck is already on its way.

Think about how that changes an ordinary Tuesday. You pray over breakfast for a stubborn situation at work, and by ten o'clock your manager has called you in about something completely unrelated. The old you would have sighed and said, "Well, so much for that prayer." The new you can smile, take a breath, and say, "I know what this is. My order went through."

Willingness, Not Reluctance

Somewhere along the line, many of us picked up a sad, religious idea that God plays hard to get. That He holds back help to see how much we can take. That prayer is a long wrestling match where you wear Him down, nagging like a toddler in the candy aisle, until He finally sighs and hands it over just to get some peace and quiet.

That is not the Father Jesus showed us. Listen to Paul's logic:

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

If God already gave His very best, why would He turn stingy over your car payment? He is not hoarding blessings behind a golden counter, waiting for a quota of tears. In fact, Paul says He has already done it:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,” (Ephesians 1:3)

Has blessed. Past tense. So prayer is never about overcoming God's reluctance. It is about laying hold of His willingness. The real question in prayer was never whether God is willing to hear you. The real question is whether you are willing to hold on to what He has already said.

THE PUSHBACK AFTER PRAYER

That changes the way you walk out of your prayer closet. You stop leaving like a beggar who is not sure the door will open again. You walk out like a son or a daughter who just placed an order with a Father who never runs out of stock.

So when the wall comes twenty minutes later, you will recognize it. That is the thief in the bushes. That is the sound of someone who knows your package is on the truck.

The pushback did not arrive because God said no; it arrived because God had already said yes.

CHAPTER 2

Pushback Is Opposition, Not Refusal

Picture a woman named Denise. She has been praying for months for her marriage, and one Sunday night she finally lets go of the worry and gives the whole thing to God. She falls asleep in peace for the first time in weeks. Monday morning, her husband slams a cupboard door and says the one sentence she least wanted to hear. Denise stands in the kitchen, coffee going cold, and a quiet voice settles over her: Well, there's your answer. God said no.

Did He? That is the question this chapter is going to answer, because if you cannot tell the difference between God's "no" and the enemy's resistance, you will spend your life surrendering ground God never asked you to give up.

Two Very Different Voices

Here is the problem. Opposition and refusal can look alike from the kitchen. Both feel like a door closing. Both leave you disappointed. But they come from completely different places, and they carry completely different fingerprints.

Jesus told us exactly whose fingerprints are on the stealing:

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Notice how simple He makes it. There are two job descriptions in that verse. One belongs to the thief: steal, kill, destroy. The other belongs to Jesus: life, and more of it. So when something comes charging into your life right after you pray, and its whole purpose is to rob your peace, crush your hope and wreck what

God promised, you do not have to wonder who sent it. It has the thief's handwriting all over it.

James gives us the other half of the picture:

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” (James 1:17)

Good things come from God. Bad things wearing a disguise do not suddenly become His gifts because they arrived after a prayer. Your Father does not answer your request for peace by sending panic. He does not answer your cry for provision by emptying your account. That is not how He talks.

The Promise Already Has an Answer

The second clue is even stronger. Ask yourself this: did I pray for something God has already promised in His Word? If the answer is yes, then you do not need to wait around wondering what His answer is. Paul settled it:

“For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”
(2 Corinthians 1:20)

All the promises. Not some. Not the ones you feel worthy of this week. In Jesus, every promise God made is already stamped "Yes." Forgiveness, peace, wisdom, provision, His presence, His help in trouble: those are not open questions. God answered them at the cross.

Jesus put it in language a parent understands:

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”
(Matthew 7:11)

Think about your own kids, or the kids you love. If your daughter asked for lunch, would you hand her a plate of gravel to "teach her something"? Of course not. And Jesus says, if a flawed human parent would not do that, how much more will your perfect Father give good things? So when the gravel shows up after you prayed for bread, do not say, "God must be teaching me a lesson." Say, "Somebody is trying to swap my plate."

When God Really Does Say No

Now, let me be honest with you, because I am not going to sell you a fairy tale. God does sometimes say no. James tells us one reason:

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:3)

If you have been asking God to help you get revenge, or to bless something He told you not to do, His "no" is a kindness. And sometimes He closes a door simply because He has a better one. When Paul and his team tried to head one direction, the Bible says they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia (Acts 16:6). A few days later, God opened the door to Europe, and the gospel went west.

But look at the difference in how that "no" felt. God's "no" comes with direction. It comes with peace, even when it is disappointing. It points you toward something. It never accuses you, never tells you that you are worthless, and never contradicts what He has already promised in His Word. The enemy's resistance is the opposite. It comes with fear, with confusion, with accusation, and it always tries to talk you out of something God has clearly said.

And let me add something tender here. Some of you have prayed for someone you loved, and they were not healed in this life, and you have carried a heavy question ever since. Please hear me: that loss does not mean you or they lacked faith. We live in a

world where the thief is still active, and there are things we will not fully understand until we see Jesus face to face. God was not cold toward you. He grieved with you, and He is holding you still.

The Religious Lie That God Plays Hard to Get

There is a teaching floating around in some contemporary churches that does a great deal of damage. It says that God deliberately holds back good things to toughen you up. That He sends sickness to humble you, poverty to teach you, and heartbreak to make you holy. It sounds deep. It sounds humble. And it turns the Father of lights into a moody landlord you can never quite please.

The effect of that lie is devastating. If you believe God is the one sending the storm, you will never stand against it. Why would you resist God? So you shrug, you sigh, and you hand the thief whatever he came for, thinking you are being spiritual. Meanwhile the enemy walks off with your peace and your promise, and you thank God for the robbery.

Do not misread a storm as God's cold silence. God can and does work good out of hard things; He is that good. But working good out of something is not the same as sending it. A doctor can set a broken leg beautifully, and you will thank him for it, but you do not credit him with pushing you down the stairs.

So the next time something slams shut after you pray, run it through these questions. Did I pray in line with what God has promised? Does this thing look like a good gift, or like stealing, killing and destroying? Is it pointing me toward life, or trying to drag me into fear? Most of the time, you will know within a minute. It is not a refusal. It is resistance.

Denise, by the way, put her coffee down that Monday morning and said out loud, "No. God gave me a promise for this house,

and I am not giving it back." That was not the end of her story. It was the beginning of her standing.

God's no points you somewhere; the devil's no only tries to make you stop.

CHAPTER 3

The Attack Proves You Are a Threat

Here is a question nobody likes to ask out loud, but almost everybody thinks: "If I am doing what God wants, why is everything suddenly so hard?" You started praying every morning, and your sleep fell apart. You decided to forgive your brother, and he picked a fight at the family dinner. You stepped up to serve at church, and your car broke down twice in one month. It feels backwards. Surely, if you are on the right road, the road should get smoother?

I want to turn that question on its head. What if the trouble is not proof you are on the wrong road? What if it is proof you are finally on the right one?

Nobody Shoots at an Empty Field

Think about a military commander. He has a limited supply of ammunition, and he is not foolish. He does not order his troops to fire at an empty, abandoned field. He fires at whatever is advancing. He fires at the thing that threatens his position.

The enemy of your soul works the same way. He is not going to waste his best shots on a believer who is no threat to him. If you were sitting still, praying nothing, believing nothing, and expecting nothing, he would leave you alone. He would let you coast along in comfort, because a comfortable Christian who never takes ground is exactly where he wants you.

But the moment you pray with real faith, you light up his radar. Something has moved. Ground is being taken. So he scrambles and fires. In the trench wars of a century ago, soldiers could sit in their trenches for days and hardly a shot was fired. But the

minute a soldier climbed over the top to advance, every gun on the other side opened up. The shooting did not mean the soldier was in the wrong place. It meant he was finally moving forward.

Paul was not shy about telling Timothy this:

“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” (2 Timothy 3:12)

Read it as a backhanded compliment. The pushback after your prayer is the enemy's way of admitting that your prayer worked.

Heaven Opened, Then the Wilderness

If you want to see this pattern clearly, watch what happened to Jesus Himself. At His baptism, the sky split open:

“And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.’” (Luke 3:22)

What a moment. The Father's voice out loud. The Spirit resting on Him. If ever there was a mountaintop, that was it. And what came next?

“Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.” (Luke 4:1-2)

From the open heaven straight into the wilderness. The devil did not waste time. And look at the very first thing he went after: If You are the Son of God. The Father had just said, "You are My beloved Son," and the enemy came immediately to question it. We will look later at exactly how Jesus answered him. For now, notice the timing. The attack came because something powerful had just been declared, and the enemy wanted to steal it before it took root.

If it happened to Jesus, do not be shocked when it happens to you. The pushback is not proof that the voice from heaven was wrong. It is proof that hell heard it too.

Nehemiah's Wall

The Old Testament gives us a wonderful, very practical picture of this in a man named Nehemiah. He heard that the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins, and he wept and fasted and prayed. God opened the door, the king gave him permission and supplies, and Nehemiah went home to rebuild. And the minute the first stones started going up, so did the opposition:

“But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews.” (Nehemiah 4:1)

When he heard that they were rebuilding. Not before. As long as the wall was rubble, nobody cared. The rage started the moment the work began. First came mockery, then threats, then plots. But look at what the people did:

“So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.” (Nehemiah 4:6)

They did not stop to argue. They did not conclude that the opposition meant God had changed His mind. They kept building. And when the threats grew louder, Nehemiah did two things at once:

“Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.” (Nehemiah 4:9)

They prayed, and they posted guards. Faith and watchfulness, side by side. Later his enemies tried to lure him off the wall for a "meeting," and his answer is one of my favourite lines in the Bible:

“I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?” (Nehemiah 6:3)

That is the attitude you want when the pushback hits. You are doing a great work. You prayed. God answered. You are not coming down off the wall to debate with mockery.

Reading the Attack Correctly

Let me bring this to an ordinary week. Picture a man named Grant who finally decides to deal with the anger that has been poisoning his home. He prays on Sunday night and asks God for a gentle heart. On Monday, his teenage son is rude at breakfast, a driver cuts him off on the highway, and his boss blames him for someone else's mistake. By Wednesday, Grant is thinking, "This prayer stuff makes it worse."

But if Grant reads the attack correctly, he sees what is really going on. He has climbed out of the trench. He has started building the wall. Of course the guns are firing. The very people and moments that are pushing his buttons are the enemy's attempt to make him quit before the gentleness God has planted has time to grow. Every time Grant answers with patience instead of a shout, another stone goes on the wall.

So be encouraged, not discouraged, when the pushback comes. And remember who is on your side:

“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4)

The enemy is firing because he is afraid. He knows Who is in you. He knows what your prayer set in motion. His noise is not a sign of his strength. It is a sign of his panic.

The enemy only aims at what he fears, and right now he is aiming at you.

CHAPTER 4

The Enemy Strikes at the Seed

Jesus told a story about a farmer, and then He did something He rarely did. He explained it, line by line, so nobody could miss the point. He even said that if we do not understand this parable, we will struggle to understand any of the others (Mark 4:13). So this is not a side story. It is the key that unlocks the rest. And right in the middle of it is one small word that explains why the attack comes so quickly after you pray.

"Immediately"

Here is the first type of soil Jesus described:

“And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.”

(Mark 4:15)

Immediately. The thief does not wait a month to see how things develop. He does not give the seed a chance to settle in. He shows up the very same day, sometimes the very same hour. The seed lands, and he is already there.

Why the rush? Because the enemy knows what a seed is. A seed looks like nothing. It is small, plain and easy to overlook. But inside that little thing is an entire harvest. If he lets it sit undisturbed in good soil, it will put down roots, and once it has roots, he cannot easily pull it out. So he goes for it while it is still lying on the surface.

That is exactly what happens after you pray a prayer based on God's Word. You have planted something. Faith has been born in you. And the enemy knows that newborn faith, left alone, grows

strong. So he hurries to smother it before it can root: a dark thought, a bad report, a sharp word, a sleepless night. Anything to snatch the seed off the path before it sinks in.

Four Soils, Four Kinds of Pushback

What I love about this parable is that Jesus does not describe just one attack. He describes four different soils, and when you read them carefully, they show you four different ways the enemy pushes back against what God has planted.

The first is the one we just read: snatching. The seed never even gets in. You pray in the morning and by lunchtime you cannot even remember what promise you were standing on. It is gone, carried off like breadcrumbs in a bird's beak.

The second is pressure:

“These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble.” (Mark 4:16-17)

Notice the word "immediately" shows up twice more. They receive it with joy immediately, and when trouble comes, they stumble immediately. This is the believer who walks out of a powerful service on fire, and three days later someone mocks them at work or a crisis hits, and the fire is out. And look why: "for the word's sake." The trouble came because of the word. The pressure is aimed at the seed.

The third is distraction:

“Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things

entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”
(Mark 4:18-19)

This one is sneaky. Nobody snatches the seed. Nobody attacks it. It just gets crowded out. Worry about bills. The chase for a little more money. A hundred other wants. The seed is still technically there, but it is fighting for sunlight under a jungle of other things. Many believers do not lose their promise to a dramatic attack. They lose it to a busy calendar.

And the fourth soil is the one we want to be:

“But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” (Mark 4:20)

Hear it, accept it, bear fruit. That is the whole goal. The good ground is not soil that never gets attacked. It is soil that holds on.

Guarding the Newborn

Here is the practical heart of this chapter. Faith is most vulnerable when it is newest. Peter wrote that new believers should be like babies who crave milk:

“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,” (1 Peter 2:2)

You do not leave a newborn alone on the porch. You feed it, you keep it warm, you watch over it closely, especially in the first days. The same is true for the faith that is born when you pray. In those first hours and days after you have laid hold of a promise, it needs extra care.

Let me show you what that looks like on an ordinary day. Picture a woman named Megan who has been struggling with fear for years. One evening she reads a verse that says God has not given her a spirit of fear, and something clicks. She prays and receives it. That night, guarding the seed means she does not scroll through frightening news before bed. The next morning, it means

she reads that same verse again over breakfast, out loud, before she checks her phone. At lunch, when a familiar wave of anxiety rolls in, it means she whispers the verse instead of rehearsing the worry. She is not trying to earn anything from God. She is simply keeping the birds off her seed while it puts down roots.

Jesus said the good-ground people do something specific:

“But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15)

Keep it. That is your job. God supplies the seed, the life and the growth. You keep it. You hold it, you protect it, and you give it time.

And as you keep it, something wonderful happens under the surface. Paul describes the believer who is:

“rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” (Colossians 2:7)

Rooted. Once the roots go down, the birds cannot carry it off, the sun cannot scorch it, and the thorns cannot choke it. The early attack was so fierce precisely because the enemy knew that if you kept the seed long enough to root, he would lose.

So when the pushback comes right after you pray, do not panic. Recognize it. It is the bird circling the path. Cover the seed, keep it, and let it go deep.

The devil rushes to the seed because he cannot stop the harvest.

CHAPTER 5

Deliverance Removes the Bondage, Not the Battles

Many people come to Jesus with a quiet assumption tucked in their back pocket. They think that once God sets them free, life will become smooth and easy. No more struggles, no more opposition, no more hard days. Then the first real battle arrives after their breakthrough, and they are stunned. "I thought God delivered me. Why am I fighting again?"

Here is the truth that will save you a great deal of confusion: deliverance removes the bondage; it does not remove the battles. In fact, before you were free, there was not much of a battle at all. There was only slavery. The fight starts when you walk out.

Free, and Then Chased

Nobody shows this better than Israel. For four hundred years they had been slaves in Egypt. Then God moved with plague after plague until Pharaoh finally let them go. They walked out with their families, their flocks, and even the gold of Egypt. They were free. Truly, genuinely free. And then, a few days later, this happened:

"Now it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh and his servants was turned against the people; and they said, 'Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?' "
(Exodus 14:5)

Listen to Pharaoh. He is not worried about their worship. He is worried about losing his workforce. "We have let Israel go from serving us." That is exactly how the enemy thinks about you

when you are set free. He has lost something he thought he owned, and he wants it back. So he gathers his chariots and comes after you.

“And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD.” (Exodus 14:10)

Picture the scene. Sea in front of them. Army behind them. Their freedom is only days old, and it already looks like it is about to be crushed. Some of them even said they would rather have stayed in Egypt. That is what pushback does. It makes the old prison look safer than the new freedom.

But notice what the chase did not mean. It did not mean Israel was still enslaved. They were out. The chains were off. Pharaoh's pursuit was not proof that the deliverance had failed. It was proof that it had worked, and that he was furious about it.

Jesus Never Promised a Quiet World

Jesus was very honest with His disciples about this:

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

He does not say, "Follow Me and nothing bad will ever happen." He says you will have trouble in this world. But He puts two things around that trouble like bookends: "in Me you may have peace," and "I have overcome the world." The battles are real, but they are being fought on ground He has already won.

And the freedom is just as real as the battles:

“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” (John 8:36)

Free indeed. Not "sort of free." Not "free until the next attack." So when Pharaoh's chariots show up, the question is not whether you are free. The question is whether you will stay free. Paul put it like this:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” (Galatians 5:1)

The enemy cannot put the chains back on you without your cooperation. All he can do is chase you and try to scare you into walking back.

"Why Do You Cry to Me?"

Now watch what God says to Moses, because it is one of the most surprising moments in the Bible. The people are screaming. Moses turns to the Lord, and the Lord answers:

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea.’ ” (Exodus 14:15-16)

Why do you cry to Me? God is not scolding Moses for praying. He is telling him that the time for crying is over and the time for acting has come. And He reminds Moses of something Moses already had: the rod. Back at the burning bush, God had asked him, "What is that in your hand?" and had told him to take that rod and do signs with it. The authority was not new. It had been given long before the Red Sea. Moses simply needed to use it.

So Moses did:

“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided.” (Exodus 14:21)

Moses stretched out his hand, and the Lord moved the sea. God's power and Moses' obedience worked together. The same people who had been trapped walked through on dry ground, and the army that chased them never chased them again.

What This Looks Like on a Tuesday

Let me make this practical. Picture a man named Ray who has been set free from years of drinking. He prayed, he got help, he has been sober for six weeks, and he knows God did something real in him. Then comes a rough Tuesday. His car is towed, his ex-wife calls with bad news, and on the drive home he passes the bar he used to sit in every night. Every craving he thought was gone seems to come roaring back at once.

That Tuesday does not mean Ray was never delivered. It is Pharaoh's chariots. It is the enemy saying, "Why did we let him go?" And Ray has a rod in his hand. He has the name of Jesus, the Word of God, and the friends God has put around him. So instead of sitting in the car crying, "God, why is this happening?" Ray picks up the phone and calls his friend from church. He speaks out loud the verse he memorized: "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." He drives past the bar and goes home. That is stretching out the rod. That is walking through the sea.

You are going to have battles after your breakthrough. That is not a sign that God's work failed. It is a sign that the enemy noticed. Pick up what God already put in your hand, and go forward. Pharaoh only chases people who have already left.

CHAPTER 6

Daniel and the Twenty-One Days

If I could give every discouraged believer one chapter of the Bible to read slowly, it might be Daniel chapter ten. It pulls back the curtain on the invisible world and shows you what happens between the moment you pray and the moment the answer shows up. Once you have seen it, you will never look at a "delay" the same way again.

Three Weeks of Silence

Daniel was an old man by this time. He had served kings, survived a den of lions, and prayed faithfully for decades. Now he was burdened about the future of his people, and he set himself to seek God:

“In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.” (Daniel 10:2-3)

Think about what those three weeks felt like. Day one: he prays. Nothing. Day five: still nothing. Day ten: not a word, not a sign, not a whisper. Two weeks pass. If Daniel had been living by his feelings, he could easily have decided that God was ignoring him, or that he had done something wrong, or that this kind of praying simply did not work.

Most of us know that stretch. You pray for your son, and a week later he is no different. You pray for a job, and the inbox stays empty for twenty days. The silence feels personal. It starts to whisper, "God is not listening to you."

What Was Really Going On

Then, on the twenty-first day, a messenger from heaven appeared. And the first thing out of his mouth answered the question that had been hanging over Daniel for three weeks:

“Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words.” (Daniel 10:12)

God heard him on the first day. The answer was sent on the first day. So what was the hold-up? The angel explained:

“But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.” (Daniel 10:13)

There it is. The delay was not in heaven's willingness. The delay was in the unseen battle between heaven and earth. A dark spiritual power, called here "the prince of the kingdom of Persia," stood in the way of the answer for three weeks. It took Michael, one of God's great angels, to break the resistance.

Paul tells us this kind of battle is not a strange one-off from ancient history. It is the normal backdrop of the Christian life:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12)

Your real opponent is not your boss, your ex, your landlord or your doctor's schedule. There is a spiritual struggle behind the scenes, and it is that struggle the pushback after prayer comes from. Daniel could not see the fight. He only saw the silence. But the silence was not empty. It was full of war.

Even after delivering the answer, the messenger told Daniel the fight was not over:

“Then he said, ‘Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come.’” (Daniel 10:20)

That is sobering, and it is also comforting. Heaven does not get tired of fighting for God's people. The resistance is real, but so is the help.

Daniel's Part in the Fight

Here is what moves me most about this story. Daniel did not know any of this was happening. Nobody told him on day four, "Hang on, there is a battle going on." He simply kept praying. He kept fasting. He kept his heart set on God.

What if he had quit on day ten? What if he had sighed, gone back to eating normally, and said, "Well, I guess God isn't going to answer this one"? We cannot know every detail of how heaven works, but this much is clear: the messenger came because of Daniel's words, and Daniel's words did not stop. His persistence anchored the line while heaven cleared the road.

That is why Jesus told His disciples a parable with this purpose:

“Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,” (Luke 18:1)

Not lose heart. That is the whole battle on your side. You are not trying to convince God. Daniel proves that God was convinced on day one. You are simply refusing to let go of the rope while the answer fights its way through.

And notice that this was not idle waiting. Daniel was not sitting on his couch shrugging. His waiting was active: praying, fasting, humbling himself, setting his heart. That is the kind of waiting God honours. It is not passive resignation that says, "Whatever

will be, will be." It is standing, expectant faith that says, "God has spoken, and I am staying right here until I see it."

Delay Is Not Denial

Let me bring this home with a picture. A woman named Colleen has been praying for her younger brother, who has not spoken to the family in two years. She prays, and nothing happens. Weeks become months. Every holiday his chair is empty. Some days she wonders whether her prayers are reaching anyone at all.

But if Colleen understands Daniel ten, she can pray with a completely different heart. She can say, "Father, I know You heard me the first day I prayed for him. I know the answer left Your throne that day. Whatever is standing in the way, I am not letting go." That is not denial of the pain. It is refusing to let the pain interpret God for her.

When the messenger finally reached Daniel, he was so overwhelmed he could hardly stand. And the angel said something beautiful:

"And he said, 'O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!' So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, 'Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.'" (Daniel 10:19)

O man greatly beloved. Daniel had spent three weeks wondering whether God cared, and heaven's first word to him was "beloved." That is God's heart toward you in your waiting, too. The delay was never a sign that you were less loved. It was a sign that something precious was being fought for.

So if your answer seems late, do not assume it was refused. Remember the prince of Persia. Remember Michael. Remember that the answer left on day one. And keep your heart set, just as Daniel did, until the messenger knocks.

THE PUSHBACK AFTER PRAYER

Heaven answered on day one; the battle only decided how long you would have to keep standing.

PART TWO — STANDING

CHAPTER 7

Standing, Not Fighting, Is the Assignment

When most of us hear the words "spiritual warfare," we picture something exhausting. We imagine ourselves charging into battle every morning, swinging wildly, trying to win a victory over the devil that never quite seems to get won. We pray louder, longer and harder, hoping that this time we will finally beat him. And by Friday we are worn out.

I have good news for you. That is not your assignment. Your assignment is far simpler, and far more powerful. You are not called to win the war. You are called to stand in a war that has already been won.

Read the Instructions Again

Paul's famous passage on the armour of God is often read as a call to fight. But read it slowly, and count one word:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

(Ephesians 6:10-11)

Stand. Not attack. Not conquer. Stand. And he keeps going:

“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist

with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,” (Ephesians 6:13-14)

In four short lines, Paul uses that word four times: stand, withstand, stand, stand. He is not being repetitive by accident. He is hammering home the job description. Having done all, stand. When you have prayed, when you have believed, when you have put your trust in what God said, your job is not to go looking for a fresh battle. Your job is to stay planted.

Notice, too, where the strength comes from: "in the Lord and in the power of His might." Not in your muscles. Not in your emotional energy on a good day. You are standing in His strength, which means you can keep standing even on the days you feel weak.

The War Was Won Before You Showed Up

Why stand instead of fight? Because Jesus already fought. Look at what Paul says happened at the cross:

“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”
(Colossians 2:15)

Disarmed. The enemy's weapons were stripped away. Made a public spectacle. In the ancient world, a victorious general would march his defeated enemies through the streets in chains so everyone could see they were beaten. That is what Jesus did with the powers of darkness. He did not wound them. He paraded them.

So when you face the pushback after prayer, you are not facing an undefeated champion. You are facing a disarmed enemy who is bluffing. Paul says it again elsewhere:

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Gives us the victory. Present tense. You do not earn it, and you do not win it. You receive it. Your part is to hold on to what you have been given.

Here is a picture that helps. Imagine a town that has been liberated at the end of a war. The enemy army has surrendered. The treaty is signed. But there are still a few stragglers in the hills, taking pot shots and spreading rumours that they are coming back. The soldiers who stay in that town are not there to win the war. The war is over. They are there to guard what has been won, so the stragglers cannot sneak back in and take it. That is what the armour of God is for. It is not for conquering new ground. It is for guarding conquered ground.

"Stand Still and See"

The Old Testament gives us two moments that show this beautifully. The first is at the Red Sea, when Israel was terrified and the Egyptian army was closing in. Moses spoke to the people:

"And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever.'"

(Exodus 14:13)

The second is centuries later, when a huge army came against King Jehoshaphat. He and the people fasted and prayed, and God answered through a prophet:

"Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's."

(2 Chronicles 20:15)

And then:

"You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD,

who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem! Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you.” (2 Chronicles 20:17)

Notice something important. "Stand still" did not mean "sit on the couch and do nothing." In Jehoshaphat's case, God said, "Position yourselves" and "go out against them." The people got up early and marched out. Standing is not passive. It is a posture. It is choosing your position on God's promise and refusing to move off it, no matter how loud the enemy gets. They went to the battlefield, but they did not have to fight, because God had already settled it.

Standing on an Ordinary Tuesday

So what does standing look like when you are not at the Red Sea, just in your kitchen with a stack of bills? Picture a man named Victor who prayed for God's provision after losing his job. He found promises in the Word, prayed over them, and thanked God for the answer. Two days later, a rejection email arrives, then another.

Fighting would look like Victor panicking and begging God all over again as if the first prayer never counted. Standing looks different. Standing is Victor saying, "Lord, I already asked You. I believe You heard me. I am not going to pray this prayer again as if You are hard of hearing. Thank You that Your provision is on the way." Then he gets up, sends three more applications, and helps his neighbour with a broken fence. He is active, he is working, he is expectant. But inside, he is not swinging wildly. He is standing his ground. And when the next rejection comes, he does not treat it as God's verdict. He treats it as a straggler in the hills, taking a pot shot at a town that has already been liberated.

Paul summed it up in one line to the Corinthians:

“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.”

(1 Corinthians 16:13)

Stand fast. That is your whole assignment after prayer. You do not have to beat the devil again. Jesus already did. You only have to stay where the victory put you.

You were never sent to win the war; you were sent to hold the ground Jesus already won.

CHAPTER 8

Receive Before You See

There is one verse in the Gospels that, once you really understand it, will change the way you walk out of every prayer for the rest of your life. Jesus said it to His disciples the morning after He spoke to a fig tree, when they saw it withered from the roots. They were amazed, and He told them how it worked:

“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” (Mark 11:24)

Most of us have read that verse a hundred times. But I want you to slow down and look at the order of the words, because the order is everything.

Mind the Grammar

Notice where Jesus puts the believing. He does not say, "Believe you receive them when you see them." He does not say, "Believe when you feel them," or "Believe once the bank statement shows it." He says, "Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them."

When you pray. That is when the receiving happens. Then comes the second half: "and you will have them." Having comes later. Receiving comes first.

So there are really two moments in every answered prayer. There is the moment you receive, which happens in the unseen realm the instant you ask in faith. And there is the moment you have, which happens in the seen realm when the answer shows up where your eyes can see it. The trouble is that most of us have

them reversed. We want to have first, and then we will believe we received. Jesus says it works the other way round.

Here is a picture that helps. When you buy a house, there is a day when you sit at a table and sign the papers. The moment the last signature goes down, the house is yours. Legally, fully, completely. But you are still sitting in an office with a pen in your hand. You have not moved in. Your furniture is still at the old place. For a few weeks, you own a house you are not yet living in. Nobody in their right mind walks out of that office saying, "Well, I guess I don't really own it, since I'm not sleeping there tonight."

That is what it means to receive before you see. You signed. It is yours. The moving van is coming.

What Faith Actually Is

The book of Hebrews gives us the clearest definition of faith in the whole Bible:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

Faith is substance. It is not a feeling, a mood or a wish. It is the real, solid stuff of the thing you are hoping for, held in your heart before it shows up in your hands. And it is evidence. In a courtroom, evidence is what proves something is true even though the judge did not see it happen. Faith is heaven's evidence that the answer is real before your eyes can verify it.

That is why Paul could say:

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

And he explains why that is not wishful thinking:

“while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are

seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:18)

This is one of the most freeing truths in Scripture. What you can see right now, the symptom, the empty bank balance, the silence from your son, is temporary. It is real, but it is not final. What God has said is eternal. Faith fixes its eyes on the eternal thing and lets the temporary thing catch up.

Abraham Called It Done

Nobody lived this better than Abraham. God told him he would be the father of many nations when he did not have a single child, and when he and his wife were far past the age of having one. Look how Paul describes the God Abraham believed:

“(as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;” (Romans 4:17)

God calls things that do not exist as though they did. Before Isaac was born, God was already calling Abraham "father of many nations." In fact, God changed his name from Abram to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude." Picture this old man introducing himself to strangers by that name, with no children anywhere in sight. Every time he said his own name, he was declaring the promise.

“who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ ”
(Romans 4:18)

Contrary to hope, in hope believed. Every natural reason for hope was gone, and he believed anyway, because God had spoken. And here is the secret of how he held on:

“and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.” (Romans 4:21)

Fully convinced. Not "fairly hopeful." Abraham had settled it. If God said it, God could do it. Case closed.

Counting It Done on a Tuesday

So how does this work in a normal week? Picture a woman named Rosa who has been praying for peace in her mind after a long season of anxiety. One night she finds a promise, prays over it, and believes she receives peace. The next morning she wakes up and the old jittery feeling is still in her chest.

Here is where the grammar of Mark 11:24 rescues her. Rosa does not say, "I guess I didn't receive it." She says, "Father, I received Your peace last night when I prayed. Thank You that it is mine. I am going to walk in it today." And she goes about her day with that thanks on her lips, the way a new homeowner talks about "my house" before the moving van arrives. If she needs to see her doctor about that anxiety, she goes, and she thanks God on the way there too, because seeking God and getting good care are not rivals. Over the following days, she notices the peace growing stronger, settling in, moving from her spirit into her emotions.

That is how faith works. It counts the thing done because God said it, and then it lives like it is done until the eyes catch up.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

(Hebrews 11:6)

He is a rewarder. When you received in prayer, you were not playing pretend. You were signing for something real.

Faith does not wait to see before it receives; it receives, and then it waits to see.

CHAPTER 9

Believe It, Say It, Walk It

On Sunday morning the message is about God our provider. Your heart jumps. You nod, you lift your hands, you say "Amen!" loud enough for the row in front of you to hear. You walk out of church believing every word of it.

On Monday morning at nine o'clock, a repair bill for the car lands on your desk. Your stomach drops into your shoes. Your mind starts running numbers. By lunchtime you are telling a colleague you have no idea how you are going to pay it.

What happened between Sunday and Monday? Did you lose your faith overnight? No. Here is the honest answer, and it is good news, because it can be fixed: on Sunday you agreed with the Word. Agreeing is a fine start, but it is not the same thing as faith.

Agreeing Is Not the Same as Believing

Plenty of sincere believers think that because they agree with the Bible, they have faith. They would never argue with a single verse. They can quote the promises. They underline them in three colours. But agreeing with a truth and putting your weight on it are two different things.

Think of a chair. You can admire a chair, study how it was made, and tell everyone you are completely convinced it would hold you. But you only believe in that chair when you sit down in it. Until then, you are a fan of the chair, not a believer in it.

Mental agreement puts the Word in a glass display case and salutes it from a safe distance. Faith takes the Word out of the case, rolls up its sleeves, and lives on it. And that is exactly the

difference that shows up in the pushback after prayer. Agreement goes quiet the moment the bill arrives. Faith keeps standing on what God said.

James puts it plainly:

“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17)

A dead faith can sit in church and nod. It just never moves your mouth or your feet.

The Key in Your Hand

Picture a man standing on his own front porch in the pouring rain. In his hand is the key to the door. He holds it up, studies the grooves, and says to the neighbours, "I believe with all my heart that this key fits this lock. I am fully persuaded that warmth and light and dry clothes are waiting on the other side." And he stays on the porch, shivering, because he never puts the key in the lock and turns it.

That is where so many of us live after we pray. The Word of God is the key. Believing it is holding the key firmly in your hand. But there is one more thing a key needs. It has to be turned. Speaking the Word and acting on the Word is the turning of the key. Until it turns, the answer stays on the other side of the door: talked about, admired, prayed about, but not walked into.

Paul gives us the law of how this works:

“And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak,” (2 Corinthians 4:13)

Believed, therefore spoke. Believing and speaking are married in that verse, and what God has joined together we should not separate. Faith that stays locked up in silence never gets out of the house. Faith speaks before it sees, and then it sees because it spoke.

Paul says the same thing about the greatest answer to prayer any of us has ever received:

“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

(Romans 10:10)

Heart and mouth. That is how you were saved, and that is how you go on walking with God through every pushback that follows.

The Woman Who Said It Before She Felt It

Mark tells us about a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. She had spent everything she had looking for help, and nothing had worked; she had only grown worse. She was worn out in her body, cut off from her neighbours, and broke. Then she heard about Jesus.

“When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, ‘If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well.’”

(Mark 5:27-28)

Look at the order. She heard. She said. She acted. She heard about Jesus. She said, "I shall be made well." Not "I hope so," not "maybe, if it is God's will, but His ways are mysterious." She said what was going to happen before a single thing had changed in her body. And then her words directed her feet. Weak as she was, she pushed through a crowd that was shoving in every direction, stretched out her hand, and touched the edge of His clothes.

Instantly she was healed. And Jesus stopped the whole procession to find her, not to scold her but to bless her:

“And He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.’”

(Mark 5:34)

Your faith. Jesus pointed at the thing she carried with her into that crowd: a heart that believed, a mouth that agreed, and a pair of feet that moved before she could feel any difference.

Let me add one word of care here, because this story is easily misused. She had seen doctors for years, and the Bible does not mock her for it. Seeking God and getting good care are not rivals, and nobody should read this story and stop their treatment. What the story teaches is where her confidence finally rested, and what she said and did once it rested there.

The Switch on the Wall

Picture a house in the middle of winter, dark and freezing. The family inside sits huddled on the floor complaining, "Why won't the power company give us electricity? If they really cared, our lights would be on and our heaters would be running." And all the while the power lines outside are humming with more electricity than that house could ever use, and the light switch is on the wall about two feet from their hands.

Nobody would blame the power station for that dark house. The power is there. The switch simply has to be flipped.

God has already supplied everything Jesus paid for. As we saw at the start of this book, Paul asks the question that settles it:

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

Heaven is not holding a committee meeting about whether to help you. The answer is already yes in Christ. But faith is the switch, and you flip it with your mouth and your feet. When you keep speaking and acting on what God said, the lights come on in the house. When you go quiet, or worse, start speaking the opposite, the power station is still humming and the house stays dark.

Believing It on a Wednesday

So what does this look like in a normal week? Picture a man named Jonah who has been out of work for two months. On Sunday night he and his wife pray together for a job, and they receive it by faith. On Monday there are no calls.

The old Jonah would have stayed on the porch with the key in his hand: believing in theory, doing nothing in practice, and telling his friends it was all in God's hands. This time he turns the key. He thanks God out loud each morning for the job that is on its way. He tells his wife, "God has provided; we are going to walk in it." And he acts like a man whose answer is coming. He updates his CV, he makes the calls, he shows up to every interview dressed for the job he believes he has received.

On Wednesday a door slams. On Thursday another one does. He refuses to change what he is saying. Three weeks later a former colleague rings him about a position that was never even advertised. Jonah does not think his phone calls earned it. He knows God supplied it. But he also knows he was standing in the doorway when it came, not shivering on the porch.

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22)

Do not just admire the key. Believe it, say it, and walk through the door.

CHAPTER 10

Wavering Forfeits the Grip

Have you ever watched someone try to carry a full cup of coffee across a moving bus? If they stand firm, knees soft, eyes fixed, they usually make it. But if they keep shifting their weight every time the bus lurches, the coffee ends up on their shoes. The coffee was never the problem. The wobbling was.

That is a pretty good picture of what James is warning us about when he talks about wavering in prayer. And it is one of the most important lessons for anyone who wants to hold on to what God has given through the pushback.

The Wave on the Sea

Here is what James wrote:

“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 that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:6-8)

Now, I want you to read that carefully, because many people have read it as though God gets offended at a doubter and decides to punish him by withholding the answer. That is not what James says. Look at the picture he uses. A wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. The wave is not being punished. It simply has no stability. It goes wherever the wind pushes it. North today, south tomorrow, crashing on the rocks the day after. That is what happens to the believer who keeps changing his mind. On Monday morning he believes God heard him. On Monday afternoon, after a bad phone call, he is sure God did not.

On Tuesday he is back to believing. On Wednesday he is in despair. He is double-minded, which literally means he has two minds, two opinions, pulling in opposite directions. And James says that person is "unstable in all his ways."

Here is the key. God is not the one who moves. God released the answer when you prayed. But a person who keeps letting go and grabbing again cannot keep hold of anything. The devil cannot stop God's promise. What he can do is trick you into loosening your grip on it.

Peter on the Water

The Bible gives us a living picture of this in Peter. The disciples were in a boat in the middle of a storm at night, and they saw Jesus walking toward them on the water. Peter, always the bold one, called out:

“And Peter answered Him and said, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ So He said, ‘Come.’ And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’” (Matthew 14:28-31)

Let us give Peter some credit. He is the only man in history apart from Jesus who walked on water. He got out of the boat when the others stayed in. He stood on one word from Jesus: "Come." And as long as his eyes were on Jesus and his feet were on that word, the water held him up.

Then something changed. Not the wind. The wind had been blowing the whole time. What changed was where Peter was looking. "When he saw that the wind was boisterous." He looked away from the One who had said "Come" and started studying

the storm. And the moment his attention shifted from the word to the waves, he began to sink.

Here is the part we often miss: the wind was no stronger when Peter sank than when he first stepped out. The storm had not grown. Only his attention had shifted.

That is wavering. You were walking on a promise, and then you looked at the symptoms, the bills, the cold shoulder, and started measuring your situation by the wind. The word under your feet had not changed. Your focus had.

Most of us were trained to live from the outside in. We wait to feel well before we say we are healed. We wait to see the money before we thank God for provision. We wait for our feelings to cheer up before we rejoice. That is living by the five senses, and in God's kingdom the order runs the other way. Faith speaks first, and the senses catch up second.

Jesus said as much to Thomas, who would not believe until he could touch the wounds:

“Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” (John 20:29)

Blessed are those who have not seen. That is you, in the pushback after prayer. Your body may report pain and your eyes may see a pile of unpaid bills, but you are not obliged to let them have the final say. God's Word is the highest court there is, and you can stand on what He said before your senses agree with it.

And notice how kind Jesus was. "Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him." He did not let Peter drown to teach him a lesson. He lifted him up, and then He asked a gentle question: "Why did you doubt?" Not "How dare you doubt?" but "Why?" In other words, "Peter, there was no reason to. I was right here the whole time."

Feelings Every Morning, or the Word Every Morning

Here is where this gets very practical. Most of us wake up with a weather report going on inside. Some mornings we feel full of faith. Some mornings we feel flat, tired and unsure. If we let those feelings decide whether God's promise is still true, we will be waves on the sea, believing on sunny days and doubting on cloudy ones.

The writer of Hebrews gives us a better way:

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”

(Hebrews 10:23)

Look at the reason he gives. Not "because you feel strong." Not "because things look better." "For He who promised is faithful." Your grip is not anchored in your mood. It is anchored in His character. And His Word does not change with your feelings:

“Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.”

(Psalm 119:89)

Settled. That means it is not up for daily review. It does not need your feelings to vote on it each morning.

Let me show you what this looks like. Picture a man named Kevin who has prayed for healing in his back after an injury. He is seeing his doctor and doing his physical therapy, and he has also put his faith in God's promises. Some mornings he wakes up and the pain is lighter, and he feels great about his prayer. Other mornings it is worse, and a voice says, "See, nothing is happening." The old Kevin would ride that wave up and down. The new Kevin has a habit. Before he checks how his back feels, he opens his Bible and reads the promise he is standing on. He says out loud, "Lord, I believe You heard me, and I am holding fast, because You are faithful." Then he gets up and goes to his therapy appointment. His feelings get a voice, but they do not get a vote.

That is what Paul meant when he told the believers:

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

(1 Corinthians 15:58)

Steadfast. Immovable. Not because the wind stops blowing, but because you have decided where your feet are planted.

The wind was never strong enough to sink Peter; only looking at it was.

CHAPTER 11

"It Is Written" as the Standing Weapon

You have prayed. You have received. You are standing. And now the darts start flying. So here is the most practical question in this whole book: what exactly do you do with your mouth and your mind when the enemy starts talking?

Most of us argue with him in our heads, round after round, or try to ignore him, which works about as well as ignoring a smoke alarm. Or, worst of all, we agree with him. Jesus showed us a fourth way, and it is the only one that works. He answered every single lie with three words: "It is written."

The Wilderness Blueprint

Look at how the encounter opens.

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry."

(Matthew 4:1-2)

Notice that Jesus was hungry. The Bible does not hide that from us. He was not floating six inches off the ground with a glow around His head. He was a Man in a desert with an empty stomach, which is exactly when the tempter showed up.

"Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.' But He answered and said, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."'" (Matthew 4:3-4)

The first dart went straight for His identity and His appetite at the same time. "If You are the Son of God." The devil loves to turn what God has declared into a question mark. He still does it. You pray over your marriage, your health, your finances, and within hours a voice says, "If God really heard you..." "If you were really forgiven..." "If you were really His child..."

Jesus did not debate the word "if." He did not prove Himself by doing a miracle on demand. He reached past His feelings, past His hunger, past the logic of the moment, and He pulled out what His Father had already said.

The second dart was sneakier. The devil quoted Scripture himself, twisting a promise from Psalm 91 to dare Jesus into a stunt off the top of the temple. And Jesus answered,

"It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" (Matthew 4:7)

I love that word again. When the enemy twists one verse, you do not throw the Bible away. You answer with more of it. The cure for scripture used wrongly is scripture used rightly.

The third dart was the shortcut: all the kingdoms of the world, no cross required, just one little bow.

"Then Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (Matthew 4:10)

And then look at the result.

"Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him." (Matthew 4:11)

The devil left. Not because Jesus out-argued him or felt strong, but because there is no comeback to what God has said. Three darts, three answers, one result. That is a pattern for you.

The Shield and the Sword

Paul takes that wilderness pattern and turns it into equipment you can wear.

“above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;” (Ephesians 6:16-17)

Picture the fiery darts of an ancient battlefield: arrows wrapped in cloth soaked in pitch and set alight. They were not designed only to pierce. They were designed to spread fire. One burning arrow in a tent and the whole camp is soon in panic. That is exactly how a lying thought works after prayer. One small "it didn't work" lands in your mind at breakfast, and by lunchtime it has set fire to your peace, your patience and your plans.

The Roman shield was often covered in leather and soaked in water before battle, so that a flaming arrow hitting it simply fizzled out. Faith is that soaked shield. It does not stop the arrows being fired. It puts them out when they land.

But notice that Paul does not hand you only a shield. He gives you a sword, and he tells you plainly what the sword is: the word of God. The shield protects. The sword pushes back. A soldier with only a shield can survive, but he cannot advance. When you speak the Word, you are not merely defending your ground; you are driving the enemy off it.

And this sword is not a museum piece.

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

Living. Powerful. Sharp. It cuts between what your soul feels and what your spirit knows. That is precisely the battlefield after prayer. Your soul says, "Nothing has changed." Your spirit says, "God heard me." The Word slices cleanly between the two and tells you which one to believe.

The Word Never Comes Home Empty

Here is why "It is written" carries such weight. God Himself has promised what His Word will do.

“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Rain does not fall on a field and float back up to the clouds unused. When you send God's Word out of your mouth against a lie, it does not bounce off and come back empty. It soaks in and does what God sent it to do.

A Verse for Every Dart

Let me make this as practical as a Tuesday morning. Meet Dominic. Dominic prayed on Sunday night for a job after months of rejection letters. He went to bed at peace. On Monday morning he opened his inbox to another "we regret to inform you." Right on cue came the dart: "God doesn't care about your bills."

Old Dominic would have spent the whole day chewing on that sentence. New Dominic had learned the wilderness pattern. He stood in his kitchen and said out loud, "It is written," and then he read Philippians 4:19 with his own name in it, the promise that God would supply all his need. The thought came back an hour

later, a little quieter. He answered it again. By Wednesday the voice had grown bored of losing.

You cannot pull out a sword you never picked up.

“Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11)

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy in the desert because Deuteronomy was already in Him. So do the simple thing. Take the darts you hear most often, the ones about money, fear, your body, your family, your worth, and find a promise that answers each one. Write them down. Read them aloud. Put them on the fridge, the dashboard, the bathroom mirror. Bringing your feelings to a lie is like bringing a pool noodle to a sword fight. Bring the sword. The devil has heard every argument you own, but he has never once found an answer to "It is written."

CHAPTER 12

Do Not Dig Up Your Own Seed

Every schoolteacher knows the bean-in-a-cup experiment. Each child gets a plastic cup, some soil and one dried bean. They push the bean down with a finger, water it, write their name on the cup and line it up on the windowsill.

Little Theo was seven and very excited about his bean. So excited that on Tuesday morning he dug it up to see how it was doing. Nothing much. He pushed it back in. On Wednesday he dug it up again. A tiny crack in the skin. Back it went. On Thursday he pulled it out to show his friend. By Friday every cup on the windowsill had a little green hook pushing through the soil except one. Theo's cup was just mud and a very tired bean. Theo did not lack a good seed, good soil, water or sunshine. He lacked one thing: the ability to leave it alone. His bean was not killed by the weather. It was killed by his own curious fingers.

The Spade in Your Mouth

Here is the uncomfortable truth. After we pray, most of us do not dig up our seed with our fingers. We dig it up with our words.

You pray in faith on Sunday night. On Monday a friend asks how things are going, and you hear yourself say, "Oh, I prayed about it, but nothing's changed. Honestly, I don't think it's going to happen." On Tuesday you tell your sister, "It's just one thing after another with me." On Wednesday you sigh to your colleague, "That's my luck." Each sentence is a little spade, and each one turns over the soil where the seed was planted.

Scripture takes our words far more seriously than we do.

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.” (Proverbs 18:21)

Notice the last part: you eat the fruit of your tongue. Your words are not just noise that disappears into the air. They are seeds that grow a crop, and you are the one who sits down to supper with it. Speak defeat all week and do not be surprised when defeat is on your plate by Friday.

Jesus used the same picture when He explained the parable of the sower:

“The sower sows the word.” (Mark 4:14)

Every word you speak is a seed of some kind. If you wake up, look in the mirror and announce, "I'm coming down with that flu, everything is falling apart, I never get a break," you are not being realistic. You are sowing weeds in your own field, and then wondering why God let them grow. A farmer who plants thistles cannot pray for wheat and expect God to break the laws of farming for him. But when you take God's own word and plant that instead, the crop changes:

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)

The harvest always matches the seed.

James gives us a picture any sailor would understand.

“Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.” (James 3:4-5)

A rudder is tiny compared to the ship, but it decides where the ship goes, wind or no wind. The fierce winds after prayer are real. The symptoms, the bills, the slammed doors are real. But the winds do not get to steer. The rudder does, and the rudder is your tongue.

Say, Says, Says

Now look at how Jesus taught His disciples to deal with a mountain.

“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.”
(Mark 11:23)

Read it slowly and count. Whoever says. Those things he says. Whatever he says. Believing is mentioned once. Saying is mentioned three times. Jesus did not tell us to think at the mountain, hope at the mountain, or worry about the mountain. He told us to speak to it.

And notice who is being spoken to. Not God. The mountain. This is where so many sincere believers have got it backwards. We spend our prayer time talking to God about our problem: "Lord, this debt is so big. Lord, this pain is so bad. Lord, my son is so far away." Then we spend the rest of the day describing the problem to everyone else. The mountain gets a lot of publicity and very few instructions.

Jesus turns it around. Talk to your Father about His promises, and talk to the mountain about your Father. "Debt, you are not my master; my God supplies my need." "Fear, you have no place in this house." "Mountain, move."

Let me be gentle and clear here, because this is easily twisted. Speaking to the mountain does not mean pretending the mountain is not there. If the doctor gives you a diagnosis, you do not say, "I don't have that." You go to your appointments, you take wise advice, and you also refuse to let the diagnosis have the last word. Faith does not deny facts. Faith simply outranks them. You can be completely honest with God about how much it hurts. David poured out his heart in the Psalms, tears and all. But

honesty about your pain is different from preaching sermons of defeat to everyone who will listen.

Guard the Gate of Your Lips

Jesus showed us where words come from.

“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matthew 12:34)

That means your mouth is not only a spade; it is also a window. What you keep saying reveals what you are really believing. If every conversation drifts back to the problem, it is a sign that the problem has more room in your heart than the promise does. The answer is not just to bite your tongue; it is to fill your heart. Pour in the Word until the overflow changes.

Then ask God for help with the gate itself. David prayed,

“Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.” (Psalm 141:3)

What does that look like on an ordinary Tuesday? Meet Lena. Lena and her husband had been praying for a breakthrough with their teenage daughter, who had stopped speaking to them. They prayed, they agreed together, and they received the answer by faith. Then came the pushback: a slammed bedroom door, a hurtful text. At the school gate a friend asked, "How's it going with your girl?"

The old Lena would have unloaded the whole sorry saga and finished with "I've given up hoping." This time she paused, smiled and said, "It's been a rough week, but we've prayed and we're believing God is turning her heart. Watch this space." She was not lying about the rough week. She just refused to dig up the seed in front of an audience.

That night she did the same thing at home. Instead of rehearsing every hurtful word at the dinner table, she and her husband thanked God out loud for the daughter He was restoring to them.

It felt awkward at first, almost silly. Months later, when that same daughter sat at the kitchen table crying and asking for a fresh start, Lena understood what had been growing under the soil all that time.

Here is a simple exercise. For one week, catch every sentence you say about your situation and ask, "Is this watering the seed or digging it up?" If it is digging, stop mid-sentence if you have to, and replace it with what God has said. You will be amazed how often the spade is in your hand.

Your seed is good. God's soil is good. The Sun of Righteousness is shining on it. Now take your fingers off the cup.

Put the spade down; the seed already knows what to do.

CHAPTER 13

Half an Hour After the Amen

I want to talk about something I have watched happen more times than I can count, in good people, in sincere people, in people who truly love God. I have done it myself.

They pray, and they pray in faith. Nobody is pretending. They mean every word. They kneel at the side of the bed, or sit in the car before work, and they say, "Father, I thank You that You have heard me. I receive Your provision. I receive Your healing. I believe You are turning this situation around." They say "Amen," and they get up with peace in their hearts.

Then, half an hour later, the phone rings. Or a colleague asks how things are going. Or the bad news comes on the screen. And out of the same mouth that just prayed comes something completely different. "I don't know how we're going to make it." "This cold is going to knock me flat for a week, it always does." "Nothing ever works out for me." "My son will never change."

Half an hour. The prayer was sincere. The faith was real. And thirty minutes later, without even noticing, they have spoken against the very thing they prayed for.

This is one of the biggest reasons the answer after prayer seems to stall. Not because God did not hear. He did. But because we prayed one thing and then spent the rest of the day saying the opposite.

The Same Mouth

James saw this happening in the early church, and he did not soften it:

“Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.”

(James 3:10)

Same mouth. In the morning it blesses, prays and agrees with God. By the afternoon it is announcing defeat. James says these things ought not to be so. Not because God is waiting to catch us out, but because a mouth that speaks two ways is working against itself.

You cannot talk like a conqueror in your prayer closet and like a victim at the dinner table and expect to see the conqueror's results. Think about what you are actually doing. In prayer you said to God, "I believe You have answered." Half an hour later you are telling people, in effect, "I don't believe He has." Which of those two statements do you really mean? The pushback after prayer is designed to find out. The enemy brings the phone call, the bad report, the slammed door, for one reason: to get you to say with your own lips the opposite of what you just prayed.

Jesus taught us to take our words seriously:

“For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:37)

Your words are not just noise. They are a verdict you pass out loud, and you are the one who has to live under it.

Laying the Track

Here is a picture that has helped many people see what is happening. Think of your answer as a great freight train, fully loaded with everything Jesus paid for: healing, provision, peace of mind, the turnaround in your family, freedom from what has held you. It was paid for in full at the cross. It has left the station. It is on its way to you.

But a freight train cannot run across open ground. It needs rails. And your words are the rails it runs on.

Every time you say what God has said, you lay another length of steel toward your front door. And every time you say the opposite, you tear up a rail. You pray on Sunday, "Lord, deliver us from this debt." On Monday over coffee you tell a friend, "We'll never get ahead. The whole system is against people like us. We'll be paying this off until we die." You have just pulled up the track. Then on Wednesday you wonder why the train has not arrived.

The train was not late. The track was missing.

Now put the rails back down. When the bank balance is low, say what David said:

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."

(Psalm 23:1)

When your body aches, say what God says about your healing. When your emotions are screaming that nothing will change, say that the God who heard you is faithful. Keep the line unbroken. The train follows the rails your lips lay down.

The Sponge Test

So how do you stop the half-hour slide? Biting your tongue helps, but it is not enough on its own. What comes out of you under pressure is what has soaked into you.

Think of a sponge. Leave it in clean water and squeeze it, and clean water comes out. Leave it in vinegar and squeeze it, and you get vinegar. The squeeze does not decide what comes out. It only reveals what was soaked in.

The phone call half an hour after prayer is the squeeze. If all you have soaked in since you prayed is the news, the worry and other people's opinions, that is what will come out of your mouth. So Paul tells us what to soak in:

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and

hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16)

Richly. Not a verse on Sunday and nothing until next week. When the Word is living in you that richly, then when life squeezes you, the first thing out of your mouth is what God said.

Guarding Your Speech After You Pray

Here is the heart of this chapter: after you pray, keep your words in agreement with your prayer. If you prayed it, speak it. If you would not say it in prayer, do not say it half an hour later in the kitchen.

Scripture puts a guard on the mouth for good reason:

“He who guards his mouth preserves his life, But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.”

(Proverbs 13:3)

Here are four simple habits that will help you guard your speech after you pray.

First, write down what you prayed. One or two sentences: "I have received God's provision for the rent." Keep it in your pocket or on your phone. That is your script for the day.

Second, when someone asks, answer honestly, but answer in faith. You do not have to pretend nothing is wrong. You can say, "It's been a hard week. But we've prayed, and we believe God is providing." That is not denial. That is agreement with your prayer.

Third, catch yourself. When the old words start coming out, stop, even mid-sentence, and say, "No, let me say that again." Then say what God said. It may feel awkward the first dozen times. Do it anyway.

Fourth, finish the day the way you started it. Before you sleep, thank God out loud for the answer you received that morning.

Let the last words of the day agree with the first ones.

Meet Grace. Grace had been praying for her husband's health after a worrying test result. One morning she prayed in faith, received his healing, and felt real peace. Forty minutes later her mother rang. "Any news?" And Grace heard herself start the old speech: "Oh, Mum, I'm so worried, you know what these things are like, it never ends well in our family..." She stopped. She took a breath and said, "Actually, Mum, let me start again. We're waiting on the results, and he's going to all his appointments. But I prayed this morning and I believe God has touched him. I'm not going to talk against that." Her mother went quiet, then said, "Well, I'll believe it with you."

Grace did not deny the test. She kept every appointment. She simply refused to pray one thing at seven o'clock and say the opposite at twenty to eight.

Make this your prayer before you speak each day:

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.” (Psalm 19:14)

You prayed. Heaven heard. Now let your mouth agree with your prayer, half an hour later and every hour after that.

CHAPTER 14

The Enemy Cannot Win Until You Quit

Here is a sentence I want you to read twice: you do not lose until you quit.

The enemy knows it. That is why his whole strategy after your prayer is not to defeat you but to discourage you. He cannot cancel what God has promised. He cannot overrule what Jesus has already won. So he does the only thing left to him. He tries to make you so tired, so confused and so fed up that you lay down your shield yourself. His victory depends entirely on your surrender.

Which means the reverse is true as well. If you will not surrender, he cannot win.

Resist, and Watch Him Run

The Bible is wonderfully plain about this.

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

Two commands and one promise. Submit to God: you stay under His authority and His Word. Resist the devil: you stand against him and refuse what he offers. And then the promise: he will flee. Not he might. Not he will think about it. He will flee. The word picture is of someone running away.

Peter, who had learned the hard way what happens when you stop standing, wrote the same thing.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that

the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Notice that the lion is seeking whom he may devour. He cannot devour just anyone. He is looking for the one who will lie down. A roaring lion makes a lot of noise, and noise is the point. The roar is meant to make you run. When you stand steadfast instead, the roar is all he has.

And notice the comfort at the end of that verse. You are not the only one. Believers all over the world are standing in the same kind of fire this very week. You are not weird, you are not singled out, and you are not failing. You are simply in the fight, and the fight is winnable.

Authority, Not Muscle

Jesus did not send His followers out with good advice. He sent them with authority.

“Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” (Luke 10:19)

Read the word all again. Not some of the power of the enemy. All of it. And He handed His church the keys to go with it.

“And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:19)

Picture a police officer standing in the middle of a busy intersection. A twenty-ton truck comes thundering down the road towards him. He does not try to wrestle it to a halt. He does not sit on the curb praying that it will slow down by itself. He steps out, lifts one hand, and the truck stops.

Does that officer have the muscle to stop twenty tons of steel? Of course not. But he has something far greater than muscle. The

whole authority of the city stands behind that lifted hand, and the driver knows it.

You are that officer. The Holy Spirit is your badge and the Word of God is the law you enforce. When anxiety, sickness, lack or depression comes barrelling down your street, God is not going to step out and lift your hand for you. He has already given you the badge. Lift the hand.

But here is the key: an officer who lowers his hand halfway through the junction has not been overpowered. He has simply stopped enforcing. The truck rolls on, not because the law changed, but because the officer quit. Many believers are not being defeated by the enemy's strength. They are just putting their hand down too soon.

David Spoke Before He Threw

When David walked out to meet Goliath, the whole army of Israel had spent forty days hiding in their tents. Every morning the giant came out and mocked them, and every morning they shrank a little more. Then a teenager with a sling opened his mouth.

“Then David said to the Philistine, ‘You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s, and He will give you into our hands.’” (1 Samuel 17:45-47)

David announced the giant's defeat before he had picked a single stone out of his bag. He did not wait to see whether the first throw would land before deciding what he believed. His confidence was not in his aim; it was in his covenant. And because his mouth agreed with God, his hand followed through.

Notice too that Goliath had been "winning" for forty days without ever fighting anyone. His entire victory was built on Israel's fear. The moment one person refused to be afraid, the giant's career was over by lunchtime.

He Needs Your Permission

Here is the truth that sets you free. Satan has no dominion over the new creation unless the new creation hands it to him. You have been moved out of his territory altogether.

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,”
(Colossians 1:13)

That is why Paul warns,

“nor give place to the devil.” (Ephesians 4:27)

The devil needs a place, and he cannot take one; he has to be given one. You give him a place every time you agree with his lie, every time you say, "I guess God didn't hear me," every time you lower your hand. You take that place back every time you say, "It is written," and keep standing.

Meet Ingrid. Ingrid had been praying for her small cleaning business, which was hanging by a thread. Two clients cancelled the week after she prayed. Then a van repair bill arrived. One evening she sat at her kitchen table with a pen, ready to write the email shutting it all down. She heard herself say, "That's it. I give up."

And then something rose up in her. "No," she said out loud. "The Lord has given me authority over all the power of the enemy. I

am not giving this place to the devil." She closed the laptop. The next morning she made ten calls instead of writing one email. Within a month she had three new contracts, and a year later she had to hire help.

The enemy had not beaten her. He had nearly persuaded her to beat herself.

So when the pressure rises, remember the scoreboard. The war was decided at the cross. The only question left in your situation is whether you will keep your hand raised until the truck stops.

The enemy cannot take what you refuse to give him.

CHAPTER 15

Quitting Just Short

You know the scene. A jar of pickles with the lid stuck fast. You twist until your hand goes red, run it under hot water, bang it on the counter, twist again, and finally hand it to someone else in disgust. They give it one easy turn and it pops open. Then they have the nerve to say, "There you go, it wasn't that tight." Of course it wasn't. You had loosened it for them. You simply stopped one twist too soon.

That is a funny little kitchen moment, but in the kingdom of God it is no joke. Many people do not lose their miracle because it was never coming. They lose it because they stopped one step, one day, one prayer before it arrived. And the most dangerous moment in any season of pushback is often the moment just before the breakthrough, when you are most tired and the answer is closest.

Seven Times to the Top of the Hill

After three and a half years without rain, Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, bowed down to the ground and put his face between his knees. He had already heard from God. He had already told King Ahab that he could hear the sound of abundance of rain. Now he prayed, and he sent his servant to look out towards the sea.

“and said to his servant, ‘Go up now, look toward the sea.’ So he went up and looked, and said, ‘There is nothing.’ And seven times he said, ‘Go again.’ Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, ‘There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!’ So

he said, ‘Go up, say to Ahab, “Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.”’” (1 Kings 18:43-44)

"There is nothing." Imagine hearing that report six times. Six times the servant trudged up the slope, squinted at the horizon and came back with the same flat news. Six times Elijah had every reason to say, "Well, perhaps I misheard God." Instead, six times he said, "Go again."

And what finally appeared on the seventh trip? Not a storm. A cloud the size of a man's hand. Tiny. Easy to dismiss. But Elijah knew what it meant. He did not wait for the downpour to start celebrating. He told the king to get his chariot moving.

Some of you are on report number five. You have looked and looked, and the answer has been "nothing" every time. Do not stop sending the servant up the hill.

The Seventh Dip and the Seventh Day

Naaman was a powerful army commander with leprosy. The prophet Elisha told him to wash in the muddy Jordan River seven times. Naaman was insulted; he had expected something far more impressive. But his servants talked him round, and he went down to the river.

Dip one: he came up, looked at his skin, and nothing had changed. Dip two, three, four, five, six: nothing. If Naaman had been measuring progress by what he could see, he would have climbed out after the fourth dip, wiped the mud off and gone home angry.

“So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” (2 Kings 5:14)

The healing was not partly there at dip four and a bit more at dip five. As far as Naaman could see, nothing happened until the

seventh. The six dips that "did nothing" were just as much a part of his obedience as the one that did everything.

Then there is Jericho. For six days Israel marched once around the walls in silence while the priests blew trumpets. Six days of sore feet and no visible change. The walls looked exactly as thick on day six as on day one.

"But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times. And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets, that Joshua said to the people: 'Shout, for the LORD has given you the city!'" (Joshua 6:15-16)

Notice the tense. "The LORD has given you the city." Joshua said it before a single stone moved. And then:

"So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat." (Joshua 6:20)

What if they had gone home on day five? The walls would still have been standing, and they would have told their grandchildren that marching does not work.

I Nearly Quit, Too

I want to be honest with you, because I have not written this chapter from a safe distance. I remember a season when I came within a breath of letting go of something God had clearly promised me. I had prayed, I had believed, I had stood, and the pushback just kept coming, until one day I was ready to say, "Enough. I must have got this wrong."

What held me in that hour was not my feelings. It was the very thing this chapter is about. The promise had not changed just

because the pressure had. God had not changed His mind; I had simply grown tired. And tired is not the same as wrong. I did not let go, and I have never been more grateful for anything than that I held on.

Do Not Throw It Away Now

That is why Scripture speaks so directly to the tired believer.

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”

(Galatians 6:9)

There is a condition in that verse: if we do not lose heart. The harvest is certain, the season is set, and the only thing that can stop you reaping is giving up before the reaping comes.

Hebrews says it again.

“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:” (Hebrews 10:35-36)

You do not lose your confidence the way you lose your keys, by accident. You cast it away. You throw it. It is a decision, usually made on a bad day, when you are tired and the evidence looks thin. Do not make that decision on your worst day.

Paul liked to talk about athletes.

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” (1 Corinthians 9:24)

Every runner who has ever finished a marathon knows the place they call "the wall", usually somewhere in the last few miles, where every muscle screams that you cannot go on. The runners who win gold are not the ones who never hit the wall. They are the ones who keep putting one foot in front of the other when

they do. No medal has ever been handed to someone for leading at mile twenty and walking off the course.

Meet Ellis. Ellis had prayed for his younger brother for eleven years. Prison, addiction, broken promises. One evening Ellis sat in his car outside a prayer meeting and said, "Lord, I'm done. I've prayed enough." He went in anyway, out of habit, and prayed one more time. Three weeks later his brother phoned from a rehabilitation centre. "I gave my life to Jesus last night," he said. "Somebody told me my brother never stopped praying."

The cloud may be the size of a man's hand. The wall may still be standing. Your skin may look the same after the sixth dip. Go again.

The breakthrough was never far away; it was always one more "go again" away.

PART THREE — THE MEANTIME

CHAPTER 16

Seed, Time, Harvest: What Happens Between

After the flood, when Noah stepped out onto a washed and empty earth, God made him a promise that still holds the world together.

“While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease.” (Genesis 8:22)

Seedtime and harvest. Notice that God did not say "seed and harvest", as if one followed straight on from the other. Between the seed and the harvest there is time. It is written right into the law of creation. And that little word is where most of the struggle in the Christian life takes place.

We love the seed. Planting is exciting. You pray, you believe, you sow your faith into a promise of God and you feel wonderful. We love the harvest even more. Everybody turns up for the harvest party. But the time in between? Nobody throws a party for that. Nobody posts photographs of a field of bare brown soil. Yet God does some of His most important work in the part we would happily skip.

I like to call it the meantime, because that is honestly what it can feel like: a mean time. It is the stretch after the prayer but before the answer, after the sowing but before the reaping. It is where the questions come at night. Did God really speak? Did I get it wrong? Has He forgotten me? But the meantime is not dead

time. It is growing time, and the fact that you cannot see the growth does not mean it is not happening.

The Seed Grows While You Sleep

Jesus told a short parable that every believer in the waiting room needs to read slowly.

“And He said, ‘The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.’” (Mark 4:26-29)

Look at what the farmer does. He scatters the seed. Then he sleeps and gets up, sleeps and gets up, night after night, day after day. And the seed grows, he himself does not know how.

That phrase is such a relief. The farmer is not required to understand botany. He does not need to explain how a dry husk turns into a green shoot. He cannot see the roots pushing down or the cells dividing. All he has to do is plant, tend and trust the law God built into the soil. The growing is God's department.

Some of us exhaust ourselves trying to work out exactly how God will answer, by which route, through which person, on which date. We lie awake running every possible scenario. Let the farmer teach you. You do not have to know how. You have to know Who.

Notice also the stages: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain. Growth comes in a sequence. There is a stage when all you have is a thin green blade, which looks nothing like bread. Do not despise the blade. It is not the answer failing; it is the answer on its way. A small change in your teenager's tone, one

good report among three bad ones, a little more peace in your heart than last month: those are blades. Thank God for the blade and keep tending the field.

The Farmer Is Not Idle

James had farmers in mind when he wrote to struggling believers.

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.” (James 5:7)

The farmer waits. But do not imagine him sitting on his porch with his feet up for six months. Talk to any farmer and you will find that the waiting season is one of the busiest of the year. He pulls weeds before they choke the young plants. He mends the fence so the neighbour's goats do not wander in. He checks the irrigation. He watches the sky. He walks the rows. He is waiting, but he is waiting actively, with his boots muddy and his eyes on the crop.

That is exactly the kind of waiting God asks of you after prayer. Not a shrug and a "whatever will be will be". That is resignation, and resignation is not faith. Faith-filled waiting keeps pulling the weeds of doubt, keeps mending the fences around the heart, keeps watering the promise with the Word, keeps thanking God for the rain before it comes. It looks like nothing is happening on the outside. On the inside, everything is happening.

And look at James's word for the harvest: precious. The farmer waits because the fruit is worth waiting for. Nobody stands guard over a field of weeds.

A Season for Everything

Not every seed takes the same time. Plant radishes in spring and you can be eating them in a month. Plant an asparagus bed and

gardeners will tell you to leave it alone for a couple of years before you cut a proper crop. Plant an acorn and your grandchildren may picnic under the tree.

None of those seeds has failed. They simply belong to different seasons. Solomon put it this way:

“To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:” (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

One of the cruellest tricks the enemy plays is to make you compare your field with somebody else's. Your friend prayed for a job and had three offers within a fortnight. You have been praying for your marriage for two years. The voice says, "God answers her and ignores you." Rubbish. She planted radishes. You planted an oak. Different seed, different season, same faithful God.

Meet Walter. Walter retired early and planted a small orchard at the back of his property, mostly to keep himself busy. Apple trees, a couple of pears, a plum. For three summers he mowed between the rows, pruned, sprayed, staked the young trunks against the wind, and harvested nothing worth mentioning. His brother-in-law teased him every Christmas: "How's the fruit shop, Walter?"

In the fourth year, the branches bent so low with apples that Walter had to prop them up with planks. He gave away boxes of fruit to the whole street. And when people asked him the secret, he laughed and said, "Three years of looking after trees that weren't giving me a thing."

That is the secret. The harvest is not the reward for the last week before it arrived. It is the fruit of every unseen season of faithful tending.

So what are you doing in the "time" part of seedtime and harvest? Not wasting it, I hope. Not digging up the seed, not comparing fields, not resigning yourself to an empty field. Walk

your rows. Pull the weeds. Water with the Word. Thank God for the blade. The sickle is coming.

The harvest is settled at the planting, but it is grown in the waiting.

CHAPTER 17

Microwave Christianity

We live in the fastest generation in history. Food arrives at the door in twenty minutes. Films stream in seconds. A parcel ordered at breakfast can be on the doorstep by teatime. If a web page takes more than three seconds to load, we close it and go somewhere else. We have trained ourselves to expect everything now, and we get irritated, even offended, when anything takes longer.

Then we bring that same expectation into the kingdom of God.

Let me say it plainly: it is dangerous to live a microwave Christianity. Ninety seconds, ding, done. You know what a microwave does to a frozen dinner. It heats the outside until it is scalding and leaves the middle as cold as an ice cube. That is exactly what instant faith produces: hot on the surface, raw in the centre. Some of what God wants to build in you simply cannot be built in ninety seconds. It has to be cooked slowly, and the waiting is the oven.

The Vision Has an Appointed Time

The prophet Habakkuk was praying about a situation that made no sense to him, and God answered with a word for every believer who has ever looked at the clock.

“For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry.”
(Habakkuk 2:3)

Read the two halves of that verse side by side. "Though it tarries" and "it will not tarry." Is God contradicting Himself? Not

at all. From where you are standing, it seems to be tarrying. From where God is standing, it is right on schedule. It is not late. It has an appointed time, and it will arrive exactly then, not a minute after.

Notice too the word surely. The question is never whether the vision will come. The only question is when, and God has kept that part in His own hand.

Faith and Patience, Together

The writer of Hebrews warns us about a particular danger.

“that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

(Hebrews 6:12)

Faith and patience. Not faith alone, and certainly not patience alone. Faith without patience is a sprinter who collapses at the first bend. Patience without faith is a person sitting on a bench at a bus stop where no bus ever runs. But put them together and you have someone who knows the bus is coming and keeps their ticket in their hand until it arrives.

Then Hebrews gives us the model.

“And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.” (Hebrews 6:15)

That is Abraham. Do you know how long he patiently endured?

“So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.” (Genesis 12:4)

And when did the son of promise finally arrive?

“Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.” (Genesis 21:5)

Twenty-five years. A quarter of a century of birthdays without the baby. Twenty-five years of looking at the stars God had told

him to count. If Abraham had been a microwave believer, he would have given up somewhere around year two and opened a camel-hire business instead. But he inherited the promise because he combined faith with patience, and God has held him up ever since as the father of all who believe.

Name It by Friday?

I have to be honest about something, because it has hurt a lot of sincere people. Some contemporary churches teach what I call a "name it and get it by Friday" gospel. The message goes something like this: if your faith is strong enough, the answer will be instant; and if the answer has not come yet, the problem must be your faith.

That teaching sounds bold, but it is not the whole counsel of God. It ignores Joseph's thirteen years, David's years in the wilderness, Abraham's twenty-five years and Daniel's twenty-one days. It ignores Habakkuk's appointed time and James's patient farmer. Worst of all, it puts a crushing weight on people who are already hurting. A woman is still waiting for her healing, and on top of the pain she is made to feel that she is a spiritual failure.

Let me be very clear. If you have prayed in faith and the answer has not yet appeared, that does not prove you have too little faith. God never shamed Abraham for year twenty-four. He kept His promise in His time. Bold faith absolutely believes God hears and answers the moment we pray. Mature faith also understands that the manifestation may come through a season, and it refuses to be offended by the calendar.

Wings for the Waiting

Here is the beautiful thing. Waiting on God does not make you weaker. It makes you stronger.

“But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles,

They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

Notice that those who wait are the ones who renew their strength. The world sees waiting as weakness, as doing nothing. God sees it as refuelling. To wait on the Lord is not to slump in a chair. The picture is of a person leaning their whole weight on Him with expectation, the way you would lean against a strong wall. And out of that leaning comes eagle strength.

Meet Simone. Simone ran a busy household and a part-time job, and she wanted her prayers answered the way she wanted her coffee: fast and hot. When her husband lost his job she prayed on Monday and was distraught by Thursday that nothing had changed. She said later, "I treated God like a vending machine. I put the prayer in, pressed the button, and kicked the machine when nothing came out."

It took eight months for the new job to come. But somewhere in those eight months, something in Simone changed. She learned to start her mornings with thanksgiving instead of panic. She stopped checking the job sites every ten minutes and started checking in with God. Her children noticed that their mum laughed more, not less. When the offer finally arrived, it was better than anything they had applied for, and Simone said the job was only half the answer. "The other half," she said, "was me."

So here is my encouragement. Unplug the microwave. Put your request in God's slow cooker, set it on His timer, and stop lifting the lid every half hour to check. The aroma of the promise will fill the house long before supper is served, and when it comes, it will be cooked all the way through.

God is never in a hurry, and He is never late.

CHAPTER 18

God Builds the Vessel Before He Sends the Answer

Imagine you ordered a beautiful new piano, a full concert grand, nine feet long and heavier than a small car. The delivery company rings to say it is ready. And you suddenly realise that you live on the fourth floor of an old building with a narrow staircase and floorboards that creak when the cat walks across them.

The piano is real. It is paid for. It is yours. But if they carried it in today, it would go straight through the floor and land in your downstairs neighbour's kitchen. Before the piano arrives, someone has to strengthen the floor.

That is one of the great secrets of the waiting season. Sometimes the answer is ready long before you are ready to hold it. And God, who loves you too much to let the blessing crush you, starts by building the vessel.

The Word Tested Him

No one shows this more clearly than Joseph. At seventeen he had two dreams that left no doubt: one day his family would bow before him. It was a genuine word from God. And then, almost immediately, everything went in the opposite direction.

His jealous brothers threw him into a pit.

“Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit was empty; there was no water in it.” (Genesis 37:24)

They sold him to traders. He ended up a slave in Egypt. He served faithfully, was falsely accused by his master's wife, and

was thrown into prison for a crime he refused to commit. He interpreted a dream for a fellow prisoner who promised to remember him, and then forgot him for two more years.

Dream. Pit. Slavery. Prison. If you had been Joseph, you might have wondered whether that dream had come from God at all.

The psalmist looks back over the whole story and tells us what was really going on.

“He sent a man before them— Joseph—who was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with fetters, He was laid in irons. Until the time that his word came to pass, The word of the LORD tested him.” (Psalm 105:17-19)

Read that last line again. It was not only his brothers, the slave traders or the prison guards that tested Joseph. The word of the LORD tested him. The very promise God gave him became the place where he was tried. Every day in that cell, Joseph had to decide whether he still believed what God had said when everything around him said the opposite.

And here is what I want you to see. The years between the dream and the palace were not wasted years. They were construction years. In Potiphar's house Joseph learned to manage a household. In the prison he learned to manage people, because the keeper of the prison put everything in his hands. He learned to interpret dreams for others while his own dream seemed dead. He learned humility, integrity and patience. He learned to forgive.

By the time he stood before Pharaoh, Joseph was ready to carry an entire nation's food supply through seven years of famine.

“Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Genesis 41:46)

Thirteen years after the dreams. The seventeen-year-old who boasted to his brothers could not have carried that weight. The

thirty-year-old who had been through the pit and the prison could.

Notice too that God never left him during the building.

“The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man;” (Genesis 39:2)

That was in slavery.

“But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.” (Genesis 39:21)

That was in prison. The presence of God is not proved by the absence of problems. He was there in every room of the construction site.

The Potter's Hands

God once sent the prophet Jeremiah on a field trip to the local pottery.

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: ‘Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.’ Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the LORD. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!’” (Jeremiah 18:1-6)

If you have ever watched a potter at work, you know it is not gentle in the way we usually mean the word. The clay is pressed, pushed, pulled up, pressed down again. Sometimes the potter collapses the whole thing into a lump and starts over. From the

clay's point of view, that must feel like failure. From the potter's point of view, it is craftsmanship.

Notice that the clay never leaves the potter's hand. Even when the vessel is marred, it is still in the hand of the potter. Your waiting season is not God dropping you. It is God reshaping you.

And then the vessel goes into the kiln, the furnace that makes clay hard enough to hold water. A pot that has never been fired looks finished, but pour hot soup into it and it collapses. The fire is what turns a pretty shape into something useful.

Strong Enough to Carry It

Paul tells Timothy what God is after.

“Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.” (2 Timothy 2:21)

Prepared for every good work. The answer you are praying for may be a good work in itself: a ministry, a business, a restored family, a healed body that God intends to use for His glory. And God is preparing the vessel to carry it.

Meet Priya. Priya prayed for years for an opportunity to lead. She was gifted, sharp and ambitious, and she could not understand why others kept being promoted ahead of her. In the meantime she was given the jobs nobody wanted: the difficult client, the team that was always in conflict, the project that had already failed twice. She complained a great deal at first. Then something shifted. She began to see each impossible assignment as God's training ground. She learned to listen before she spoke, to keep her temper, to give credit away.

When the senior role finally came, it involved leading a department in crisis. The person who had been promoted ahead of her had lasted four months. Priya thrived. "If I had got this job five years ago," she said, "it would have flattened me."

THE PUSHBACK AFTER PRAYER

So if the answer seems to be sitting in heaven's warehouse with your name on it, do not assume God is withholding it. He may be reinforcing the floor.

God is not only getting the answer ready for you; He is getting you ready for the answer.

CHAPTER 19

The Hidden Season

Gardeners plant tulip bulbs in the autumn, just as everything else is dying back. They push those papery brown bulbs down into cold soil, cover them over, and walk away. All winter long there is nothing to see. Frost on the ground. Snow, perhaps. A bare patch of earth that looks exactly like every other bare patch of earth.

But tulips need that winter. The bulb sends roots down into the dark, and the cold itself does something inside the bulb that makes a strong spring flower possible. Skip the winter and you get a weak bloom, or none at all. The colour that bursts out in April was being prepared in the hidden months when nobody was looking.

There is a season like that in almost every life God uses. A season out of sight. A season when you feel overlooked, set aside, forgotten. If you are in it right now, I want you to know it is not a mistake. It is a winter with a purpose.

Behind the Flock

Moses grew up in Pharaoh's palace with the finest education in the world. At forty he tried to deliver his people in his own strength, killed an Egyptian, and had to run for his life. He ended up in the desert of Midian, looking after his father-in-law's sheep.

For forty years.

Stephen sums it up in one sentence.

“And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the

wilderness of Mount Sinai.” (Acts 7:30)

Forty years had passed. That is a long time to go from prince to shepherd. Moses must have wondered whether God had finished with him. But the desert was teaching him things the palace never could. He learned the land he would one day lead a whole nation through. He learned how to find water, where to find pasture, how to keep a flock together. Above all, the proud young man who had thought he could save Israel with his fists became the man the Bible later calls very humble. The palace made Moses educated. The desert made him usable.

When the prophet Samuel came to Jesse's house to anoint the next king, Jesse paraded seven sons before him and did not even bother to call the youngest. David was out with the sheep. Nobody thought he counted.

But God had been watching the field.

“He also chose David His servant, And took him from the sheepfolds; From following the ewes that had young He brought him, To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.” (Psalm 78:70-72)

Look at the connection. God took David from shepherding sheep to shepherding a nation. The integrity of his heart and the skill of his hands were formed out in those fields, where nobody was applauding. While his brothers were at the front line with the army, David was alone on the hills learning to protect, to worship and to hear God. To everyone else it looked like nothing. To God it was the throne room's training school.

Thirty Quiet Years

Here is the one that amazes me most. The Son of God, who came to save the world, spent most of His earthly life in obscurity. We

have one story from His boyhood, the visit to the temple at twelve, and then the curtain falls.

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” (Luke 2:52)

And when it rises again?

“Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age,” (Luke 3:23)

Thirty years of quiet for three years of public ministry. Thirty years in a carpenter's workshop in a small town, measuring timber and fixing doors. If anyone had a reason to hurry, it was Jesus. Yet the Father was in no rush. Those hidden years were not wasted years; they were years of increasing, in wisdom, in stature, in favour. When He finally stepped out, He was ready.

Polished in the Quiver

Isaiah gives us a picture of the Servant of the Lord that fits every one of these hidden seasons.

“And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me.”
(Isaiah 49:2)

Two kinds of hiding in that verse. Hidden in the shadow of His hand, which is protection. Hidden in His quiver, which is preparation. An archer does not leave his best arrows lying about in the open where they can be warped by rain or snapped underfoot. He keeps them in the quiver, straight and polished, until the moment he needs them. And when he reaches for one, it flies true.

If you feel hidden, you have not been thrown away. You have been put in the quiver. The archer knows exactly where you are, and He has not forgotten the target.

Paul goes even further for every believer.

“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:3)

Your truest life is hidden, not in obscurity, but in Christ. Nobody can steal what is kept there. Even when no one else sees you, you are in the safest place in the universe.

There is a law in God's garden: roots go down before fruit comes up. Isaiah spoke of God's people in exactly those terms.

“And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah Shall again take root downward, And bear fruit upward.” (Isaiah 37:31)

Downward first, then upward. The tree that shoots up fast with shallow roots is the first to fall in the storm. The tree that spends years pushing its roots into the dark is the one still standing a hundred years later.

Meet Hugo. Hugo felt called to preach from his early twenties, but for years the only place he was asked to serve was the church car park on Sunday mornings, in all weathers, directing traffic and helping elderly people out of their cars. He prayed, "Lord, when?" He watched others go to the platform. He was tempted to leave and find a church that would "recognise his gift".

He stayed. In the car park he learned names. He learned who was grieving, who was lonely, who had stopped coming and why. He prayed for people in the drizzle. When he was finally asked to lead a small group, the room filled up within weeks, because the people already knew he cared. The car park had grown his roots.

So what do you do with your own car park, your own sheepfold, your own carpenter's bench? Do the small thing faithfully. Pray where nobody sees. Serve where nobody claps. Learn everything the hidden place can teach you, and stop measuring your worth by how many people know your name.

The hidden season is not the opposite of your calling. It is the root of it.

What God grows in secret He will one day show in the open.

CHAPTER 20

Why God Feels Silent

Think back to your school days and the morning of a big exam. All term long your teacher talked. She explained, she illustrated, she answered questions, she wrote on the board until her arm ached. Then exam day came. You turned over the paper, looked up at the front of the room, and she was sitting quietly at her desk, saying nothing at all.

Had she stopped caring? Had she left the building? Of course not. She was right there, watching every pen move. She was silent because it was a test, and in a test the teacher does not whisper the answers. Her silence was not absence. It was confidence that you had been taught enough to answer.

Some of the hardest seasons after prayer are not the ones full of noise and attack. They are the ones where heaven seems to go quiet. You pray and feel nothing. You read and the words lie flat on the page. You worship and it feels like singing into an empty room. If that is where you are, this chapter is for you, and I want to start by saying something very plainly: you are not abandoned, you are not being punished, and the silence does not mean you have done something wrong.

I Go Forward, But He Is Not There

Job knew this place better than anyone. He lost his children, his wealth and his health, and the friends who came to comfort him ended up accusing him. In the middle of it all he said:

“Look, I go forward, but He is not there, And backward, but I cannot perceive Him; When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; When He turns to the right

hand, I cannot see Him. But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.”
(Job 23:8-10)

Look at the honesty of it. Forward, backward, left, right: Job searched in every direction and felt nothing. He did not pretend. And then comes that mighty word but. "But He knows the way that I take."

Job could not see God. He was certain God could see him. That is the turning point of every silent season. Your feelings report that God is nowhere. Your faith answers that God knows exactly where you are, which road you are on, and what He is making of you on it. "When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold." Job did not say if. He said when. Gold goes into the fire as ore and comes out as treasure.

How Long, O Lord?

David wrote a whole psalm out of the silence, and it is only six verses long. It begins with a cry that many of us have prayed.

“How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?”
(Psalm 13:1-2)

Four times, "How long?" David is not being polite. He is being real. And God put that prayer in the Bible, which tells you something wonderful: God is not offended by your honest questions. You can bring Him your "how long" without fear.

But David does not stay there. Listen to how the same short psalm ends.

“But I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.” (Psalm 13:5-6)

Nothing in his circumstances had changed between verse two and verse five. What changed was where David fixed his eyes. He moved from what he felt to what he knew: God's mercy, God's salvation, God's past kindness. He started singing before the silence was broken. That is not denial. That is faith choosing its focus.

The Ache Is the Proof

Here is a truth that has comforted many people in the dark. Dead hearts do not miss God. Only a heart that is alive to Him feels the pain of His seeming distance. The very ache you feel is evidence that His Spirit is at work in you. If you did not belong to Him, you would not care.

And sometimes the silence is doing something precious. When God's presence always feels warm and close, it is easy to start loving the feeling more than the Person. In the quiet, the question gets asked: do I seek His hand, or His face? Do I want what He gives, or do I want Him? Many who have walked closest to God have said that their seasons of silence became seasons of deeper hunger, and deeper hunger became deeper friendship.

This is not passive. Waiting in the silence is one of the most active things a believer ever does.

“The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD.”

(Lamentations 3:25-26)

Notice the words side by side: wait, seek, hope. The quiet waiter is still seeking. Still hoping. Still turning up.

Silence Is Not Absence

So what do you hold on to when you cannot feel a thing? You hold on to what He has said. And He has said this:

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” (Hebrews 13:5)

Never. Not "never, unless you stop feeling Me". Not "never, except on the bad days". Never. In the original language that promise is packed with negatives, as if God were saying, "I will not, I will not, I will never leave you." Your feelings are a weather report: useful, changeable, not reliable enough to build a house on. His promise is the rock under the house.

David asked a question once that answers itself.

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (Psalm 139:7)

The answer is nowhere. There is no room so dark, no season so quiet, that God has moved out of it.

Meet Bethany. Bethany cared for her elderly mother through a long illness, and for most of that year she said her prayers felt like they were hitting the ceiling and dropping back on her head. She kept going anyway. She read a psalm every night by her mother's bed, even when it felt like reading a phone book. She kept thanking God, out loud, for things she could not feel. Months later, looking back, she said, "I didn't feel Him once that whole year. But when I look at how I got through it, I can see His fingerprints on every single day."

That is so often how it works. We feel the silence in the moment and see the faithfulness in the rear-view mirror.

So keep praying, even if it feels like talking to the ceiling. Keep reading, even if the words lie flat. Keep thanking Him for what you cannot yet feel. The Teacher has not left the room. He is watching you write, and He knows you have been taught enough. The God who seems silent has never once been absent.

CHAPTER 21

Elevation Without Preparation Is Collapse

Every few months the news carries the same sad story. Somebody buys a lottery ticket at a gas station on a Tuesday night, and by Wednesday morning they are a millionaire. There are balloons, a giant cardboard cheque, and a photo with a big grin. Then, a few years later, a quieter report comes out. The money is gone. The marriage is gone. The friends turned out to be fans of the money, not of the person. Some of those winners say they wish they had never bought the ticket.

Why does that happen so often? It is not because money is evil. It is because the blessing arrived before the person was built to carry it. Nobody had trained them to handle that kind of weight. The gift was real, but the vessel was not ready, and when a heavy gift lands on a weak vessel, something cracks.

That is exactly why God does not always hand you the answer the same afternoon you pray. He is not stingy. He is not testing how long you can suffer. He loves you far too much to lift you higher than your foundation can hold. Elevation without preparation is not a blessing. It is a setup for collapse.

Saul Went Up Too Fast

Look at the first king Israel ever had. Saul was tall, handsome and humble at the start. When the time came to present him to the nation, they found him hiding among the baggage. But he went from the back field to the throne almost overnight, with very little shaping in between. And it did not take long for the cracks to show.

When the pressure came at Gilgal and the people began to scatter, Saul could not wait for Samuel. He offered the sacrifice himself, and his excuse is something every impatient heart understands:

“then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.’ Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.” (1 Samuel 13:12)

I felt compelled. That is the language of a man who has never been trained to wait. Later Samuel had to remind him where he had come from:

“When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel?” (1 Samuel 15:17)

Saul had the crown, but he did not have the character to keep it. The position grew faster than the man.

David Was Built in the Fields

Now look at David. He was anointed king as a teenager, and then God sent him straight back to the sheep. Years followed: years of lions and bears, years of playing music for a king who threw spears at him, years of hiding in caves with a band of men who were in debt, in distress and discontented. To anyone watching, it looked like the anointing had been a mistake.

But God was not wasting a single day. Listen to how the Psalm sums it up:

“He also chose David His servant, And took him from the sheepfolds; From following the ewes that had young He brought him, To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.” (Psalm 78:70-72)

Integrity of heart and skill of hand. Those two things were not handed to David with the anointing oil. They were grown in him during the long wait between the oil and the throne. Saul was promoted and then tested. David was tested and then promoted. One collapsed under the crown; the other wore it until the day he died.

This is why Paul warned the young church not to rush a new believer into leadership:

“not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.” (1 Timothy 3:6)

That is not an insult to new believers. It is protection. A seedling planted out in the open wind before its roots are down gets flattened by the first storm. God loves you too much to put you in the wind too early.

Count the Cost of the Tower

Jesus gave us a very practical picture of this.

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’?”
(Luke 14:28-30)

Think about what you are praying for. A ministry. A business. A marriage. A healing that will put you back on your feet and into the busy world. A promotion at work with three times the responsibility. Every one of those answers is a tower, and every tower needs a foundation. The waiting season is God pouring the concrete. It is not glamorous. Nobody takes photos of footings. But nobody wants to live in a tower without them either.

Solomon put it in one sharp line:

“An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning Will not be blessed at the end.” (Proverbs 20:21)

Hasty is the opposite of blessed. What comes too fast tends to leave too fast.

Let me be clear about one thing, because some contemporary churches get this badly wrong. This is not a reason to stop believing, and it is not a reason to fold your hands and do nothing. The waiting I am talking about is not lying in a hammock hoping something drops out of the sky. It is active. It is the farmer working his field while the seed grows under the soil. Jesus said,

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.” (Luke 16:10)

The preparation happens in the small things you do faithfully while the big thing is still on its way.

What This Looks Like on a Tuesday

Picture a young man named Nathan who has been praying for a leadership role in his church. He is gifted, he is keen, and he is a little frustrated that nobody has handed him a microphone yet. Meanwhile he has been asked to set up chairs on Sunday mornings and to drive an elderly widower to the grocery store every Tuesday.

Nathan can treat those jobs as an insult, or he can see them for what they really are: the sheepfold. Every Tuesday that he shows up on time, listens to the same old stories for the fourth time, and carries the bags with a smile, God is laying another course of bricks in his foundation. He is learning faithfulness when nobody is clapping. He is learning to serve people who cannot do a thing for him in return. And one day, when the larger door swings open, he will not be crushed by it. He will be ready for it.

So the next time you are tempted to say, “Lord, why is this taking so long?”, try asking a better question: “Lord, what are You building in me while I wait?” The answer is already on its way. God simply wants you standing on rock when it arrives. God will never lift you higher than your foundation can hold.

CHAPTER 22

Strength Is Permanent, Blessings Are Not

There is a kind of prayer that does something most of us never expect. It does not move the mountain first. It does not pay the bill first or fix the relationship first. Instead it reaches down inside you and makes you stronger before it changes a single thing around you.

If you have ever prayed faithfully, week after week, and looked up to find your situation exactly where it was, I want to show you that something was shifting all along. You were just looking in the wrong place. The most powerful work of prayer often begins on the inside, and if you miss that, you will misread every waiting season you ever walk through.

The Blacksmith Is Not Being Cruel

Picture a blacksmith at his forge. He pushes a bar of metal into the fire until it glows, then lays it on the anvil and hits it. Again. And again. Then back into the fire. If you had never seen a sword made, you might think he hated that piece of metal. You might call the fire a punishment and the hammer abuse.

But the blacksmith knows exactly what he is doing. The heat makes the metal soft enough to shape. The hammer drives out the impurities and lines up the grain so the blade will not snap in battle. He is not destroying the metal. He is turning it into something that can do a job it could never have done as a lump.

That is what God does in you while you wait. The delay is not neglect. The pressure is not punishment. It is formation. And

what comes off the anvil is a believer whose inner man has been made strong enough that no circumstance can push him around.

Paul's Prayer for the Inner Man

Look at what the apostle Paul prayed for the believers in Ephesus. He did not ask God to remove their trials or fatten their bank accounts. He prayed this:

“that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,” (Ephesians 3:16)

The inner man is not your mood or your willpower. It is your born-again spirit, the real you, the part of you that was made new in Christ. Paul knew that when the inner man is strong, the outer storms lose their grip on you. He wrote elsewhere,

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” (2 Corinthians 4:16)

Something can be getting stronger on the inside even while things look worse on the outside.

Paul learned this the hard way. He prayed three times for a thorn in the flesh to be taken away, and God gave him something he had not asked for:

“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

Do not read that as God shrugging. Read it as God upgrading. Paul walked away with a strength he would never have discovered if the trouble had vanished on day one.

The Answer Gets Used Up, the Strength Stays

Here is the heart of this chapter. Blessings can be spent. Strength cannot.

Think about it. The money that finally arrives will get paid out to the landlord, the grocer and the mechanic. The new job may change hands in five years. Even a wonderful healing is lived out in a body that will one day wear out. Every outward answer, however precious, is something you use.

But the strength God builds in you during the wait does not get used up. It becomes part of who you are. The steadiness you learned the night you held on to a promise with shaking knees will still be there for the next storm, and the one after that. It cannot be repossessed, stolen or lost in a market crash.

David put it beautifully:

“In the day when I cried out, You answered me, And made me bold with strength in my soul.” (Psalm 138:3)

Notice what the answer was. Before anything else changed, God made David bold on the inside.

Even Jesus experienced this. In Gethsemane, under pressure so heavy that His sweat fell like drops of blood, He stayed in prayer, and

“Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.” (Luke 22:43)

The cup did not pass. The cross was still ahead. But He rose from that prayer strengthened to finish what He came to do.

Some of you are reading this and thinking, “That is lovely, but I do not feel strong. I feel worn out.” Good. You are exactly the person this promise was written for.

“He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength.” (Isaiah 40:29)

God does not wait for you to become strong before He works. He pours strength into the very place where you feel you have none. Your weakness is not a disqualification. It is the empty jar He fills.

Picture a woman named Helen who has been praying for her adult son for six long years. He is still far from God. Nothing on the outside has moved. But ask the people who knew Helen six years ago, and they will tell you she is a different woman. She used to panic every time the phone rang late at night. Now she prays, hands it to the Lord and sleeps. She used to argue with her son and lecture him over dinner. Now she loves him, speaks blessing over him and refuses to give up. Her prayer has not changed her son yet. But it has built a woman who will still be standing on the day he comes home, and who will know exactly how to welcome him.

That is not a consolation prize. That is the design. The enemy wanted the delay to wear Helen down. Instead God used it to build her up.

An Oak, Not a Weed

Isaiah describes God's people as

“trees of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:3)

A weed shoots up in a week and dies in the first frost. An oak takes years, and every gale that bends it drives its roots a little deeper. The storms did not stop the oak from becoming strong. The storms are how it became strong.

So keep praying when nothing seems to move. Keep standing. Keep speaking the Word. Every one of those prayers is going somewhere, and some of them are landing inside you first. When the answer arrives, you will enjoy it. But you will also discover

that you have become someone you never would have been
without the wait.

Blessings get spent. Strength stays.

PART FOUR — WHAT THE WAITING TEACHES

CHAPTER 23

Patience: Hupomone, the Active Kind

We now come to the heart of this book. Up to this point we have talked about what the pushback is, how to stand against it, and what God is doing in the meantime. From here on I want to show you what the waiting actually produces in you. Because the season between the prayer and the answer is not dead time. God is doing something in you while He is doing something for you. And the first thing He builds is patience.

Now, I know. The moment some people hear the word “patience” their shoulders slump. They picture an old man on a porch in a rocking chair, or a tired mother in a doctor’s waiting room flipping through a magazine from three years ago. To them, patience means sitting still and putting up with things. That is not what the Bible means at all.

Remaining Under the Load

The word the New Testament uses most for patience is the Greek word *hupomone*. In plain English it means “remaining under”: staying under a heavy load without dropping it and without running away from it.

Picture two men in a gym under the same heavy barbell. The first lets the bar settle onto his chest and lies there pinned, sighing, waiting for somebody to come and lift it off him. That is resignation. The second keeps his arms locked, keeps breathing, and pushes. He is still under the weight, but he is holding it up, and every second he holds it he is getting stronger. That is

hupomone. Not lying down under the load, but standing up under it.

That is the patience God is building in you. It is not passive. It is not quitting with a religious face on. It is active, muscular, expectant endurance that keeps its grip on the promise while the pressure is still on.

What the Testing Produces

James puts it this way:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

(James 1:2-4)

Read that slowly. James does not say patience is a nice extra for the super-spiritual. He says patience is how you become complete, lacking nothing. And notice where it comes from: the testing of your faith. There is no shortcut. You cannot download patience. It is only manufactured in the waiting room, under the weight.

Paul says the same thing from another angle:

“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

(Romans 5:3-4)

Do you see the order? Pressure produces endurance. Endurance produces character. Character produces hope. So the pushback you are facing right now is not ruining you. If you will remain under it, it is building you. Pain is not the enemy of faith. Sometimes it is the furnace where faith grows steel.

Paul even prayed that believers would be

“strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;”
(Colossians 1:11)

Patience with joy. That is not gritting your teeth until it is over. That is standing under the load with a song, because you know the One who promised.

And patience always has a partner: hope.

“But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.” (Romans 8:25)

Look at the word eagerly. Bible patience is not a shrug that says, “Whatever happens, happens.” It leans forward. It watches the road like a child waiting for Dad’s car to turn into the driveway. You do not see it yet, but you know it is coming, so you stay on your feet and keep watching. That is the difference between resignation and expectation. Resignation has stopped looking. Expectation cannot stop looking.

Run, Do Not Sit

Hebrews pictures it as a race, not a nap:

“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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Run with endurance. You cannot run sitting down. Endurance in the Bible is always on the move: laying aside weights, keeping your eyes on Jesus, putting one foot in front of the other.

And look at Jesus Himself. He did not endure the cross with a shrug. He endured it for the joy set before Him. He could see past the pain to the finish line. That is what turns endurance from misery into strength. You are not just surviving. You are running toward something.

Some of you are carrying weights God never assigned you. Bitterness. Worry about things you cannot change. Distractions that drain your fire every evening. Endurance gets a lot easier when you stop running the race with a suitcase in each hand. Put them down.

Possess Your Soul

Jesus said something remarkable about the hard days ahead:

| **“By your patience possess your souls.”** (Luke 21:19)

In other words, patience is how you stay in charge of your own inner life. The impatient person is owned by every circumstance. Whatever happens that morning decides how he feels, what he says and whether he believes. The patient person possesses his soul. Circumstances knock, but they do not get to move in and take over the house.

Picture a man named Grant who has been out of work for five months. He has prayed, he has stood on the promises, and he is still sending out applications. The impatient version of Grant checks his email forty times a day, snaps at his kids, and announces every evening that God has forgotten him. The patient version of Grant still feels the pressure, but he possesses his soul. He keeps a schedule. He sends the applications. He spends time in the Word each morning before he opens his laptop. He thanks God out loud at dinner for what is already on the table. He volunteers two afternoons a week. Same load, completely different man. One is pinned under the bar. The other is holding it up.

Jesus said,

“But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”

(Matthew 24:13)

There is no race that gives the prize to the one who started well. The prize goes to the one who finishes. Faith begins the journey. Patience finishes it.

So when the answer is slow, do not let anyone tell you that waiting on God is a waste of time. Passive resignation is a waste of time. Active, standing, expectant patience is one of the most powerful things on earth. It is God’s own strength holding you up while He finishes what He started.

Patience is not lying down under the load; it is standing up under it.

CHAPTER 24

Positive Stubbornness Against Bad News

Most of us have been taught that stubbornness is a bad thing, and usually it is. The toddler who will not put his shoes on, the driver who will not ask for directions, the church member who has refused to change seats for thirty-one years. But there is a holy kind of stubbornness. Somebody once called steadfastness “positive stubbornness”, and I love that. It is the refusal to let go of what God said, no matter how loud the bad news gets.

And the waiting season is where God grows it in you. When the answer comes quickly, you never need it. When the answer is slow and the bad reports keep rolling in, you either learn positive stubbornness or you learn to give up.

A Heart That Is Fixed

Here is the promise for the believer who has been standing a while:

“He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.” (Psalm 112:7)

Notice what it does not say. It does not say the believer will never hear bad news. Evil tidings will come. The phone will ring. The letter will arrive. The report will not be what you wanted. The promise is that bad news will not get to set up house in your heart, because your heart is already occupied. It is steadfast, fixed, settled, trusting in the Lord.

Think of a tent peg driven deep into the ground. The wind can howl all night and the tent will flap and shake, but it stays put.

That is a fixed heart. Not a heart that never feels the wind, but a heart that is pegged down into God.

Two Reports About the Same Land

The clearest picture of this in the Bible is the day the twelve spies came back from the Promised Land. All twelve saw the same fruit, the same cities, the same giants. Ten of them came back with this:

“We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.” (Numbers 13:31)

Then they added a line that tells you everything:

“and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.” (Numbers 13:33)

Did you catch that? They saw themselves as grasshoppers before anyone else did. The bad report started on the inside.

But two men had a different report.

“Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, ‘Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.’” (Numbers 13:30)

And when the whole crowd started weeping and talking about going back to Egypt, Joshua and Caleb stood up again:

“Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them.” (Numbers 14:9)

The giants were real. Caleb never pretended they were not. He simply refused to let the giants have the last word, because God had already had the first word. That is positive stubbornness. And God’s verdict on it is beautiful:

“But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the

land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.”

(Numbers 14:24)

A different spirit. Forty-five years later, at eighty-five, Caleb was still asking for the hill country with the giants on it. Stubborn to the end, in the best possible way.

Abraham faced the hardest kind of bad news: the kind you can see in the mirror. He was about a hundred, and Sarah was well past the age of having children. Every morning the facts said, “Impossible.” Here is what he did with those facts:

“And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,”

(Romans 4:19-20)

Abraham did not deny the facts. He just refused to make them his focus. He did not sit around studying his own body. He kept looking at the promise and giving glory to God. And the longer he did that, the stronger his faith got. Positive stubbornness is like a muscle. It grows every time you use it.

“It Is Well”

My favourite example might be the Shunammite woman. Her son, the miracle son God had given her, died in her lap. She laid him on the prophet’s bed, shut the door, and set off to find Elisha. When her husband asked why she was going, her answer was two words: “It is well.” When Elisha’s servant ran to meet her and asked,

“Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?” she answered, “It is well.”

(2 Kings 4:26)

She was not lying, and she was not in denial. Her heart was fixed. She refused to speak the bad report over her son until she had brought the matter to the man of God. And that boy came back to life.

A Gentle Word About Bad News and Good Care

Now, let me be very careful here, because this is where some people get hurt. Positive stubbornness is aimed at the bad report, never at good care. Standing on God's promise does not mean refusing to see a doctor, throwing away a prescription or ignoring sound advice. Jesus Himself said,

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” (Luke 5:31)

Seeking God and seeing a doctor are not rivals. Many of the most faith-filled people I know take their medication with a thankful heart and keep standing on the Word while they do.

And if you know someone who stood stubbornly and has not yet seen their answer, please be gentle. Their waiting is not proof that their faith was too small. Some things we will only understand on the other side. Love them, stand with them, and leave the verdicts to God.

Picture a woman named Joanne who opens a letter from the bank on a Tuesday morning. The news is bad. Her first instinct is to ring three friends and tell each one how awful it is. Instead she sits at the kitchen table, takes a breath, and says out loud, “Lord, this letter is real, but Your Word is truer. My heart is fixed. I trust You.” Then she picks up the phone, calls the bank, and starts working on a plan. Same letter. Different spirit.

That is what the waiting is teaching you. Every bad report that comes before the answer is a chance to practise a fixed heart. The first time, you will probably wobble. The tenth time, you will notice you are steadier. By the time the answer comes, you

will have become the kind of person who hears evil tidings without being afraid of them, and that is worth more than any single answer.

The bad report may be loud, but it never gets the last word.

CHAPTER 25

Compassion Learned While Still Suffering

There is a lesson God teaches in the waiting that cannot be taught any other way. You cannot learn it from a book, even this one. You cannot pick it up at a conference. It only grows in the soil of your own pain. That lesson is compassion.

Here is the remarkable thing. God does not wait until your trouble is over to start growing it. He grows it while you are still hurting. Long before the answer arrives, something tender is being formed inside you, and it is one of the most valuable things you will ever carry.

A High Priest Who Has Been There

Start with Jesus. Hebrews tells us something wonderful about the One we pray to:

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)

Jesus does not look down on your struggle from a safe distance. He knows hunger, because He fasted forty days. He knows exhaustion, because He fell asleep in a boat in the middle of a storm. He knows betrayal, rejection, grief and loneliness. Hebrews even says,

“though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.” (Hebrews 5:8)

The Son of God walked through suffering on purpose, so that when you come to Him, you come to someone who understands

from the inside.

And look at how that understanding showed itself:

“But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36)

When He met a widow following her only son’s coffin,

“When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’” (Luke 7:13)

Compassion was not a technique for Jesus. It moved Him. It changed His plans, stopped His walk and drew Him to the hurting.

And here is the part that speaks straight to your waiting season. When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been killed, He got into a boat to go somewhere quiet. He was grieving. But the crowds followed Him on foot, and when He stepped ashore,

“And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.” (Matthew 14:14)

He did not wait until His own grief had passed. He let His sorrow make Him more tender, not less. That is compassion learned while still suffering.

How Pain Softens a Hard Heart

Let me be honest about something. Before most of us go through real trouble, we are a little hard. Not cruel, perhaps, but quick with advice and slow with understanding. We hear about somebody’s depression and think, “Why don’t they just cheer up?” We hear about someone’s money problems and think, “They should have budgeted better.” We hear about a marriage in trouble and assume we know exactly whose fault it is.

Then the pushback hits us. We pray and the answer is slow. We lie awake at three in the morning with our hearts pounding. We find out how heavy one bad week can feel. And something begins to change. The ground of the heart, which used to be packed hard like a footpath, gets broken up.

God described exactly what He wants to do:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26)

A heart of flesh is a heart that can feel. When you are born again, God gives you that new heart. But the waiting is often where you learn to live from it, where the old hardness is worked out of your reactions toward other people.

The psalmist could look back and say,

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.” (Psalm 119:71)

That is not a man who enjoyed pain. It is a man who discovered what pain had taught him.

Paul tells us compassion is something we can choose to put on, like clothing:

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;” (Colossians 3:12)

Every morning you get dressed. You do not wait to feel like wearing a shirt; you just put it on. Compassion works the same way. Your own hard season has handed you the fabric. Now get up and put it on. Peter says the same thing:

“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;” (1 Peter 3:8)

Here is the danger, though. Pain can make you tender, or it can make you bitter. The same rain that softens one patch of ground turns another into mud. The difference is what you do with it. If you turn your pain inward, it becomes self-pity. If you turn it toward God and toward others, it becomes compassion.

Compassion Forming in Your Own Wait

Picture a man named Wesley who has been standing in faith for his health for nearly a year. He prays, he stands on the Word, he follows his doctor's plan, and some days are still very hard. One afternoon he is sitting in a hospital waiting room for yet another appointment when an older man next to him starts fidgeting with his paperwork, hands trembling.

A year ago Wesley would have buried his face in his phone. Not today. He knows that tremble. He knows what it is to sit in that chair and wonder what the next hour will bring. So he leans over and says, "First time here?" The man nods. Wesley says, "It's scary, isn't it. Would you mind if I prayed with you?" Five minutes later, two men who had never met are holding hands in a waiting room, and one of them has stopped shaking.

Wesley's answer has not fully come yet. But look at what has come. His wait has turned him into a man who notices trembling hands. That is not a side effect of his trial. That is part of God's purpose in it.

The Beautiful Paradox

So here is the paradox. While you are waiting for God to meet your need, He is quietly making you into someone who can meet the needs of others. While you are crying out for comfort, He is growing a comforter. You may not be able to see the answer yet, but you can already see the fruit, if you look at how differently you treat hurting people.

Do not waste your waiting. Let it soften you. Let it slow you down long enough to notice the person beside you. Some of the most compassionate people in the kingdom of God are not the ones who have been spared, but the ones who have been through it and kept their hearts soft.

Your pain is not wasted when it teaches you to notice someone else's.

CHAPTER 26

Gentleness Toward the One Who Failed

There is a strange thing that happens to people who have never really struggled. They become very good at spotting other people's failures. It is as if the less pushback they have faced, the more confident they are that everyone else's trouble is their own fault. Everything has always come easily to them, so they cannot imagine why anybody would fall.

The waiting season cures that. When you have stood in the pushback yourself, when you have wobbled at two in the morning, doubted what you were sure of the day before, and had to pick your shield back up off the floor, you lose your appetite for judging the brother whose faith seems to be failing. You know how heavy the darts are. And God uses that knowledge to grow one of the loveliest fruits of all: gentleness.

Considering Yourself

Paul gives the instruction plainly:

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

(Galatians 6:1)

Notice the goal. Not expose. Not punish. Not post about it. Restore. The word Paul uses was used for setting a broken bone. Anyone who has had a bone set knows you want the doctor to be skilful and gentle, not to stamp on your arm to prove a point.

And then there are those two words that change everything: considering yourself. The person who has been tested remembers. He remembers how close he came to the edge. He knows that, but for the grace of God, it could have been him. That memory is not a weakness. It is the very thing that makes him safe for a fallen brother to come to.

Stones Dropped One by One

Watch how Jesus handled a woman who was caught in the very act of sin. The religious leaders dragged her into the temple courts, threw her down in front of the crowd, and demanded He agree that she should be stoned. They were not interested in her. They were interested in trapping Him.

Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground. When they kept pressing Him,

“He raised Himself up and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.’” (John 8:7)

And one by one, starting with the oldest, they walked away. The oldest went first, perhaps because they had lived long enough to know their own hearts.

Then came one of the most tender moments in the Gospels:

“When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’” (John 8:10-11)

Do not miss either half. Jesus did not pretend sin was nothing; He told her to go and sin no more. But He led with mercy. He lifted her up before He sent her on. Gentleness is not soft on sin. It is soft on the sinner.

Jesus also gave us a picture that should make every one of us smile and wince at the same time:

“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?”

(Matthew 7:3)

Picture a man walking around with a wooden beam sticking out of his eye, knocking over lamps and banging into doorframes, while he squints at his friend and says, “Hold still, I think you have a little something in there.” It is ridiculous, and that is the point. Jesus goes on:

“Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:5)

Jesus is not saying we should never help anyone with their speck. He is saying the order matters. Deal honestly with yourself first. The waiting season is very good at this, because it tends to bring your own planks into view. Once you have seen your own, you handle other people’s specks very differently.

The Young Man Who Quit

Now here is a story I love. On Paul’s first missionary journey, a young man named John Mark went with him and Barnabas. Partway through, Mark turned around and went home. We do not know exactly why. Maybe he was homesick, maybe he was frightened, maybe the work was harder than he expected. Whatever the reason, he quit.

When the next journey came around, Barnabas wanted to give him a second chance, but Paul refused. Luke records that Paul

“insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work.” (Acts 15:38)

The disagreement was so sharp that Paul and Barnabas parted ways.

That could have been the end of Mark's story. But it was not. Barnabas took him, invested in him, and stayed gentle with him. Years later, from a prison cell near the end of his life, Paul wrote this:

“Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:11)

Useful to me. The young man who quit became the man Paul asked for at the end. Somebody's gentleness kept the door open long enough for God to finish His work in Mark. And even Paul, the great apostle, seems to have softened with the years.

A Fruit, Not a Performance

Gentleness is not a personality type that some people are born with. It is fruit.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

And fruit takes time to ripen. Much of it ripens in the waiting.

Picture a woman named Carla whose close friend at church stopped coming after a hard divorce, and then posted some angry things online about God. A few people in the small group are muttering about backsliding. Carla has had her own long season of unanswered prayer, and she remembers some of the things she thought, and nearly said, at her lowest. So she does not mutter. She texts her friend: “I miss you. No lectures. Coffee on Thursday?” That text may be the bruised reed that does not get broken.

That is exactly how Isaiah described the Messiah:

“A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth.”

(Isaiah 42:3)

He is gentle with the one who is barely hanging on.

So the next time someone stumbles near you, before you say a word, remember your own two o'clock mornings. Remember who picked you up. Then go and do the same. Let your waiting make you like Him.

The one who has been tested judges gently, because he remembers.

CHAPTER 27

Understanding What Other People Are Carrying

Have you ever been cut off in traffic and thought some unkind things about the driver, only to see the car swing into the hospital entrance a mile later? Suddenly the whole picture changes. That driver was not rude. That driver was frightened. You just could not see what they were carrying.

Most of the people around you are carrying something you cannot see. The cashier who seemed short with you. The neighbour who never waves. The friend who cancelled on you again. The person in the pew in front of you who sat through the whole service without singing a note. We see the outside, decide what it means, and move on. And very often we get it badly wrong.

The waiting season is one of God's best tools for curing that habit. When you have carried a heavy, unseen load yourself, you start to realise that other people might be carrying one too. You become slower to judge and quicker to understand.

Carry It Together

Paul wrote,

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

That is a beautiful command, but notice something. You cannot help carry a burden you have not noticed. Before you can bear someone's load, you have to understand that they have one, and you have to have some idea of how heavy it is.

That is where your own pushback becomes a gift. You know what it is to smile at church while your heart is breaking. You know what it is to say “I’m fine” when you are anything but. And because you know, you start to look past the surface of other people. You start asking a second question after “How are you?” and actually waiting for the answer.

The Priest Who Got It Wrong

One of the saddest misreadings in the Bible happened in the house of God, and the person who got it wrong was the priest.

Hannah had been waiting years for a child. Every year she went up to worship, and every year her rival mocked her until she wept and could not eat. One year she slipped away to the tabernacle and poured out her heart to God, so deeply that no sound came out.

“Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk.” (1 Samuel 1:13)

Imagine that. A woman at the lowest point of her life, praying harder than she ever had, and the man of God looks at her and decides she has had too much wine.

“So Eli said to her, ‘How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!’” (1 Samuel 1:14)

Hannah’s reply is so gracious it should humble every one of us:

“No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.” (1 Samuel 1:15)

To his credit, Eli listened, changed his mind and blessed her:

“Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.” (1 Samuel 1:17)

But think how close he came to sending a broken woman away with a rebuke instead of a blessing. He judged by what he could see. He did not understand what she was carrying. And remember, this was the man whose whole calling was to stand between hurting people and God and help them.

Friends Who Talked Too Much

Job's friends are another warning. When they first heard about his losses, they did something wonderful. They came, they wept, and

“So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.” (Job 2:13)

That was the best thing they did in the whole book.

Then they opened their mouths. For chapter after chapter they explained to Job why all of this must be his own fault. They had a neat little theory that suffering always means hidden sin, and they were determined to make Job fit it. Job finally cried out,

“I have heard many such things; Miserable comforters are you all!” (Job 16:2)

And at the end, God Himself said to them,

“for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.” (Job 42:7)

Here is the lesson. When someone is in the middle of their pushback, they rarely need your theory. They need your presence. Some contemporary churches are quick to hand out explanations to the hurting: “You must not have enough faith,” or “There must be sin in your life.” Be very careful with words like that. Unless God has clearly shown you something, it is far better to sit on the ground with someone than to stand over them with an explanation.

Paul gives us the simple rule:

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” (Romans 12:15)

Not “explain to those who weep.” Not “correct those who weep.” Weep with them.

James adds,

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;” (James 1:19)

Most of us have that backwards. We are swift to speak and slow to hear. Proverbs is blunt about it:

“He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.” (Proverbs 18:13)

Drawing Out the Deep Water

There is one more verse I want you to hold on to:

“Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, But a man of understanding will draw it out.” (Proverbs 20:5)

People are like wells. What is really going on is usually far below the surface. You will not get to it by shouting down the shaft. You get to it the way you draw water: slowly, patiently, with a rope and a bucket. A gentle question. A quiet coffee. A willingness to wait through the silence until the real answer comes up.

Picture a woman named Megan whose teenage son has suddenly become sullen and short with everyone. Her first instinct is to lay down the law. But Megan has been through her own long wait this past year, and she remembers how often she snapped at people when she was hurting inside. So instead of a lecture, she takes him for a drive and simply asks, “Is something heavy going on?” Twenty minutes of silence later, it all comes out: a friend in

trouble, a fear he did not know how to say out loud. One question, asked with understanding, drew up the deep water.

Your own waiting has taught you what it feels like to carry something nobody else can see. Let it make you the kind of person who looks twice, asks gently and listens long. That is understanding, and the world is starving for it.

Look twice before you judge once.

CHAPTER 28

Forgiveness in the Wait

Have you ever noticed what Jesus said right after His most famous teaching on faith? He had just told His disciples to speak to the mountain and command it into the sea. He had just told them to believe they receive when they pray. And then, without taking a breath, He said this:

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.” (Mark 11:25-26)

That is not an accident of editing. Jesus put mountain-moving faith and forgiveness side by side on purpose. He was telling us that one of the quickest ways to choke your own prayer life is to carry a grudge into it.

And here is why this matters so much in the waiting season. When the answer is slow, you have time to think. And very often, what you think about is who hurt you. The boss who passed you over. The family member who said that thing at Christmas. The friend who disappeared when you needed them. The longer the wait, the more time those old wounds have to fester. So God uses the waiting to deal with something you might never have dealt with otherwise.

The Kink in the Hose

Picture yourself watering your garden on a hot evening. The tap is turned on full. Water is surging through the pipe. But nothing is coming out of the nozzle except a sad little dribble. You shake

it. You bang it against your hand. Then you look back across the lawn and see it: a kink in the hose, folded over on itself behind the rose bush.

The supply was never the problem. The tap was on the whole time. The problem was a fold in the line between the source and the garden.

Unforgiveness is a kink in the hose of prayer. Heaven's supply has not been switched off. God has not changed His mind. But bitterness folds the line over and chokes the flow. And the frightening thing is that you can stand there for months blaming the tap, when the kink is right there in your own backyard.

Hebrews warns us about exactly this:

“looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;”

(Hebrews 12:15)

Bitterness is a root. It grows underground, quietly, and by the time you see it above the surface it has already spread.

Seventy Times Seven

Peter once asked Jesus the question most of us would like to ask:

“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’”

(Matthew 18:21-22)

Peter thought seven was generous. Jesus multiplied it until it stopped being a number at all. In other words: stop counting. If you are keeping score, you have not really forgiven.

Then Jesus told a story to explain why. A servant owed his king an amount so huge he could never repay it in a hundred lifetimes.

The king forgave the whole debt. That same servant walked straight out, found a fellow servant who owed him a few months' wages, grabbed him by the throat and had him thrown into prison. When the king heard, he called him back:

“You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?”

(Matthew 18:32-33)

And Jesus finished with a sobering line:

“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” (Matthew 18:35)

Notice the words from his heart. Forgiveness is not pretending it did not hurt. It is not saying what they did was fine. It is releasing the debt from your heart, handing the account over to God and refusing to keep demanding payment.

Let me add a gentle word here. Forgiving someone does not mean you must put yourself back in harm's way. If someone has been abusive or dangerous, you can forgive them from your heart and still keep a wise and safe distance. Forgiveness releases the debt. It does not hand them the keys to your house. Trust is rebuilt over time; forgiveness is given as a gift.

Joseph in the Wait

Nobody had more reason for bitterness than Joseph. Thrown into a pit by his own brothers. Sold as a slave. Falsely accused. Forgotten in prison by a man he had helped. Year after year of waiting, with plenty of time to rehearse every wrong.

And yet, when he finally stood before those same brothers with the power of Egypt in his hand, he said this:

“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this

day, to save many people alive.” (Genesis 50:20)

That kind of forgiveness did not appear in a moment. It was grown in the waiting. Somewhere in the prison years, Joseph made a choice not to let his brothers’ evil become his identity. He let God reinterpret his pain. By the time the answer came, his heart was clean enough to carry it. Can you imagine what would have happened if a bitter Joseph had been handed that kind of power?

Forgive as You Have Been Forgiven

Paul sums it up:

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”
(Ephesians 4:32)

That is the measure. Not “forgive them when they deserve it,” but “forgive them the way God forgave you,” which was long before you deserved anything.

Jesus showed us how from the cross itself:

“Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’” (Luke 23:34)

He forgave while the nails were still in His hands. He did not wait for an apology.

Picture a woman named Rosa who has been praying for a breakthrough in her finances for over a year. One morning, in her quiet time, the face of her former business partner comes to mind, the one who walked off with the clients and left her with the debts. She realises she has been rehearsing that betrayal almost every day. So she stops, right there at the kitchen table, and prays out loud: “Father, I release him. I hand this debt to You. I bless him in Jesus’ name.” It is not easy, and she may have to pray it again next week. But something unkinks in her spirit. Her prayers feel free again.

Forgiveness does not always change the person who hurt you. It always changes you. And it straightens the line so heaven's supply can flow.

You cannot hold a grudge and a promise in the same hand.

CHAPTER 29

Trusting Character Over Mood

If you lived in a seaside town and decided whether to stay there based on the weather each morning, you would move house about forty times a year. Monday is glorious, so you love the place. Tuesday brings fog, so you start looking at listings inland. Wednesday a storm rolls in and you are ready to pack the van. Thursday the sun is out again and you wonder what all the fuss was about.

Nobody sensible lives like that. You choose where to live based on the climate, not the weather. Weather is what is happening today. Climate is what is true over the long haul.

Your feelings are weather. God's character is climate.

One of the most important things the waiting season teaches you is the difference between those two. When the answer is slow, your emotions will go up and down like a seagull in a gale. Some mornings you will wake up full of faith. Other mornings you will wake up feeling as though God has moved away and left no forwarding address. If you build your faith on your moods, you will be spiritually unstable by lunchtime. But if you learn to anchor yourself to who God is, you can stand in any weather.

God Is Not a Man

Here is the bedrock:

“God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”

(Numbers 23:19)

Read those two questions slowly. Has He said, and will He not do? Has He spoken, and will He not make it good? People make promises and then forget, change their minds, or find they cannot keep them. Most of us have been let down by someone we trusted. It is easy to project that onto God and assume He might do the same. But He is not a man. When He speaks, it is as good as done.

He even swore an oath to settle it:

“My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.” (Psalm 89:34)

Once a word has left God’s lips, it is not up for revision. It does not depend on whether you felt close to Him this morning.

The God Who Does Not Change

God says it about Himself in the plainest possible words:

“For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” (Malachi 3:6)

Notice the “therefore”. The reason Israel was still standing was not that they had been so faithful. It was that God had not changed. The New Testament says the same of Jesus:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Think about that the next time you have a bad day. The Jesus who healed the sick, welcomed sinners and kept every promise is exactly the same today as He was then. Your mood changed overnight. He did not. Paul goes even further:

“If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” (2 Timothy 2:13)

Even on the days your faith feels paper-thin, His faithfulness has not shrunk by a single inch. He cannot stop being who He is.

Jeremiah wrote one of the most hopeful passages in the Bible in the middle of one of the darkest books. Lamentations is a funeral song over a ruined city. Yet in the middle of it he says:

**“Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not. They are new every
morning; Great is Your faithfulness.”**

(Lamentations 3:22-23)

Jeremiah’s circumstances had not improved. Jerusalem was still in ruins. But he turned his eyes from the weather to the climate. He remembered who God is. And hope came back.

Here is how that works on an ordinary morning. You wake up and the feelings arrive before you have even found your slippers: heavy, grey, discouraged. That is weather. You can acknowledge it honestly, because God is not offended by your feelings. But you do not have to obey it. Before you check your phone, you can say, “Lord, Your mercies are new this morning. You have not changed overnight. Great is Your faithfulness.” You are not denying the weather. You are choosing to live by the climate.

This is one place where some contemporary churches have done believers a real disservice. Without meaning to, they have taught people to measure God by how the service felt. If the music was moving and there were goosebumps, God was there. If it was a flat morning, He must have stayed home. So people go chasing the next emotional high, and when the feelings fade, they assume God has faded too. But God was never in the goosebumps. He is in His Word, and His Word does not go up and down with the room temperature. Enjoy the warm moments when they come. Just never mistake them for the foundation.

Talk to Your Own Soul

David knew all about moods. Some of his psalms start in the pit. But listen to what he does in one of them:

“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance.” (Psalm 42:5)

David is not talking to God in that verse. He is talking to himself. He is taking his own soul by the collar and saying, “Why are you so down? Look up. Hope in God.” He does not wait for his feelings to agree before he speaks. He tells his feelings where to go.

Many of us let our soul do all the talking. It says, “This will never change,” and we nod along. David shows us a better way. Your spirit can speak to your soul. Your faith can preach a sermon to your feelings.

Picture a man named Colin who has been believing God for his marriage for two years. Most mornings he is steady. But one Saturday, after another tense conversation, he finds himself in the garage feeling as though God has forgotten him completely. The old Colin would have let that feeling run the whole weekend. This time he stops, puts down the screwdriver, and says out loud, “Soul, why are you cast down? God has not changed since yesterday. His Word is still true. I will yet praise Him.” He does not feel much different right away. But by the time he walks back into the kitchen, he is standing on climate, not weather, and it shows in how he treats his wife.

Anchored to Who He Is

The waiting season will give you plenty of practice at this. That is part of the gift. Every grey morning is a chance to learn that God’s character holds when your feelings do not. And once you have learned that, you can face almost anything, because you are no longer at the mercy of the forecast.

Feelings are the weather; His faithfulness is the climate.

CHAPTER 30

Hunger Deepened by Withdrawal

There is a strange thing that happens in the waiting that nobody puts on a greeting card. Sometimes, right after you have prayed and taken your stand, the warm sense of God's nearness seems to drain away. Last month you could hardly open your Bible without a verse leaping off the page. This month the same pages feel like reading a phone book. You still believe. You are still standing. But the sweetness has gone quiet.

Most of us panic at that point. We assume we have done something wrong, or that God has stepped out of the room. But I want to show you something that will change the way you read those dry seasons for the rest of your life. Very often, when God withdraws the feeling of His presence, He is not leaving you. He is making you hungry.

The Deer at the Dry Creek

Listen to the man who wrote this, because he was not writing from a mountaintop:

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”

(Psalm 42:1-2)

A deer does not pant when it is standing knee-deep in the stream. It pants when the stream is out of reach. That psalm was born in a season of distance, not a season of closeness. And out of that distance came one of the most beautiful prayers ever prayed.

David said the same thing from the desert of Judah, running for his life:

“O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.” (Psalm 63:1)

Notice where he was: a dry and thirsty land. Notice what the dryness produced: not bitterness, but longing. The dry land did not drive David away from God. It drove him toward God with a desire he had never felt in the palace.

Think about the difference between a snack and a hunger. When the fridge is full, you graze. You wander past, grab something, and wander off. But let a man go without food for a day, and he does not graze. He seeks. He thinks about food. He plans his route to the kitchen. Hunger turns a casual relationship with food into a single-minded pursuit. God knows that about us, and in His kindness He sometimes lets the fridge look empty for a while, not to starve us, but to turn grazers into seekers.

His Hand or His Face

The waiting season asks a question every believer must eventually answer: do I want what God gives, or do I want God?

When the prayer is answered quickly and the feelings are warm, it is easy to confuse the two. But when the answer has not arrived yet and the warm glow has faded, the heart is tested. If I only wanted His hand, His blessings, the quick fix, then the dryness will make me drift. If I want His face, the dryness will make me press in.

Jesus promised a full table to exactly this kind of person:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Matthew 5:6)

He did not say, "Blessed are those who feel full." He said blessed are the hungry, because hunger is the guarantee of filling. The ache you feel is not a sign that you are far from God. Dead hearts

do not miss Him. Only a heart that is alive to God can feel the pain of His apparent distance. Your hunger is proof of life.

And God has given His word about where hunger leads:

“And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13)

With all your heart. Not half your heart while the other half scrolls the news. Not a quick glance on the way out of the door. All of it. And the beautiful thing is that the dryness is often what gathers your scattered heart into one piece. It takes the pursuit that was spread thin across a hundred interests and focuses it like sunlight through a magnifying glass.

Seeking Him by Night

There is a tender picture of this in the Song of Solomon. The bride lies awake, and the one she loves is not beside her:

“By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him.” (Song of Solomon 3:1)

Does she roll over and go back to sleep? No. She gets up. She goes out into the streets and the squares. She asks the watchmen. She keeps looking. And then:

“Scarcely had I passed by them, when I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go.”
(Song of Solomon 3:4)

Notice the order. She sought, she did not find, she sought again, and then she found him and held on tighter than she ever had before. The search did not weaken her love. It deepened her grip. That is exactly what God is doing in you. The seeking season is producing a believer who, when the sense of His presence returns, will hold on and not let go.

Let me give you an ordinary picture. Marisol had been a believer for years, and she prayed the way some people brush their teeth:

faithfully, quickly, and without much thought. Then a hard season came. She prayed over her son's future and took her stand on the promises, and in the weeks that followed, heaven felt like brass. For the first time in her life, she found herself waking early, not because she had to, but because she could not stand the distance. She started reading the Psalms aloud at the kitchen table before anyone else was up. She stopped asking God only for the answer and started asking for Him.

Months later, when the breakthrough for her son came, she put it this way: "I got what I prayed for, but before that I got God. And if I ever had to choose, I would keep Him."

That is not passive waiting. That is the most active thing a human heart can do. Hunger gets out of bed. Hunger rearranges the schedule. Hunger turns off the television, opens the Book, and says, "Lord, I am not leaving until I find You."

What to Do on a Tuesday

So what do you do when the feelings fade and the answer has not yet arrived?

First, do not interpret dryness as rejection. The feelings are weather; the faithfulness of God has not moved an inch. Second, follow the hunger instead of numbing it. When you feel that ache, do not reach for something to fill the hole. Reach for Him. Read a psalm aloud. Sit in the quiet a little longer than is comfortable. Third, keep standing on the promise you prayed. Hunger for His face does not mean you let go of His Word about your situation. You hold both: the promise in one hand and the longing in the other.

And know this: the seeking always ends in finding. God has never once hidden Himself from a heart that refused to stop looking.

God does not withdraw to leave you empty; He withdraws to make you hungry enough to be filled.

CHAPTER 31

Worship in the Dark

Anybody can sing when the sun is out. Anybody can lift their hands when the bills are paid, the test results are clear, and the family is getting along. That is wonderful, and God enjoys it. But the worship that shakes the enemy's camp is the worship that rises at midnight, when nothing has changed yet and every circumstance is shouting that you have nothing to sing about.

Here is a secret about the pushback after prayer: once you have prayed in faith, your request needs to move from your prayer list to your praise list. You have asked. Heaven heard you on the first day. Now the most powerful thing you can do in the meantime is thank God for the answer before you can see it. Praise is faith with its mouth open.

Midnight in the Inner Prison

Paul and Silas had been beaten with rods, thrown into the inner prison, and had their feet fastened in the stocks. Their backs were raw. The room was dark. There was no reason in the natural world to sing. And yet:

“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.” (Acts 16:25-26)

Look at the time stamp. Midnight. Not after the release, not after the apology from the magistrates, but at the darkest hour, with their wounds still fresh. They did not wait to feel better before

they worshiped. They worshiped, and then the foundations moved.

And notice who was listening: the other prisoners. Your worship in the dark is never private. The people chained beside you, the coworker who knows you are going through it, the children watching how you respond to the bad news, are all listening. Your midnight song may be the first time they have ever seen faith that does not depend on circumstances.

Job on the Ground

If any man had a right to stop worshiping, it was Job. In one day he lost his livestock, his servants, and all ten of his children. Watch what he did:

“Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.’” (Job 1:20-21)

I want you to see something tender here. Job tore his robe. He grieved. He did not pretend the pain was not real. Worship in the dark is not putting on a fake smile. It is falling to the ground with tears on your face and still saying, "You are worthy." Grief and worship can live in the same heart on the same day. In fact, the worship that comes through tears may be the purest worship God ever receives.

Though the Fig Tree May Not Blossom

The prophet Habakkuk looked at a future where everything he depended on might fail, and he made a decision ahead of time:

“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will

rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

That little word yet is one of the strongest words in the Bible. It is the hinge between what I see and what I choose. Put your own situation into that verse. Though the account is low, though the symptom lingers, though the phone has not rung, yet I will rejoice in the Lord. You are not rejoicing in the circumstance. You are rejoicing in the God who is bigger than the circumstance.

This is why the Bible calls it a sacrifice:

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” (Hebrews 13:15)

A sacrifice costs something. Praise on a good day costs very little. Praise on the day of the bad report costs your pride, your self-pity, and your right to complain. That is exactly what makes it precious to God. Continually, the verse says, not occasionally.

Singers at the Front of the Army

Now let me show you the most outrageous battle plan ever recorded. King Jehoshaphat was facing a coalition of three armies. He prayed, God answered through a prophet, and then the king did something no military academy would ever teach:

“And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: ‘Praise the LORD, for His mercy endures forever.’ Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated.” (2 Chronicles 20:21-22)

He put the choir in front of the soldiers. And notice the timing again: when they began to sing. The ambush did not come before the song. It came with the song. Praise was not the celebration after the victory. Praise was the weapon that brought it.

Picture Thaddeus, a man who had prayed over his failing business and was standing on the promise, while every week's figures looked worse than the last. One night he could not sleep, and instead of lying there rehearsing the numbers, he went into the living room and put on worship music, quietly so he would not wake the house. He did not feel like singing. He sang anyway. He said it felt like lifting weights at first. But somewhere around the third song, the heaviness lifted off his chest, and for the first time in weeks he was not afraid. Nothing on the spreadsheet had changed that night. Thaddeus had. And the man who walked into work the next morning was not a man the enemy could easily push around.

Your Midnight Song

Complaining strengthens unbelief; praise strengthens faith. Every time you thank God for what you have not yet seen, you are telling the enemy, "I am not cancelling the order."

So tonight, or whenever your midnight comes, do not wait for the earthquake before you sing. Thank Him for hearing you on the first day. Thank Him that His mercy endures forever. Thank Him with tears if you must. Then watch what He does with the foundations.

Praise is not the noise you make after the prison opens; it is the sound that opens it.

CHAPTER 32

Obeying Without the Map

Most of us would happily obey God if He would only show us the whole plan first. Just send the five-year map, Lord, with the turns marked in yellow highlighter, the dangers circled in red, and the happy ending printed at the bottom. Then I will gladly follow.

But God almost never works that way, and the waiting season is where we find that out. You prayed, you believed, you took your stand, and now you are in the in-between, where the next step is clear but the step after that is lost in fog. This is where many believers freeze. They would rather stand still in confusion than take one step in the light they have. But faith was never designed to see the whole road. Faith was designed to take the next step.

Abraham Packed Without an Address

Look at the father of faith:

“By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.”

(Hebrews 11:8)

Not knowing where he was going. Can you imagine the conversations at the farewell dinner? "So, Abraham, where are you moving?" "I don't know." "What is it like there?" "I don't know." "When will you arrive?" "I'll know when I get there." His relatives must have thought he had lost his mind.

But Abraham knew the one thing that mattered. He did not know the destination, but he knew the One who called him. And that was enough to pack the tents. God had said, **“Get out of your**

country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.” (Genesis 12:1) A land that I will show you. Future tense. The showing came after the going.

That is the pattern of the waiting season. God reveals as you move, not before.

Enough Light for the Next Step

The psalmist described God's guidance with a picture every ancient traveller understood:

“**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.**”
(Psalm 119:105)

In those days a lamp was a small clay dish of oil with a wick. Carried at night, it did not light up the whole valley. It lit up the ground right in front of your sandals, enough to see the next rock, the next root, the next step. And as you walked forward, the light walked with you.

That is how God's Word works in the waiting. It rarely floods the whole future with daylight. It shows you the next obedient thing: forgive that person, make that phone call, keep showing up at work with integrity, keep speaking the promise, keep loving your family. Do that, and the light moves forward with you.

Think of the GPS in your car. When you set the destination, it does not read out every turn of the whole journey at once. It says, "In four hundred yards, turn left." That is all. You do not argue with it. You do not pull over and demand to see every turn between here and the end of the trip. You trust that the system knows the route, and you make the turn in front of you. When you make it, the next instruction comes. And if you refuse to turn until you get the full list, you simply sit at the junction while the traffic goes round you.

God's guidance is like that. He gives you the next turn. When you obey it, He gives you the next one.

Trust, Not Understanding

The most famous verse on guidance in the Bible is really a verse about letting go of the map:

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Notice the word lean. Your understanding is not evil. God gave you a mind and He expects you to use it. But your understanding was never meant to carry your full weight. When you lean all your weight on what you can figure out, you will fall over the first time life makes no sense. And in the waiting season, life frequently makes no sense.

Trust is not a mood. It is a decision you make again every morning. Today I will not lean on my understanding of how this should work out. Today I will acknowledge Him in the next step and let Him direct the path.

Following the Cloud

When Israel travelled through the wilderness, God led them with a cloud over the tabernacle. Listen to how it worked:

“Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents.”

(Numbers 9:17)

Sometimes the cloud stayed one night. Sometimes it stayed much longer:

“Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey.”

(Numbers 9:22)

Picture the frustration. You have just unpacked everything, set up the cooking pots, and the cloud lifts. Or you are itching to move on and the cloud just sits there for a year. Israel never got a schedule. They got a presence. Their job was to watch the cloud and move when it moved.

And here is the key: staying put was obedience too. **“At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed.”** (Numbers 9:23)

Remaining was not wasted time. It was faithfulness. When God says stay, staying in faith is as active as marching, because you are watching, ready, packed in your heart, and refusing to run ahead.

Let me bring it to an ordinary week. Rosalind had prayed for direction about her career and felt sure God had a new door for her. But nothing opened. What she did have was a clear sense, every time she prayed, that she should serve wholeheartedly where she was and finish the training course she had been putting off. It seemed so small. It did not look like the answer at all. But she obeyed the lamp-light. She finished the course. Six months later, the very opportunity she had prayed for required exactly that qualification. If she had sat at the junction demanding the whole map, she would have missed the one turn that got her there.

The Next Step Is Enough

So here is your instruction for Tuesday morning. Stop demanding the full itinerary. Ask God for the next step, and then take it. Do the last thing He told you to do. Obey the light you have, and more light will come. Waiting on God was never sitting in a parked car. It is driving faithfully through the turn in front of you, trusting the One who already sees the destination.

God rarely shows you the whole road, but He has never once failed to light the next step.

CHAPTER 33

Guarding the Gates While You Wait

Every ancient city had walls, and every wall had gates. The walls could be thick as a house, but if the gates were left wide open, the enemy did not need a battering ram. He just walked in. Your heart is like that city. You can have a strong promise, a solid prayer, and a real stand of faith, but if you leave the gates of your mind open to every thought that wanders past, the enemy will stroll right in and start rearranging the furniture.

That is why the waiting season demands a watchman.

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)

Out of it spring the issues of life. Everything you will eventually say, do, and become flows out of what you let settle in your heart. The pushback after prayer is very often a battle at the gate. The enemy cannot touch your born-again spirit, so he goes after your thoughts: the "what if" at three in the morning, the replay of the bad news, the whisper that says it is not going to work.

The Wandering Mind Is Untrained, Not Wicked

Let me start with some good news, because many sincere believers carry a load of guilt about this. You kneel to pray, and suddenly your mind becomes the busiest place on earth. You remember the email you forgot to send, the bill that is due, the thing your sister said last week. Five minutes later you realise you have spent four of them somewhere else entirely. And the accuser says, "If you really loved God, your mind would not wander like that."

That is a lie. Jesus Himself told His disciples in the garden:

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

(Matthew 26:41)

He did not say the spirit is weak. He said the spirit is willing. Your born-again spirit wants God. It is your mind that has spent years being trained by everything that comes in through your eyes and ears, so of course it goes where it has always gone. A wandering mind is not proof of a cold heart. It is proof of an untrained one. And whatever has been trained can be retrained.

Think about your phone. When it buzzes, your hand reaches for it before you have even decided to. That habit was built by repetition, thousands of times over. Prayer works the same way. The mind follows what it has been fed. Feed it on noise all day, and it will be noisy when you kneel. Feed it on the Word, and it will begin to settle when you pray.

Taking Thoughts Prisoner

Paul gives us the strategy:

“casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

(2 Corinthians 10:5)

Bringing every thought into captivity. That means you are not a helpless spectator in your own head. When a thought shows up at the gate that contradicts what God has said, you are allowed to stop it, question it, and lock it up. "Who sent you? Does this line up with what God has said? No? Then you are not coming in."

And here is the most practical tool I know for doing that: use your mouth. Thoughts rarely overcome thoughts, but words overcome thoughts. When your mind starts wandering in prayer or worrying in the waiting, do not just try to think harder. Speak. Say out loud, "Father, I thank You that You heard me on the first

day. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." **Your ears hear what your mouth says, and your mind turns to follow the sound, the way a big ship turns to follow a small rudder. David did this all the time: "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!" (Psalm 103:1)** He did not wait for his soul to feel like worshiping. He told it what to do.

Choosing What Comes Through the Gate

Guarding the gate is not only about throwing out bad thoughts. It is about deliberately letting good ones in:

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things." (Philippians 4:8)

That is the guest list for your mind. True things. Noble things. Lovely things. If a thought does not fit the list, it does not get a seat at the table. That does not mean pretending problems do not exist. It means you refuse to let the problem do all the talking.

And here is the promise for the one who keeps the gate well:

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You." (Isaiah 26:3)

Stayed means propped, leaning, resting its weight. The peace was never the problem. The mind was. When your mind leans on God, peace is the natural result.

Nehemiah's Watchmen

When Nehemiah finished rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he did not throw a party and leave the gates open. He gave clear orders:

“And I said to them, ‘Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot; and while they stand guard, let them shut and bar the doors; and appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, one at his watch station and another in front of his own house.’”
(Nehemiah 7:3)

Notice two things. First, the gates stayed shut until the sun was hot, until there was full light and everyone was alert. Second, each man guarded the section in front of his own house. Nobody else could do it for him.

That is your assignment in the waiting. Guard the section in front of your own house. Callum learned this the hard way. He had prayed and taken his stand over a frightening situation at work, and every evening he would sit down and read every gloomy article he could find on the subject until midnight. Then he wondered why his faith felt shredded by morning. He finally set a watchman. No news after eight in the evening. Ten minutes in a psalm before he picked up his phone in the morning. A short list of promises on a card by the bed to read aloud when the three a.m. thoughts came knocking. Nothing about his situation changed that first week. But his gates did. And a man with guarded gates can stand a very long time.

Before You Kneel

Here is a simple habit for any ordinary Tuesday. Before you pray, prepare. Lay the phone aside. Read a few verses slowly, not to study, just to let the Word become the atmosphere of your thinking. Know what you are going to pray about before you begin. When the mind wanders, do not scold it; speak the Word and bring it back. And stay a little longer than your feelings want to. The mind settles, the spirit leads, and the gates hold.

The enemy cannot storm a heart whose gates are guarded; he can only knock, and you do not have to answer.

CHAPTER 34

Refusing Self-Pity and Self-Medication

There are two quiet traps waiting in the long stretch between the prayer and the answer. Neither one looks like open rebellion. Both of them can steal more from you than the enemy's loudest attack. The first is self-pity. The second is what I call self-medication.

Before I go one step further, let me be crystal clear about what I mean by that second phrase, because words matter. When I say self-medication, I am not talking about the medicine your doctor has prescribed. If you are taking medication under a doctor's care, keep taking it exactly as your doctor directs, and keep praying. Seeking God and seeing a doctor have never been rivals. What I mean by self-medication is the habit of numbing the ache of the wait with escapes: food we do not need, hours of mindless scrolling, spending to feel better, a drink to take the edge off, anything we reach for to dull the pain instead of bringing the pain to God. That is the trap I want to expose.

Elijah Under the Broom Tree

Elijah had just seen fire fall from heaven. He had prayed, and the rain came after three and a half years of drought. If anybody was on a spiritual high, it was Elijah. And then came the pushback: one threatening message from Jezebel, and the great prophet ran for his life.

“But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, ‘It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!’” (1 Kings 19:4)

That is what self-pity sounds like. "It is enough. I am no better than anyone else. What is the point?" Self-pity always shrinks the world down to the size of my own pain. It tells me nobody understands, nobody has suffered like this, and nothing will ever change.

Now watch how God responded. He did not shout. He did not lecture. He did not tell Elijah he lacked faith.

"Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, 'Arise and eat.'"
(1 Kings 19:5)

God fed him. God let him sleep. And when Elijah lay down again, the angel came back:

"And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.'" (1 Kings 19:7)

I love that. The journey is too great for you. God was not angry that Elijah was exhausted. He knew the road was long. So He gave him real rest and real nourishment, and then:

"So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God." (1 Kings 19:8)

Notice the difference between what God gave Elijah and what self-pity offers. Self-pity says, "Lie under the tree and stay there." God says, "Rest, eat, then rise and go." God's care is never a place to hide. It is strength for the next part of the journey. And if you are worn out today, you need to hear this: rest is not unspiritual. Sleep, a good meal, a walk outside, a day off, and getting help when you need it are part of how God cares for His children. The angel did not preach a sermon. He brought breakfast.

Esau's Expensive Bowl of Stew

The second trap is the quick fix. Esau came in from the field exhausted and hungry, and his brother was cooking:

“And Esau said, ‘Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?’” (Genesis 25:32)

He was not about to die. He was hungry. But when you are tired and hurting, every craving feels like an emergency. And so he traded something priceless for something that would be gone in ten minutes. The New Testament gives the sober verdict:

“lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.”

(Hebrews 12:16)

One morsel. That is how the enemy works in the waiting season. He does not usually ask you to throw away your faith in one dramatic act. He offers a morsel. "You have had such a hard week; you deserve this." Another hour of scrolling. Another trip to the shops to buy something you do not need. Another glass. Another night of eating to fill an emptiness that food cannot reach. Each one feels small. But a hundred small morsels can trade away your peace, your focus, your health, and the clarity you need to keep standing on the promise.

The problem with numbing is that it does not choose what it numbs. When you dull the pain, you also dull your hunger for God, your sensitivity to His voice, and your strength to stand. You end up with a smaller ache and a smaller faith.

Serving While Still Suffering

One of the most powerful antidotes to self-pity is to turn outward. Joseph sat in a prison he did not deserve, with his own dreams apparently dead, and he noticed that two fellow prisoners looked sad and asked them why. He interpreted their dreams

while his own had not yet come true. Self-pity curls inward. Faith reaches out.

Imogen discovered this in a long season of waiting for a breakthrough in her health. She was under good medical care and kept every appointment, and she kept praying and standing on the promises. But the evenings were the hard part. She found herself reaching for her phone the moment the house was quiet and scrolling until midnight, feeling worse every night. One day she decided to swap one thing for another. When the ache came in the evening, she would pray for one other person by name, and then send that person a short note of encouragement. Within a month she had a small list of friends she was carrying in prayer, and the evenings had changed. Her own wait was not over. But it was no longer a pit. It had become a place of ministry.

Bring the Ache to Him

Here is the invitation that undoes both traps:

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

Self-pity says, "Stay here." Self-medication says, "Go there." Jesus says, "Come to Me." When the ache of the wait rises up in you on a Tuesday night, that is not a signal to numb it. It is an invitation to bring it. Tell Him exactly how heavy it feels. Let Him feed you, the way He fed Elijah. Then rise and go in the strength of that food.

Never trade your birthright for a bowl of relief; the One who says "Come to Me" has better bread.

CHAPTER 35

Contentment Learned in Deprivation

Contentment is one of the most misunderstood words in the Christian vocabulary. Some people think it means giving up on the promise, as if a content Christian is one who has stopped expecting anything from God. Others think it means pretending to be happy when you are not. It is neither of those things. Contentment is a settled peace in the heart that does not depend on what is in your hands. And the remarkable thing is that the Bible says it is learned. Nobody is born with it. It is learned, and the classroom is usually a season of going without.

Paul's Secret

The apostle Paul wrote these words from a prison cell:

“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

(Philippians 4:11-13)

Read that slowly. I have learned. Twice he says it. Paul did not wake up one morning naturally content. He learned it through shipwrecks, beatings, hunger, cold, and long nights in chains. And notice that contentment worked in both directions. He knew how to be abased and how to abound. Some people can be content only when things are good. Others, strangely, can handle hardship but fall apart when blessing comes. Paul had learned to

be the same man in both seasons, because his peace was anchored in Christ, not in his circumstances.

And look at the verse so many people quote on its own: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. We often use it as a motto for winning the game or passing the exam. But in its setting, it means, "I can go hungry and still be at peace. I can have plenty and not lose my head. I can face whatever comes, full or empty, because Christ is my strength." That is a far bigger promise.

Contentment Is Not Settling

Now let me be careful, because this book is about standing on the promise until it manifests, and I do not want anyone to misread what I am saying. Contentment does not cancel expectation. You can be content and still be standing. You can be at peace with what you have today while holding fast to what God has promised for tomorrow.

In fact, contentment is what makes standing possible. A discontented heart is a restless heart, and a restless heart wavers. It keeps checking, keeps comparing, keeps wondering whether God has forgotten. A content heart can wait without panic, because it is not living on the answer. It is living on God.

Paul put it simply to Timothy:

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

Great gain. The world says gain comes from getting more. God says the greatest gain is a godly heart that is at rest. We came in with nothing. We leave with nothing. Everything in between is borrowed. When you see life that way, the grip of "I must have it now" **begins to loosen. That is why the writer of Hebrews**

tells us to **“be content with such things as you have”**

(Hebrews 13:5), and roots that contentment not in what we hold, but in the One who holds us.

The Wilderness School

God's people learned contentment in the wilderness, and Moses explained exactly why they were sent there:

“And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”

(Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

Look at the order of those phrases. He allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna. God did not let them starve. He let them go without what they were used to, so that they would discover a supply they had never known. Manna came one day at a time. You could not store it up. You could not buy a year's worth and stop trusting. Every morning they had to go out and find that God had been faithful again overnight.

That is what deprivation teaches. When the things you leaned on are taken away for a season, you discover that God's Word is enough to live on. Not just your bread, but His Word. Not just your salary, your health, your plans, but every word that proceeds from His mouth.

Think of a child whose favourite toy has been put away for a week. For the first day, he sulks. By the third day, he has found a cardboard box and turned it into a castle, a rocket, and a racing car. He has discovered that joy was never in the toy. Our Father

sometimes puts a toy on the high shelf, not to be cruel, but so that we discover joy was never in the toy at all.

A Tuesday Kind of Contentment

Kwame lost his job in a sudden round of cuts. He and his wife prayed, took their stand on God's promise to provide, and began to look for work. Months passed. The family had to cut back on almost everything: no meals out, no new clothes, holidays cancelled. At first Kwame was angry and ashamed. But slowly something shifted. The family started eating together every night because there was nowhere else to go. They started thanking God at the table for specific things: the rent paid this month, a bag of groceries from a friend, the children's laughter. Kwame said afterwards that he had never been more content in his life than in that lean year, and he had never known God as his provider until he had nothing else to look at. When the new job finally came, it was better than the old one. But what he treasured most was what he had learned at the empty table.

Here is how to practise contentment today. Stop comparing your waiting room with someone else's living room. Thank God for what you have before you ask Him for what you lack. Remind yourself that you brought nothing in and will carry nothing out. And keep standing on the promise with a quiet heart, because the One who sends manna every morning has not run out.

Contentment is not the end of expectation; it is the peace that lets you wait without losing your mind.

CHAPTER 36

Gratitude Instead of Complaint

Complaining feels harmless. It feels like letting off steam, like being honest about how hard things are. Everybody does it. We complain about the traffic, the weather, the queue at the shop, and the prayer that has not been answered yet. But I want to show you from Scripture that complaining in the waiting season is far more dangerous than it looks. Complaining is not just a bad mood spoken out loud. It is voicing the enemy's unbelief with your own mouth.

Think back to what we have seen about the pushback after prayer. The enemy's whole strategy is to talk you out of the answer before it arrives. And what is complaining? It is you doing his talking for him.

The Most Expensive Complaint in History

God had brought Israel out of Egypt with signs and wonders. He had split the sea, fed them with bread from heaven, and brought water out of a rock. Then they came to the edge of the Promised Land, heard a bad report about giants, and the whole camp started murmuring. They wept all night and said they wished they had died in Egypt. Listen to God's response:

“How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me.” (Numbers 14:27)

Notice: against Me. They thought they were complaining about Moses, about the giants, about the food. God said they were complaining against Him. Every complaint about the wait is ultimately a complaint about the One we are waiting on.

And then came the sentence that should make every one of us careful with our words:

“Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you.’”

(Numbers 14:28)

They said they would die in the wilderness, and that is exactly what happened. That generation wandered for forty years, and only the two men with a different report, Joshua and Caleb, went in. They survived every hardship of the desert and still missed the promise, because their mouths kept agreeing with fear.

Paul held up this story as a warning for us:

“nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.” (1 Corinthians 10:10)

That is sobering. Complaining opened the door to the destroyer. It did not just reveal their unbelief; it gave it a voice and a door.

Do All Things Without It

So the New Testament instruction is simple and strong:

“Do all things without complaining and disputing.”

(Philippians 2:14)

All things. The things you enjoy and the things you do not. The waiting room and the breakthrough. I am not saying you cannot be honest with God about your pain. The Psalms are full of honest cries. But there is a world of difference between pouring out your heart to God and grumbling about God to everyone else. One is prayer. The other is poison.

Here is the replacement:

“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Notice it says in everything, not for everything. You do not have to thank God for the illness, the redundancy, or the betrayal. But

in the middle of it, you can find something to thank Him for. That He heard you on the first day. That His mercies did not run out last night. That you are still standing. That the promise is still true.

The Gate Into His Presence

Gratitude is not just good manners. It is the way in.

“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.” (Psalm 100:4)

Thanksgiving is the gate. If you want to come close to God in the waiting, you do not come in complaining. You come in thanking. It is the difference between walking into a friend's house saying, "Your doorbell is broken, your road is full of potholes, and it took me forever to get here," and walking in saying, "It is so good to see you." Both people arrived. Only one of them is going to enjoy the visit.

And thanksgiving does something inside you, too. Complaining shrinks your vision until all you can see is the problem. Gratitude widens it again until you can see the hand of God all around the problem.

The One Who Came Back

Ten men with leprosy cried out to Jesus from a distance. He told them to go and show themselves to the priests, and as they went, they were cleansed. Ten miracles at once. Then:

“And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, ‘Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?’”
(Luke 17:15-17)

Where are the nine? Jesus noticed. He always notices. Nine got the healing and hurried off with it. One came back and got something more. Jesus said to him:

“Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.”

(Luke 17:19)

All ten were cleansed, but the one who returned with thanks heard words of wholeness spoken directly over his life. Gratitude did not earn the miracle. It brought him face to face with the Healer.

Bronwyn had a habit she did not even notice. Every time someone asked how she was, she gave them a full report of everything going wrong: the delay on the house sale, the back pain, the neighbour. She had prayed in faith about each of them, but every conversation dug them up again. A friend gently pointed it out. So Bronwyn tried an experiment. For thirty days, before she said anything about a problem, she would say one thing she was grateful for. It felt forced at first. By the second week, she noticed she was looking for good things all day long so she would have something to say. By the end of the month, her friends said she seemed lighter, and Bronwyn herself said she felt as if she had moved out of a cramped room into a house full of windows. The house sale had not closed yet, but her heart had stopped fighting the promise.

A Thankful Tuesday

So here is the practice. Catch the complaint before it leaves your mouth. Ask yourself, "Whose report am I repeating?" Then replace it with thanks. Start the morning by naming three things God has done. When the bad news comes, say, "Father, I thank You that You are still on the throne and Your Word is still true." Be the one who comes back. Heaven is listening to what you say in the waiting, and so is your own heart.

Complaining hands your mouth to the enemy; thanksgiving hands it back to God.

CHAPTER 37

Humility: Peter, Upside Down

If you want to see what the waiting and the testing can do to a proud heart, look at Simon Peter. He is one of my favourite people in the whole Bible, because he is so wonderfully human. He was the first to speak, the first to jump out of the boat, the first to promise, and, for a while, the first to fall. And then God took that same loud, confident fisherman and turned him into one of the humblest men who ever lived.

The pushback in Peter's life did not only come from the enemy. Some of it came from his own self-confidence. And the lesson God taught him in that season is one every believer standing on a promise needs to learn: you do not stand by your own strength. You stand by grace.

"Even If All..."

On the night before the cross, Jesus told His disciples they would all stumble. Peter could not believe it:

“Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’ And so said all the disciples.”

(Matthew 26:33-35)

Listen to those words: Even if all. Peter was not only saying he was strong. He was saying he was stronger than everyone else. "These others might fold, Lord, but not me." That is the voice of pride, and it often sounds very spiritual. It sounds like devotion. It sounds like zeal. But underneath, it is leaning on myself.

The waiting season has a way of exposing this. When things are going well, it is easy to think we are standing because we are strong. We may even look down a little on the believer whose faith seems to be wobbling. But the Bible warns us: **“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”**

(1 Corinthians 10:12) And Solomon said it even more bluntly: **“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”** (Proverbs 16:18)

The Rooster and the Look

You know what happened. Within hours, Peter was standing by a fire in the high priest's courtyard, and a servant girl recognised him. He denied knowing Jesus. Then again. Then a third time, with curses. And then:

“But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are saying!’ Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ So Peter went out and wept bitterly.”

(Luke 22:60-62)

The Lord turned and looked at Peter. I do not believe that was a look of contempt. I believe it was a look of love that went straight through him. And in that moment, Peter's self-confidence shattered completely. Everything he had believed about his own strength came crashing down beside that fire.

That was the worst night of Peter's life. But it was also the night his humility was born. Sometimes God lets our own strength fail so that we will finally discover His. Peter went out and wept bitterly, and those tears washed away a pride that might otherwise have ruined his ministry.

If you have failed in the waiting, if you have wobbled, doubted, said things you regret, or let go of the shield for a while, do not

let the enemy tell you it is over. Peter's story did not end at the fire. Failure, met with honest tears, can become the soil of a humility that makes you far more useful to God than your self-confidence ever could.

Upside Down

Now fast-forward to the end of Peter's life. The Bible does not record how he died, but there is an old church tradition, handed down from the early centuries, that when Peter was sentenced to crucifixion, he asked to be crucified upside down, because he did not consider himself worthy to die in the same way as his Lord. We cannot prove that tradition from Scripture, so I hold it loosely. But whether or not every detail is exact, it fits the man Peter became. The one who once said, "Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be," ended his life by saying, in effect, "I am not even worthy to die like Him."

That is quite a journey: from "I am better than the others" to "I am not worthy." From the front of the line to the bottom of the cross. That is what the testing produced in him.

Clothed with Humility

You can hear the difference in his own letter, written years later:

"Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." (1 Peter 5:5-6)

This is the same man. But now he is not boasting about what he will do for God. He is telling us to put on humility like a garment, every day, the way you put on a coat before you go out. And he gives the reason: God resists the proud. Think about that. If you are proud, you are not only fighting the enemy in the

waiting season; you have God resisting you too. But to the humble, He gives grace, and grace is exactly what you need to keep standing.

And notice the promise at the end: that He may exalt you in due time. Due time. Not your time. Not the impatient time. God's time. Humility is willing to wait under His mighty hand until the moment He chooses to lift you up.

Dorian was the kind of believer who always had an answer. He prayed bold prayers and expected quick results, and when friends struggled, he would quietly wonder what was wrong with their faith. Then his own long season came. He prayed and stood and prayed again, and the answer did not come for a very long time. Somewhere in that season, Dorian found himself on his knees one night with nothing left but, "Lord, I cannot do this without You." That was the night everything began to change, though not first on the outside. He became gentler with people. He started listening more and lecturing less. And when the breakthrough finally came, he did not take any of the credit.

Humility on an Ordinary Day

Humility in the waiting looks like this: saying, "Lord, I need Your grace today," instead of, "I have got this." Refusing to look down on anyone whose faith seems weaker than yours. Owning your failures quickly and honestly. Bowing under His mighty hand and trusting His timing. The proud man stands on his own strength until it breaks. The humble man stands on grace, and grace does not break.

Peter learned that the ground beneath the cross is the only ground that never gives way.

CHAPTER 38

His Approval Over Applause

One of the quiet gifts of the waiting season is that it takes you off the stage. When you are standing on a promise that has not yet manifested, there is not much to show people. No dramatic testimony yet. No photo of the answered prayer. Just you, the Word, and the long middle. And in that hidden place, God works on something in you that the spotlight could never reach. He teaches you to live for His approval instead of the applause of people.

Let us be honest: most of us care far more about what people think than we would like to admit. We check how many people liked the post. We replay the conversation to see whether we came across well. We do good things and then make sure somebody notices. And during the pushback after prayer, the fear of what people think can become one of the enemy's sharpest tools. "What will they say if this does not work out? You told everyone you were believing God. You will look foolish."

Whose Servant Are You?

Paul faced enormous pressure from people who wanted him to soften his message, and he settled the question once and for all:

"For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10)

That is a strong line. Paul is saying you cannot serve two audiences. If pleasing people is your goal, then whoever you please becomes your master. You end up adjusting your faith to the mood of the room. But a servant of Christ answers to one voice.

Solomon put it like this: **“The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.”** (Proverbs 29:25) A snare is a trap that catches your foot so you cannot move. The fear of people's opinions does exactly that. It stops you from speaking the promise, from standing boldly, from obeying the next step, because you are afraid of looking silly if the answer takes longer than expected.

Loving the Wrong Praise

John records one of the saddest verses in the Gospels. Many of the religious rulers actually believed in Jesus, but they would not say so:

“Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” (John 12:42-43)

They believed, but they hid it. Why? Because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. They wanted to keep their seats, their status, their good name among the important people. And so they traded the approval of heaven for a few more years of nods in the corridor.

Some contemporary churches have fallen into the same trap without meaning to. When the measure of success becomes the size of the crowd, the quality of the lighting, and how many people shared the clip online, it is very easy for leaders and members alike to start performing for applause rather than walking in obedience. I am not against good music or large congregations. Praise God for every soul in the building. But the moment the stage matters more than the secret place, something precious has been lost. God is not looking for performers. He is looking for disciples.

The Father Who Sees in Secret

Jesus spoke directly to this in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 6:1)

And then He talked about prayer:

“And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” (Matthew 6:5-6)

Notice the two different rewards. The person who prays to be seen gets exactly what he wanted: he is seen. That is his whole reward, and it lasts about as long as the applause. But the person who shuts the door and prays in secret has a Father who sees, and that Father rewards openly.

Think about that phrase: your Father who sees in secret. In the waiting season, when nobody else knows how many nights you have prayed, how many times you have spoken the promise through tears, how many times you have chosen to forgive, to give thanks, to keep standing, your Father sees every one of them. Not one is wasted. Not one is unnoticed. The closed door is not a lonely place. It is the place where heaven keeps the records.

Working for an Audience of One

Paul brought this right down into the ordinary working day:

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive

the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” (Colossians 3:23-24)

Whatever you do. Washing up. Filling in spreadsheets. Changing nappies. Driving the delivery van. Sitting in the hospital waiting room. Do it heartily, as to the Lord. When you live this way, your faithfulness no longer depends on whether anybody claps. You are working for an audience of One, and He is the only One whose opinion lasts.

Lucinda served for years in a small, unseen role at her church, setting up chairs before anyone arrived and stacking them after everyone left. During a long season of waiting on God over her marriage, she was tempted to quit, partly because nobody seemed to notice what she did. One Sunday morning, alone in the empty hall, she felt the Lord whisper to her heart that He had seen every chair. She wept, and then she kept setting them out. She stopped needing anyone to thank her. Her joy came from knowing her Father saw. And when the restoration in her marriage came, she said the secret place had prepared her for it, because she had learned to find her worth in God's approval rather than anyone else's.

The Closet Before the Stage

Here is your practice for this week. Do one good thing that nobody will ever find out about. Pray one prayer behind a closed door that you will never mention. When the fear of looking foolish rises up in the waiting, ask yourself, "Whose approval am I living for?" Your value is not decided by how many people applaud you. It is settled by the fact that the Creator of the universe calls you His own.

Applause fades when the lights go down; the Father who sees in secret never looks away.

CHAPTER 39

Responsibility Instead of Victimhood

There was a man who had been lying beside a pool in Jerusalem for thirty-eight years. He had a mat, a spot by the water, and a story. And one day Jesus walked up to him and asked what sounds, at first, like the strangest question in the whole Bible.

“When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’” (John 5:6)

Of course he wants to be well. Who wouldn't? But Jesus never asks a question because He needs information. He asks to bring something to the surface. And look at what surfaced.

“The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’” (John 5:7)

Jesus asked a yes-or-no question, and the man answered with a story about other people. Nobody helps me. Somebody always beats me to it. It's not my fault.

Now, let me be very gentle here, because I am not throwing stones at this man. His pain was real. Thirty-eight years of being stepped over is heavy, and most of us would have built the same speech. But notice that his speech had become his address. He lived in it. And Jesus did not argue with the speech. He simply cut right through it.

“Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.” (John 5:8-9)

Rise. Take up. Walk. Three commands, and every one of them was something the man had to do. The power was all Jesus. But the getting up was his.

Life Is Not Fair, and God Is Still Good

Let's settle something right at the start, because the enemy loves to use it against you in the waiting: life is not fair. You may have been treated badly. You may have been passed over, lied about, abandoned, or left holding the bill for somebody else's choices. The Bible doesn't pretend otherwise.

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.” (Psalm 34:19)

Notice that God doesn't deny the afflictions. He says there are many of them. But He refuses to let them have the last word. The unfairness is real; the deliverance is more real.

Here is the trap. When the pushback after prayer drags on, there is a quiet voice that offers you a role to play. It says, “You are the victim here. Look what they did. Look what life did. Look what God allowed.” And that role comes with some strange comforts. A victim is never expected to change. A victim always has someone to blame. It feels like a soft mattress, but it is really a mat by the pool, and you can lie on it for thirty-eight years.

The truth is this: what happened to you may not be your fault, but what you do next is your responsibility. That is not bad news. It means you are not stuck waiting for everybody else to fix your life. You can't change the people who hurt you. But by the grace of God, you can change you.

David was honest about it.

“I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.” (Psalm 27:13)

He almost lost heart. But he chose to believe in God's goodness right here, in the land of the living, not just someday in heaven. That is a decision, not a feeling.

Joseph Never Played the Victim

If anybody in Scripture had the right to the victim role, it was Joseph. Hated by his brothers. Thrown in a pit. Sold as a slave. Lied about by his master's wife. Forgotten in prison by a man he had helped. If Joseph had written a book, he could have called it *Nobody Put Me in the Pool*, and it would have sold very well.

But look at what the Bible keeps saying about him.

“The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.” (Genesis 39:2)

A successful man. As a slave! Joseph didn't sulk in Potiphar's house. He worked and served until his master trusted him with everything. Then, when the lie landed him in prison, he did it all again.

“And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners who were in the prison; whatever they did there, it was his doing.” (Genesis 39:22)

Joseph couldn't control the pit, the slave market, or the lie. But he could control his attitude, his work and his integrity, and he took full responsibility for those. In the prison he was interpreting other people's dreams while his own dreams seemed dead. That is a man who refused to let his wound become his identity.

Paul gives us the same principle in one short line.

“For each one shall bear his own load.” (Galatians 6:5)

A few verses earlier Paul tells us to carry one another's burdens, and we should. But there is a load that is yours alone: your

choices, your attitude, your response. Nobody can carry that for you, and nobody can steal it from you either.

Pressing On From Here

Think of Marcus. Marcus was let go from a job he had given eleven years to, and he was let go unfairly. Everyone agreed on that. He prayed, he stood on the promises, and then the pushback hit: no callbacks, a stack of bills, and a bitterness that started to grow in his chest like ivy up a wall. Every conversation became the same story. “After everything I gave them.” Six months went by, and he was still telling it.

One Tuesday morning, a friend asked him over coffee, “Marcus, do you want to be well, or do you want to be right?” It stung. But it was the question Jesus asked by the pool. Marcus went home and did something simple. He forgave his old boss out loud before God. He stopped telling the story. He took a part-time job he felt was beneath him and did it with excellence. He started helping two younger men from his church with their job applications. Nothing changed that week. But Marcus had picked up his mat, and you cannot walk somewhere new while you are still lying down.

Paul, who was beaten, betrayed and imprisoned, lived like this.

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14)

Forgetting doesn't mean pretending it never happened. It means refusing to live there. You can't run forward while staring over your shoulder. The rearview mirror is small for a reason; the windshield is big for a reason.

So here is the question for your ordinary Tuesday, the one Jesus is asking you right now in the middle of the waiting: Do you want to be made well? Then stop waiting for someone else to put you in the pool. Forgive the ones who stepped in front of you. Do the next faithful thing with excellence. Speak the promise instead of the complaint. The power belongs to God, and He is good. But the rising is yours.

Your past may explain you, but it does not get to excuse you, because Jesus has already said, “Rise.”

CHAPTER 40

Capacity Enlarged by Resistance

Walk into any gym on a Monday night and you will see something that looks, to an outsider, a little crazy. People paying good money to lift heavy things, put them down, and lift them again. They sweat and leave sore. And they come back on Wednesday to do it all over again.

Why? Because every one of them knows a simple law of the body: muscle only grows against resistance. When you lift something heavier than you are used to, the muscle is stretched past its comfort zone. It gets tiny tears. Then, while you rest, the body rebuilds that muscle a little thicker and a little stronger than it was before, so that next time the same weight feels lighter. No resistance, no growth. You can't get strong lifting a feather, no matter how many times you lift it.

God built your spirit the same way. The pushback after prayer is not only something to survive. In the hands of God, it is resistance training. It is the heavy bar on your shoulders that is quietly making you able to carry more.

The Athlete Who Wants Gold

Paul loved athletes. He watched the games of his day and saw a picture of the Christian life.

“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.” (1 Corinthians 9:25)

Think about what a gold medal costs. Years of early mornings while everyone else sleeps, special food while everyone else eats pizza, no shortcuts, workouts that hurt. And all of it for a few

minutes on a track or in a pool, and a medal that will one day sit in a drawer. Paul says, if they will do all that for a perishable crown, how much more should we lean into the training for a crown that never fades?

Then he gets personal.

“Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”

(1 Corinthians 9:26-27)

Paul didn't drift into strength. He trained for it, and he welcomed discipline as the way the race is won. An athlete who complains every time the coach adds weight to the bar doesn't understand what he signed up for. Your Coach is adding weight because He sees what you can become.

The writer of Hebrews is honest about how it feels.

“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:11)

Painful for the present. God doesn't ask you to pretend it feels good. But there is an “afterward,” and the afterward belongs to those who were trained by it, not to those who simply endured it while complaining all the way through.

God Enlarges the Path and the Tent

Here is something beautiful. When David looked back on years of being chased, attacked and hunted, he didn't say, “God, You made it easy.” He said this.

“You enlarged my path under me, So my feet did not slip.” (Psalm 18:36)

God didn't remove the mountain trail. He widened it under David's feet. The resistance stayed, but David's footing grew. A few lines earlier he says God trained his hands for battle until his arms could bend a bow of bronze. That kind of strength is not given in a single afternoon. It is built over years of pulling against something hard.

And God doesn't only enlarge your strength; He enlarges your capacity to receive. Listen to the call He gave His people when they had been barren and small.

“Enlarge the place of your tent, And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, And strengthen your stakes.” (Isaiah 54:2)

Notice the two halves. Lengthen your cords, so the tent can be bigger. Strengthen your stakes, so the bigger tent won't blow away in the first storm. That is exactly what the waiting does. God is stretching the tent of your life so it can hold what He is about to pour in, and He is driving the stakes deeper so it will still be standing when the wind blows. A bigger blessing on shallow stakes is not a blessing. It is a disaster waiting for a windy day.

Jabez: Born in Pain, Praying for More

There is a man in the Bible whose whole name was a reminder of hardship. His mother named him Jabez, which sounds like the Hebrew word for pain, because she bore him in pain. Imagine being called “Pain” every day of your life! Yet listen to what came out of his mouth.

“And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, ‘Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!’ So God granted him what he requested.” (1 Chronicles 4:10)

Jabez didn't let his starting point set his ceiling. Out of pain he prayed for enlargement, and God said yes. Your pushback season may have started in pain, but it does not have to end in smallness. Resistance can be the very thing that makes your prayers bigger.

The Butterfly Must Struggle

You may have heard about the boy who found a butterfly working its way out of its cocoon. It was squeezing through a tiny opening and looked like it would never make it, so he took a pair of scissors and snipped the cocoon open. The butterfly slid out easily. But its body was swollen and its wings were small and crumpled, and it never flew. What the boy didn't know was that the squeeze through that narrow opening is how the fluid is pressed out of the body and into the wings. The struggle was not keeping the butterfly from flying. The struggle was what would have made it able to fly.

Some of us keep begging God for scissors. “Lord, just cut me out of this.” And sometimes, in His mercy, He does. But often He loves you too much to rob you of the very pressure that is putting strength into your wings.

Think of Tessa, a young mother who prayed for months over her strong-willed son and a marriage under strain. The answers didn't come quickly. Instead, every morning she had to choose patience before breakfast and kindness before coffee had even kicked in. A year later her son was softer and her husband was home earlier, and those were real answers to real prayers. But something else had happened too. Women in her church started calling Tessa when their own homes were on fire, because she had become someone who could carry weight. The resistance had built her.

That is the secret of the pushback. Paul calls our trouble “light” and “but for a moment” when you set it beside what it is

producing.

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Working for us. Not against us. Every rep counts. So on your ordinary Tuesday, when the weight is heavy and the answer is not here yet, don't drop the bar. Thank God for the resistance, take your stand on the promise, and push one more time.

The weight that feels like it is crushing you is the very weight God is using to make you strong enough to carry the answer.

CHAPTER 41

Backbone Before Microphone

We live in a world that wants the microphone before it has a backbone. Platform before patience. Influence before integrity. Followers before faithfulness. And let's be honest, the same hunger can creep into the church. Some contemporary churches, with the best of intentions, take a gifted young believer who sings beautifully or speaks with fire and put them on the stage within months, before anyone has watched how they handle a hard week. Then everyone is shocked when the pressure of the platform cracks a character that was never given time to set.

God does it the other way around. He builds the backbone first, and He builds it in private. The pushback after prayer, the long stretch where nobody is clapping and the answer hasn't arrived, is very often His workshop for exactly that.

The Lion and the Bear Came First

Everybody knows about David and Goliath. The whole nation watched that fight. But before the public giant, there were private battles nobody saw. When King Saul looked at this teenager and said, in effect, "You're just a boy," David told him what had been happening in the fields.

"Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God."

(1 Samuel 17:36)

There was no crowd when the lion came. No worship band. No one filming it. Just a young shepherd, a frightened lamb, and a decision to run toward the danger instead of away from it.

Nobody would ever have known if David had let that lamb go. That is exactly why it mattered. Character is what you do when no one would ever find out.

And look at the conclusion David drew from those hidden victories.

“Moreover David said, ‘The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.’”

(1 Samuel 17:37)

The private battles gave him a public confidence. He wasn't guessing whether God would come through; he had a history with God. Every lion is a lesson. Every bear is a reference letter you will need later, when the giant shows up.

So when you are fighting something in private right now, a temptation no one knows about, a fear that hits you at two in the morning, a promise you are holding on to while your circumstances laugh at you, don't despise it. That is your lion. God is letting you learn on the lion so you won't panic at the giant.

Paul's Hidden Years

Paul is another example. After he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, you might expect him to go straight to Jerusalem and launch a ministry. He had the education, the zeal, and one of the most dramatic conversion stories in history. Instead, listen to what he did.

“nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.”

(Galatians 1:17-18)

Three years. Arabia. No headlines. We don't have a record of what happened there, but we can see what came out of it: a man so settled in Christ that later he could be beaten, shipwrecked and thrown in prison and still write letters full of joy. The microphone of Paul's later ministry was held up by the backbone of his hidden years.

Here is the point for you. If God has you in a season where you feel unseen and the prayer you prayed seems stuck, you may be in your Arabia. It is not a punishment. It is preparation. God is not wasting your time; He is investing it.

A Good Soldier Endures

Paul later passed this on to Timothy, a young man he was training. He did not tell him, "Ministry will be fun." He used the language of war.

"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier." (2 Timothy 2:3-4)

The Christian life is not a holiday camp. It is an army, and an army trains hard. You don't send a recruit to the front line on his first day. You put him through basic training, where the drills are tough on purpose. The drill sergeant isn't cruel; he knows the battlefield will be tougher still. And here is something every soldier learns: the shooting gets heaviest when you climb out of the trench and advance. As long as you sit still, the enemy doesn't bother much. When you start to pray in faith and move forward, the guns open up. That is not proof you are failing. It is proof you are advancing.

Notice Paul's other phrase too: "entangles himself." A soldier can't fight with his boots tied together. In the waiting, the enemy loves to tangle you up in distractions, endless scrolling, petty arguments, the opinions of people who aren't even in the fight. A

good soldier keeps himself free, because he wants to please the One who enlisted him.

Paul knew the result of this kind of training from the inside.

“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—”

(2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

That is what backbone sounds like. Pressed, but not crushed. That was not his personality. That was his training.

Faithful in the Small Things

Think of Darnell. Darnell had a real gift for teaching, and everybody knew it. He prayed for a door to open into a bigger ministry, and instead God seemed to give him the opposite: three years of setting up chairs, running the sound desk, and teaching a Sunday class of six restless teenagers. At first he was frustrated. “Lord, I prayed for open doors, and You gave me folding chairs.” But he kept showing up on time. He prepared for those six teenagers as if he were speaking to six thousand. He kept his word when it cost him. One night a boy from that little class called him in a crisis, and Darnell realised that the backbone God had been building in him was now holding someone else up.

Jesus gave us the principle.

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.” (Luke 16:10)

God watches the folding chairs. He watches how you treat the sound desk and the six teenagers and the boring Tuesday. Those are not detours from your destiny. They are the road to it.

So in your waiting, don't beg for the microphone. Ask God for the backbone. Fight your lions faithfully where no one is watching. Stay untangled. Be faithful in the least. When God's

time comes to put you in front of the giant, you will not need to borrow anyone's armour. You will already know what God can do, because you have seen Him do it in the dark.

God is far more interested in what holds you up than in who is looking at you.

CHAPTER 42

Suffering That Equips You to Comfort Others

Have you ever noticed who people call when their world falls apart? Not the person with the most polished answers. Not the one who has never had a bad day. They call the one who has been there. The widow calls the widow. The parent of a wayward child calls the parent whose child came home. The person who just heard a frightening diagnosis calls the friend who heard the same words five years ago and is still standing.

There is a reason for that, and it is written right into the heart of God.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

(2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Read that slowly. God comforts us so that we can comfort others. The comfort you receive in the pushback is not meant to stop with you. It is meant to flow through you. You are not a bucket that God fills and puts on a shelf. You are a pipe.

And notice how generous the supply is.

“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.”

(2 Corinthians 1:5)

The suffering abounds, yes. But the comfort abounds right alongside it, and there is always enough left over to give away.

Paul Knew the Bottom

Paul didn't write those words from a comfortable armchair. A few verses later he tells us what had just happened to him.

“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.” (2 Corinthians 1:8)

Despaired even of life. That is the great apostle Paul. If you have ever felt the pressure was more than you could carry, you are in good company. And look what he learned at the bottom.

“Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,” (2 Corinthians 1:9)

The pressure did something no sermon could have done. It took away every crutch Paul had been leaning on and taught him to lean his whole weight on God. And then, having learned it the hard way, he turned around and handed that lesson to the church at Corinth, and to you and me two thousand years later. His pain became their lesson book.

Now let me say something clearly, because it matters. God is good, and He is not the author of evil. He did not sit in heaven scheming up the worst things that have happened to you. The thief comes to steal, and some of what you have suffered has his fingerprints all over it. But God is so much bigger than the thief that He can take what the enemy meant as a weapon and turn it into a tool.

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

It does not say all things are good. Some things are terrible. It says all things work together for good. Think of a cake. Flour on

its own tastes like dust. Raw eggs are no treat. A spoonful of baking powder would make you pull a face. But mix them together and put them through the heat of the oven, and you get something wonderful. God is the Master Baker of your story. He doesn't waste a single ingredient, even the bitter ones.

Sent Ahead to Save Lives

Joseph is the clearest picture of this in all of Scripture. Years after his brothers sold him, they stood before him in Egypt, terrified, starving, and not even recognising the brother they had betrayed. When he finally told them who he was, they were sure he would take his revenge. Instead, listen to what he said.

“But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.” (Genesis 45:5)

Do you see how Joseph read his own story? Not “You sent me.” “God sent me.” The pit, the slave market, the false accusation, the prison: Joseph saw all of it as the road God used to put him in the right place at the right time to feed a starving world, including the very people who had hurt him.

“And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” (Genesis 45:7)

Your waiting season may be doing the same thing. You may be walking a road right now that someone you have not even met yet will need you to have walked. God is sending you on ahead.

Your Scar Becomes Someone Else's Map

Think of Leona. Leona was diagnosed with breast cancer in her forties. She prayed, her church prayed, and she stood on God's promises with all her heart. She also kept every appointment with her doctors and went through her treatment, because seeking God and seeing a doctor were never rivals in her mind. It

was a long, hard road. Some days the pushback was brutal: bad test results, sleepless nights, a voice telling her God had forgotten her. But God carried her through, and today she is well.

Here is the part I want you to see. Leona now gets phone calls. A friend of a friend has just heard the word “cancer,” and someone says, “You need to talk to Leona.” And Leona knows exactly what to say, and just as importantly, what not to say. She doesn't hand out clichés. She sits with them. She tells them what it felt like on the worst night and which promises held her up. She tells them to keep going to their doctors and keep standing on the Word. Her scar has become a map for people walking into the same dark woods she came out of.

That is what Jesus Himself does for us.

“For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.” (Hebrews 2:18)

Jesus helps you not only because He is powerful, but because He has been there. And when you have walked through the fire with Him, you become a small reflection of that same kind of help.

So on your ordinary Tuesday, in the middle of your own pushback, start paying attention. Notice what God is teaching you. Write down the verses that hold you up. Remember what helped and what didn't. You are not just getting through this. You are being equipped. One day soon, someone will sit across from you with tears in their eyes, and you will be able to say, with the full weight of your own story behind you, “I know. I have been there. Hold on. God will see you through.”

God never wastes a wound: your scar is somebody else's map.

PART FIVE — THROUGH

CHAPTER 43

Sifted, and Interceded For

On the night before the cross, in the middle of the Last Supper, Jesus turned to Peter and said something that must have made the room go very quiet.

“And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.’”

(Luke 22:31)

Can you imagine hearing that? “Peter, the devil has asked for you by name.” If I had been Peter, my first question would have been, “Well, Lord, You told him no, right?” But Jesus didn't say He had refused the request. He said something even better.

“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail;” (Luke 22:32)

Those six words, But I have prayed for you, are some of the most comforting words in the whole Bible. They are the heart of this chapter, and they are the heart of your survival in the pushback.

What It Means to Be Sifted

In Bible times, after the wheat was harvested, it had to be separated from the husks, the dust and the bits of straw. The farmer would pour it into a sieve and shake it hard, back and forth, over and over. The word Jesus used here means exactly that: to shake violently in a sieve. Not a gentle rocking. A hard, rattling shake.

That is what the enemy wanted to do to Peter, and if you have ever walked through a season where everything you believed seemed to be rattled at once, you know what it feels like. You pray in faith, and then the shaking starts. Your confidence gets thrown around. Things you thought were solid start to rattle. You wonder if anything will be left when it stops.

Here is something wonderful hidden in the original language. When Jesus said “Satan has asked for you,” the word “you” is plural. The devil wanted to shake all of them. But when Jesus said “I have prayed for you,” the “you” is singular. Jesus looked at the one man who was about to fall the hardest, and said, “I have prayed for you, Peter.” The attack was general. The intercession was personal.

Now look at what sifting actually does. The shaking is violent, but it doesn't destroy the wheat. It removes the chaff. The light, worthless stuff blows away, and the real grain falls through, cleaner than before. God even says this about His own people.

“For surely I will command, And will sift the house of Israel among all nations, As grain is sifted in a sieve; Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground.”

(Amos 9:9)

Not the smallest grain. The enemy may shake you, but he cannot make you lose a single grain of what is real.

What the Shaking Removed From Peter

What was the chaff in Peter's life? Only a few verses later he announced that he was ready to go to prison and even to death with Jesus. He meant it. But it was confidence in Peter, not confidence in God. That night his self-confidence was shaken out of him entirely. By morning, it was gone, blown away like husks in the wind.

But notice what Jesus had prayed for. He didn't pray, "Father, keep Peter from ever stumbling." He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Peter's courage failed. His boasting failed. His plans failed. But his faith did not die. When the rooster crowed and Peter went out and wept, those were not the tears of a man who had stopped believing. They were the tears of a man who still loved Jesus and could not bear what he had done. The prayer of Jesus held the one thing that mattered.

That is good news for you. The pushback after prayer may shake loose some things in you that you thought were strengths: your self-reliance, your pride in your own discipline, your need to look like you have it all together. Let them go. They are chaff. What the shaking cannot touch is the faith that Jesus Himself is guarding.

He Always Lives to Pray for You

Here is where your heart should leap. Jesus didn't only pray for Peter that one night. He is still praying, right now, for you.

"Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25)

Always lives. Not occasionally. Not when you have had a good week. Always. The risen Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, and part of His ongoing work is speaking up for you.

"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." (Romans 8:34)

Think about what that means on a hard Tuesday. The enemy is accusing you, maybe in your own voice. "You've blown it. Your faith is too weak. God is tired of you." But at the very same moment, the One who died for you is standing before the Father on your behalf. Who do you think the Father is listening to?

Jesus even told us what He prays.

“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”
(John 17:15)

He doesn't always pray that you will be lifted out of the sieve. He prays that you will be kept in it.

Think of Owen. Owen had prayed for his teenage daughter for two years, and the more he prayed, the worse things seemed to get. One night, after she slammed the door and drove off, he sat in the dark kitchen feeling like a total failure, both as a father and as a believer. “I can't even pray anymore, Lord,” he said. “I've got nothing left.” Then a verse he had read that week came back to him: He always lives to make intercession. Owen realised that when his own prayers ran dry, Jesus' prayers had not. He wasn't holding the line alone. Somebody far stronger was holding it with him. That night he slept, and in the weeks that followed, little by little, the door of his daughter's heart began to open.

When You Have Returned

Jesus finished His words to Peter with a promise hidden inside an instruction: “when you have returned to Me.” Not if. When. Jesus already knew Peter would come back, and He had a job waiting for him when he did. We will look at that more closely in a later chapter. For now, simply hear this: the shaking is not the end of your story. Jesus has already prayed past it.

So if you feel shaken today, don't panic. Let the chaff go. Hold on to Jesus. And remember that before the enemy ever laid a hand on the sieve, your Saviour had already prayed for you by name.

The devil may get to shake you, but he never gets the last word, because Jesus got to pray first.

CHAPTER 44

Restoration Includes Recommissioning

After Peter denied Jesus three times, after the rooster crowed and he went out and wept bitterly, there were three days that must have been the longest of his life. Jesus was dead. And the last thing Peter had said about Him, in front of a fire in a courtyard, was “I do not know the Man.” Can you imagine carrying that? Every time he closed his eyes he must have seen the look Jesus gave him across that courtyard.

Then came Sunday morning. The women went to the tomb and found it empty, and an angel gave them a message to carry back. Read it carefully, because two little words in it are enough to heal a broken heart.

“But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.” (Mark 16:7)

And Peter. Out of everyone in the world, heaven singled out the one who had failed the loudest. Not “tell the disciples, except the one who denied Me.” Tell the disciples, and Peter. Before Peter could even work up the courage to come back, Jesus had already sent for him by name.

If you have failed in the waiting, if you buckled under the pushback, said things you shouldn't have, or walked away from a promise you were standing on, hear me: your name is in that message too. Jesus is not done with you.

Breakfast by a Charcoal Fire

A little later, Peter and several others went back to fishing. Maybe he thought that was all he was good for now. They fished

all night and caught nothing. Then a figure on the shore told them to throw the net on the other side, and the net filled up so full they could hardly haul it in. Peter knew right away who it was, threw himself into the water, and swam for the beach.

And look what was waiting for him there.

“Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread.” (John 21:9)

A fire of coals. The last time Peter had stood by a charcoal fire, he was denying his Lord. Now Jesus had built another one, on purpose, and He was cooking him breakfast. He didn't start with a lecture. He started with a meal. He let Peter get warm, eat, and settle down. And then, gently, by the fire, He asked the question.

“So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs.’” (John 21:15)

Three times Peter had denied Him. Three times Jesus asked, “Do you love Me?” Not to rub his nose in it, but to give him a chance to undo every denial with a declaration of love. By the third time, Peter was hurting.

“He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep.’” (John 21:17)

Notice what Jesus did not say. He didn't say, “All right, I forgive you, but you can sit at the back from now on.” He didn't put Peter on a shelf. He gave him a job. Feed My lambs. Tend My sheep. Feed My sheep. Restoration with Jesus never stops at forgiveness. It goes all the way to recommissioning. He doesn't just take you back; He sends you out again.

A Few Weeks Later

Now jump forward a few weeks. The Holy Spirit has fallen on the believers in Jerusalem, a crowd has gathered, and someone needs to stand up and explain what is happening. Guess who stands up.

“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words.’” (Acts 2:14)

The man who was too afraid to admit he knew Jesus in front of a servant girl is now preaching Jesus to thousands in the very same city. And look at the result.

“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” (Acts 2:41)

Three denials. Three thousand souls. That is how God answers an attack. The devil sifted Peter and thought he had finished him. God's next move made the attack look tiny.

God's Next Move Is Bigger Than Every Attack

This is the hope I want to put in your hands for the rest of your life: God's next move in your life will be bigger than every attack against you. When God moves, He doesn't measure His response by the size of what was done against you. He measures it by His own goodness and His own purpose.

Look at the pattern all through Scripture. Joseph didn't just get out of prison; he became the second most powerful man in Egypt. Israel didn't just leave slavery; they left carrying the wealth of Egypt. And Job didn't just recover.

“And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.” (Job 42:10)

Every attack against a child of God comes with an expiry date written in heaven. It may feel endless while you are in it, but it is not. And when its time runs out, God doesn't just return you to where you were. He builds something that could not have existed without the very pressure that tried to break you. That is why you can say to the enemy, with quiet confidence, what the prophet said.

“Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The LORD will be a light to me.” (Micah 7:8)

Notice: when I fall. Not “if.” The prophet expected to stumble sometimes. But he also expected to rise.

Think of Clara. She had prayed for her small business, and then within a month she lost her biggest client and a trusted partner walked away with half the customers. She felt like a failure and almost closed the doors. But she remembered breakfast on the beach. She forgave her partner, kept serving the customers she had, and kept praying. Two years later her business was healthier than ever, and she was mentoring three other women who were starting their own. When people asked how she did it, she just smiled and said, “This was the LORD's doing.”

So if you failed, come back. Jesus has already sent for you by name. If you have been attacked, hold on. The attack is not the end of the sentence; it is only the comma before God's next move.

Failure is not final, and the attack is never the last word: God always gets the next move.

CHAPTER 45

Prayer Works While You Sleep

Here is a question that troubles a lot of sincere believers at about eleven o'clock at night: "If I stop praying and go to sleep, does everything I prayed for just stop too?" Some of us lie awake half-praying, half-worrying, as if the answer depends on us keeping our eyes open. We think that if we doze off, heaven will clock out with us.

Let me put your mind at rest, literally. Prayer does not stop working when you close your eyes.

Think about your own body tonight. While you sleep, your heart will beat around twenty-five thousand times without your permission. Your lungs will breathe. Your blood will flow. Your body will repair muscle and tissue that you wore out during the day. The earth will keep turning, carrying you through the dark toward morning. None of it waits for you to supervise it. And if God built your body to keep working while you rest, do you really think His answers stop working because you have gone to bed?

The God Who Never Sleeps

The psalmist wanted us to settle this once and for all.

"He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep." (Psalm 121:3-4)

One of you needs to sleep, and it isn't God. You are the one with a body that gets tired. He is the One who never does. When you lay down your head, the night shift in heaven doesn't start, because there was never a day shift. He was awake before you

prayed, He is awake while you sleep, and He will be awake when you open your eyes in the morning.

Jesus gave us a picture of how this works in His story of the farmer who scatters seed.

“and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.”

(Mark 4:27)

The farmer sleeps. The seed grows. He doesn't stand over it all night shining a flashlight on the soil. He plants, he goes to bed, and the life in the seed keeps doing what God designed it to do. Your prayer of faith is a seed planted in heaven's soil, and it keeps growing through the night.

Sleep Is an Act of Faith

This may surprise you, but sometimes the most faith-filled thing you can do after you pray is go to sleep. Look at this.

“It is vain for you to rise up early, To sit up late, To eat the bread of sorrows; For so He gives His beloved sleep.”

(Psalm 127:2)

The bread of sorrows. That is what anxious late nights feel like, chewing the same worries over and over until two in the morning. God says that is vain. It doesn't add anything. Instead, He gives His beloved sleep. Rest is not laziness. Rest is trust.

Remember Jesus in the boat during the storm? The waves were crashing over the sides, the disciples were sure they were going to drown, and where was Jesus? Asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat. He wasn't careless; He was at perfect peace with His Father. A person who can sleep in a storm is a person who knows who is really in charge of the sea.

David knew this too. He wrote one of his psalms while he was running for his life from his own son, Absalom. An army was

looking for him. You would think he would be pacing all night. Instead, listen.

“I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me.” (Psalm 3:5)

He lay down. He slept. He woke up. And the reason he woke up was not his own night watch, but the Lord's. In the very next psalm he says it again.

“I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4:8)

You alone. Not my alarm system. Not my worrying. You alone.

What Happens in the Night Watches

When you pray in faith and then rest, you are handing your request to the One who works without a break. Remember how Jesus healed the centurion's servant? He never entered the house. He simply spoke.

“Then Jesus said to the centurion, ‘Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.’ And his servant was healed that same hour.” (Matthew 8:13)

The servant didn't have to be awake or even present for the word to reach him. God's Word is not limited by distance, and it is not limited by whether your eyes are open. It travels where it is sent and does what it was sent to do.

And here is another comfort. Even when your own prayers run out of words, the Holy Spirit doesn't.

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Romans 8:26)

Some nights you will be too tired to pray another sentence. That's all right. The Spirit inside you keeps praying in ways

deeper than words. Your prayer life does not hang on your stamina.

The night does not have to be your enemy. It can be your sanctuary. David said this.

“When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.” (Psalm 63:6)

So when you wake at three in the morning and the worries come knocking, don't open the door to them. Remember Him instead. Quietly thank Him for what you prayed. Whisper a promise. Then let your head sink back into the pillow.

Think of Nadia. Nadia had a court date coming up over a custody matter, and every night she lay awake running through every possible disaster. She prayed, and then she worried until dawn, and she was exhausted all day. One evening she decided to try something different. She prayed over the situation, read Psalm 4 out loud, and said, “Father, I've given this to You. You're awake, so I'm going to sleep.” The worries still knocked at first. Each time, she quietly thanked God and turned over. Within a week she was sleeping through the night, and she walked into that courtroom rested, clear-headed and calm. Nothing in the case had changed yet. But she had stopped carrying the night shift that belonged to God.

So tonight, when you have prayed, rest. Not because you have stopped believing, but because you believe. Hand the night to the One who never needs it. Your faith has already set something in motion, and it doesn't need you to stay awake to keep it moving. You can close your eyes in peace, because the One who answers your prayers never closes His.

CHAPTER 46

Go Back for Someone Else in the Wait

Picture a group of hikers climbing a steep mountain trail in bad weather. The wind is howling, the path is slippery, and every step costs something. One of them finally reaches a ledge where the trail flattens out and there is shelter from the wind. He could sit down, catch his breath and enjoy the view. Instead, he looks back down the trail and sees a friend twenty yards below, struggling, legs shaking, ready to give up. So he does the thing that makes him a true companion. He goes back down, takes his friend's hand, and walks the hard part with him again.

That is what this chapter is about. You don't have to wait until you are standing on the summit to help someone else up the mountain.

Jesus Gave Peter an Assignment Before He Fell

On the night Jesus warned Peter that Satan wanted to sift him, He didn't stop at the warning. He added a promise and a mission.

“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” (Luke 22:32)

Think about the timing of that. Before Peter had denied Him, before the rooster crowed, before the bitter tears, Jesus already had Peter's next job lined up. Strengthen your brethren. In other words: Peter, what you are about to go through is not only about you. When you come out the other side, turn around and go back for the others.

Your pushback season works the same way. The strength God builds in you while you wait, the verses that hold you up, the

lessons learned at two in the morning, are not meant to be locked away in a private notebook. They are supplies for somebody else's journey.

And here is the beautiful part: you don't have to be finished to start. Some of the most powerful encouragement comes from people who are still in the middle of their own wait. When someone who is still standing on a promise says to you, "I haven't seen my answer yet either, but I am not letting go," it carries a weight that a person who has never struggled could never give.

Strengthen the Weak Hands

God has been asking His people to do this for a very long time.

"Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you.'" (Isaiah 35:3-4)

Notice what we are told to say. Not "Cheer up, it could be worse." Not "Everything happens for a reason." We are told to point them to God. Your God will come. He will save you. Our job is not to have all the answers. It is to keep turning tired eyes back toward the One who does.

The New Testament picks up the same command and adds a practical twist.

"Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed." (Hebrews 12:12-13)

Make straight paths. In other words, walk in a way that others can follow. When someone who is limping watches you, they should see a path they can manage. Your steady faithfulness in

the pushback, praying, praising, refusing to quit, becomes a trail that helps a weaker brother or sister stay on their feet instead of falling further.

Solomon put it simply.

“Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

The enemy loves to isolate people in their waiting. He whispers, “No one understands. Don't bother anyone. Keep it to yourself.” Every time you reach out to someone who is struggling, you break that lie for them.

Pull Them Out of the Fire

Jude gives us an urgent word about this.

“And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.” (Jude 22-23)

Some people simply need compassion: a listening ear, a meal, a prayer, someone to sit with them. Others are much closer to the edge. They are not just tired; they are about to walk away from God altogether. For them, gentle hints are not enough. You have to reach in and pull. That might mean a hard, honest conversation. It might mean showing up at their door. Love is not always soft, but it is always for the person's good.

Think of Desmond. Desmond had been standing in faith for his marriage for over a year. It was still hard, and the answer was not complete. But one Sunday he noticed a younger man named Ben sitting alone at the back of church, looking like he hadn't slept in weeks. Desmond recognised that look. He'd seen it in his own mirror. So he bought Ben a coffee and listened. Ben's marriage was falling apart and he was ready to give up on God. Desmond

didn't pretend to be a hero. He said, "I'm still in the middle of my own battle, but let me show you the verses that are keeping me alive." They started meeting every Thursday morning. Months later, both men said the same thing: helping each other had made them both stronger.

Commit These to Faithful Men

This is how the kingdom grows. Not just by addition, but by multiplication. Listen to Paul's instruction to Timothy.

"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2)

Count the generations in that one verse. Paul taught Timothy. Timothy teaches faithful men. Those men teach others also. That is four generations of faith passed hand to hand. If every believer who learned to stand through the pushback taught just one other person to do the same, the effect would ripple through families, churches and whole communities.

Paul could also say this, which is a bold thing to say.

"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ."
(1 Corinthians 11:1)

He wasn't claiming to be perfect. He was saying, "Watch how I follow Jesus, and follow Him that way too." People are watching you in your wait. Your children, your coworkers, your friends. They are learning more from how you handle the pushback than from anything you will ever say about it.

So on your ordinary Tuesday, look around. Who is twenty yards behind you on the trail? Who has that tired, ready-to-quit look you recognise from your own mirror? Don't wait until your own answer arrives. Go back for them now.

Nobody climbs this mountain alone, so the moment you find your footing, go back for someone else.

CHAPTER 47

Prayer of Praise and Commitment

A Closing Word

My friend, we have come a long way together. We started on the mountaintop, walking out of a prayer room full of peace, and then running face-first into the wall of resistance twenty minutes later. Now you know what that wall is. It is not God crossing His arms. It is the enemy, alarmed by your faith, trying to talk you into cancelling an order heaven has already shipped.

You know now that your job is to stand. To receive before you see. To keep your words in agreement with your prayer, long after the Amen. To hold the shield of faith high and answer every dart with “It is written.” And you know that the meantime is not dead time. God is doing something in you while He is doing something for you: patience, compassion, understanding, gentleness, a backbone, and a heart that goes back for others.

Don't go back to microwave Christianity. The harvest is coming. Before you put this book down, pray this with me, out loud if you can.

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 24-25)

Prayer of Praise and Commitment

Father, I praise You for the unchanging truth of Your Word. Thank You that You are not a reluctant God who has to be begged into blessing me, but a good Father who knew what I

needed before I ever asked. Thank You that from the very first day I set my heart to pray, my words were heard. I praise You that every one of Your promises is yes in Christ Jesus, and that the moment I pray in faith, Your supply is already on its way.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You have not left me a helpless victim of my circumstances or of the darkness. You disarmed every power against me on the cross, and You have clothed me in Your righteousness and Your authority. Thank You that You always live to make intercession for me, and that when the enemy asks to sift me, You have already prayed that my faith will not fail.

Today I commit myself to be a doer of Your Word and not a hearer only. When the pushback comes, I will not cancel the order. I will raise the shield of faith and quench every fiery dart. I will answer every lie with “It is written.” I will speak to my mountains instead of complaining about them. Lord, I give You my tongue. I will not pray one thing and then speak the opposite half an hour later. I will keep my words in agreement with what I have prayed, and I will fill my heart with Your Word so that, under pressure, Your Word is what comes out. I will not sit passively in my tent waiting for You to do what You have already empowered me to do. I will stand, and having done all, I will keep standing.

Lord, I also give You the waiting. Let it do its full work in me. Make me patient instead of hasty, compassionate instead of hard, understanding instead of quick to judge, and gentle with those who stumble, remembering how often You have been gentle with me. Turn my complaints into thanksgiving and my midnights into songs. Build in me a backbone that can carry everything You plan to put in my hands.

And when You have strengthened me, send me back for someone else. Let my scars become maps for the wounded. Let me live as a steady example under pressure, and help me pass this faith on

to others who will teach others also, until Your kingdom multiplies through my life.

I love You. I trust You. I take my stand in the victory Jesus has already won. In the mighty and matchless name of Jesus, Amen.

You have prayed. Heaven has answered. Now stand, and do not let go until you are holding it.

THE JESUS BOOT CAMP

Other Books by Paul



The Jesus Boot Camp



Dare to Be a Mother



While You Were Busy



When Lies Enter Your Home



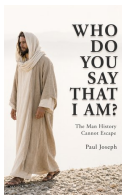
Rise Up and Walk



The Book That Cannot Be Buried



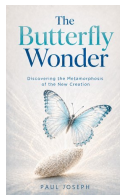
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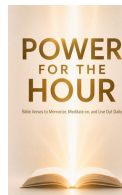
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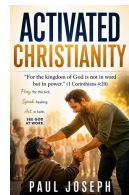
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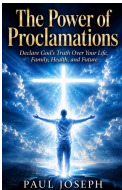
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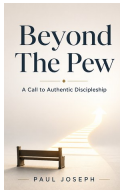
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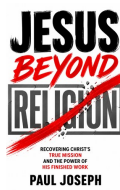
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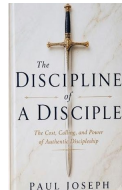
The DNA of the New Man



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YOU PRAYED IN FAITH. THEN EVERYTHING PUSHED BACK.

You know the moment: you pour your heart out to God, and leave your prayer closet filled with rock-solid peace. Then, twenty minutes later, you hit a wall. A sudden crisis erupts, doubts flood your mind, or circumstances seem to move in the exact opposite direction. It just feels like a punch in the stomach after a mountaintop. You begin to wonder: *Did I pray wrong? Did God say no?*

In *The Pushback After Prayer*, Paul Joseph brings clear biblical clarity and practical comfort to one of the most misunderstood seasons of the Christian life. The sudden resistance you experience after prayer is not God withholding His answer—it is an enemy trying to convince you to abandon an order heaven has already dispatched.

- **The Difference Between Refusal and Opposition:** Why spiritual resistance is proof you are a threat, not that your prayer failed.
- **The Assignment to Stand:** How to actively hold your ground with Scripture when circumstances test your faith.
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- **Why Rest Is Faith:** How God's promises continue working even while you sleep.
- **Turn Your Scar Into a Map:** How your private battle equips you to reach back and help someone else up the mountain.

“Failure is not final, and the attack is never the last word: God always gets the next move.”

Stop waiting for someone else to carry your faith. Take your stand on the promise—and do not let go until you are holding the answer.