

Yet Will I Trust Him

*Standing on God's Promises
When the Answer Tarries*

by
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“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”
– Job 13:15 NKJV

A Word Before the Word

Life can be very challenging. For those of us who believe in God, who hold to His power and His Word as the framework by which we live this life as we await His coming Kingdom, it can be particularly challenging to cope with the stress and trials life throws at us.

Scriptures we have memorised and stood upon for years – “He sent His word and healed them” (Psalm 107:20), “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7), “Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do” (John 14:13), and the great covering promised against “the pestilence that walks in darkness” (Psalm 91:6) – have made it extraordinarily difficult for many sincere believers to cope when prayers seem to go unanswered.

We seek healing from disease and the disease lingers. We pray for breakthrough in finance or business and the breakthrough tarries. We ask for admission, work, favour, and a year goes by, then another. We plead for a child after a long marriage, and the womb remains closed. We watch deeply loved people, prayed for fervently and committed completely into God's hands, still slip away from us. And then come the questions.

Was my faith too small? Was theirs? Did I miss a step? Did God hear me? Is His Word true even now? These questions are real, and they deserve more than a slogan or a Sabbath sermon. They deserve the patient testimony of Scripture itself, which has walked this valley with believers across every generation and has never been ashamed of the question.

This little book is written for anyone holding on to a promise. For the believer whose healing has not come. For the parent whose prayer for a child has been unanswered for decades. For the widow, the widower, the bereaved, who buried a loved one they had asked God to spare. For the one waiting on provision, on a door to open, on a body to conceive, on a heart to be healed. It is written from the conviction that the promises of God remain true – always, eternally, and without exception – and that the integrity of His Word is not measured by the speed of its visible fulfilment in this present age.

I write this not as a distant observer. My own walk through deep grief is shared more fully in *Finding God in Grief*. What follows here is the wider word — what Scripture teaches about every form of prayer that has seemed unanswered, and why the believer who is still waiting is not waiting in vain.

One of the Greatest Lies That Weakens Faith

What follows in this section will sound harder than the rest of this little book. I make no apology for the change in tone, because what is being corrected here has wounded too many of the very people this book is written for — and the wound has often been delivered by sincere men in pulpits who genuinely believed they were helping. The correction is necessary. We will then return to the gentler register that follows.

Many who come to the question of unanswered prayer do not come with empty hands. They come carrying a burden the Scripture itself never placed on them — a burden placed there by pulpits, broadcasts, and crusades that have, often with the best of intentions, taught a deeply unbalanced gospel.

It goes something like this. God will heal you. God will provide for you. God will intervene. God must intervene. God has no choice but to intervene — provided only that you are righteous enough, holy enough, prayed long enough, prayed loud enough, fasted long enough, sown the right seed, given to the right ministry, found the right anointed man of God, claimed the promise with enough boldness, or believed without a moment's doubt. The promise is presented as a formula. Pull the right levers and the answer must descend.

And when the answer does not descend? The burden of failure is quietly transferred to the very person who has just suffered the loss. *You did not have enough faith. You did not pray long enough. There must have been sin somewhere. You should have come to this man. You should have sown that seed.* The grieving widow, the parent of the dying child, the spouse and children watching disease steal a loved one, the family burying a father taken too soon, and countless others like them — are now told, on top of every other pain, that the loss is their fault.

This is one of the greatest lies that weakens faith in our generation, and it has destroyed many people's faith in God altogether. Because when the formula fails – and the formula will fail, because God has never been a vending machine – the believer concludes either that God has failed or that they have failed. Neither conclusion is true. The teaching itself was false from the beginning.

THE BALANCED POSTURE

Trust implicitly in God's ability to intervene. Trust implicitly in His willingness to intervene when He chooses. But trust also that the timing, the shape, and the choice remain His. A faith that demands is not the same as a faith that trusts. The first will eventually be broken on the rocks of real life. The second has stood through every storm of Scripture and history.

But What About “Whatever You Ask”?

An honest reader may be saying at this point: “But what about the verses where the Lord Himself seemed to promise exactly this? The promises are not the invention of prosperity preachers. They are in the New Testament. They were spoken by Christ. How are we to read them?” The question is fair, and it deserves a careful answer. The verses are real, and the believer who has heard them quoted week after week is not imagining them. Read in isolation they can sound entirely unconditional:

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And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

— John 14:13–14 NKJV

To the same effect Christ said elsewhere: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7). “Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you” (John 16:23). “Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mark 11:24, and the parallel in Matthew 21:21–22). “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7, with its parallel in Luke 11:9–10). Many readers will recognise these as the very verses they have heard quoted in defence of the demand-teaching.

But Scripture interprets Scripture. Each of these verses sits inside a context that quietly but firmly conditions the seemingly unconditional language.

The Lord's promise in John 14:13 carries its own qualifier in the very same breath: "*that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*" Prayer aimed at the Father's glory in the Son is the prayer in view. A request that has nothing to do with His glory and everything to do with our comfort is simply not what the verse is promising.

John 15:7 places a condition before the promise: "*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you.*" The believer who truly abides — whose mind is being shaped by His words — will find their desires increasingly conformed to His. They will ask what their abiding has trained them to ask. The verse is not a license for the unsanctified appetites of the natural heart; it is a description of how prayer is transformed as the believer matures in Christ.

And the Lord Himself supplies the interpretation of Matthew 7:7 only a few verses later: "*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). The Father gives *good things* to those who ask. Not whatever the child demands. A loving earthly father does not put a sharp knife in the hand of his three-year-old simply because she has asked for it loudly enough. A loving Heavenly Father does not grant every desire of an unsanctified heart simply because the request has been framed in His Son's name.

But the deepest answer to the question is not exegetical. It is the example of the One who spoke every one of these verses. In Gethsemane, on the night before His crucifixion, knowing every word He had ever taught about prayer, Christ Himself prayed:

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O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.

— Matthew 26:39 NKJV

This is the prayer of the One who said *whatever you ask in My name, that I will do*. This is the prayer of the One who said *if you have faith and do not doubt*. His own prayer, in His own deepest hour, brought the request to the Father — and released

the timing and shape of the answer to the Father's sovereign will. He asked. He did not demand. He asked, then bowed. If the Lord Himself prayed this way, no believer is exempt from praying the same way.

And the Apostle Paul — who knew every one of these verses intimately and had seen miracles done through his own hands — prayed three times for his thorn to be removed and accepted “*My grace is sufficient for you*” as the final word. He did not double down with longer prayer, louder claiming, or accusations of insufficient faith. He received God's sovereign *no* as a higher gift than the *yes* he had asked for.

The *whatever you ask* texts, taken with the rest of Scripture and with the Lord's own example, do not teach a demand-formula. They teach a posture: ask boldly, in the name of Christ, for what would glorify the Father; abide deeply, so that the very desires of prayer are shaped by the One in whom we abide; expect answer with the confidence of a child before a loving Father; and release the timing and shape of every answer to the One whose wisdom is higher than ours. The blank-check reading is not what the Lord taught. It is what hungry hearts and unbalanced pulpits have made of His words.

The Witness of Scripture Against the Formula

Scripture itself rules out the demand-formula in the clearest possible terms.

Consider Elisha — the prophet through whom God did some of the most extraordinary healings of the Old Testament. He cleansed Naaman of leprosy. He raised the Shunammite's son from the dead. He multiplied the widow's oil. He purified the poisoned pot. Even his bones, after his death, brought a dead man back to life when the corpse touched them.

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Now Elisha had become sick with the illness of which he would die.

— 2 Kings 13:14 NKJV

Read it again. The prophet of healings died of his sickness. He had asked for and received a double portion of Elijah's spirit. He had walked with God across decades. He had been the instrument of resurrection itself in someone else's child. And he died of his illness. Was Elisha not righteous enough? Not holy enough? Did he not

have enough faith? Did he not pray well enough? The formula breaks the moment it meets the actual Scripture.

Consider Stephen – “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit,” chosen by the apostolic church to serve, performing great wonders and signs among the people. The Scripture record of his first sermon is one of the most spirit-filled defences of the gospel in the New Testament. The whole early church was praying. He was stoned to death anyway.

Consider James the brother of John – one of the inner three who saw the transfiguration on the mountain, who would have been prayed for fervently by the apostles and the whole Jerusalem church. Herod beheaded him. The very next chapter records the same church praying for Peter – and Peter was delivered by an angel. Same God, same praying church, same season, two faithful men, two completely different outcomes. The formula could not explain it then. The formula cannot explain it now.

The Witness of History Against the Formula

The witness extends beyond the canon. From Nero's first persecution after the great fire of Rome in 64 AD, through ten waves of imperial Roman persecution culminating in Diocletian's edict at the dawn of the fourth century, many thousands of believers were killed for refusing to deny Christ. They prayed. Their communities prayed. They were not delivered.

The persecutions of the Inquisition centuries later claimed the lives of countless faithful believers across Europe. The Marian persecutions in England burned men like Latimer, Ridley, and Cranmer at the stake. The fires went on burning. They were praying men. The fires burned anyway.

And the witness continues into our own day. In villages and towns across northern Nigeria, the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, parts of the Middle East, and many other places whose names rarely reach the international press, Christian families pray nightly in homes where Islamic extremists and other armed groups are killing the saints wholesale. They are praying. They are righteous. They love the Lord. And many of them are dying anyway. Were they less holy than the preacher telling a

comfortable congregation that God MUST deliver? The very question is an offence against the dignity of the martyrs.

And Yet — God Still Heals, God Still Intervenes

Let me say this clearly, because the correction of one error must not push us into the opposite error. God still heals today. God still intervenes miraculously. God still answers prayer with deliverance. The God who multiplied loaves on a hillside in Galilee has not changed. The God who turned water to wine is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

I write this not as theory. I have personally witnessed the hand of God in extraordinary ways — in my own life, in the lives of people I love, and even within the year of leukaemia that eventually took my late wife from us in this present age. We saw Him. We knew His presence. We received specific provisions of grace and strength that no chemistry of circumstance could have produced on its own. The God of the miraculous is alive and moving, and any honest believer who has walked with Him for long will tell you the same.

What I am rejecting is not the miraculous. I am rejecting the *demand* for the miraculous. I am rejecting the suggestion that the believer can compel God's hand by the depth of their faith, the volume of their prayer, the size of their offering, or the reputation of the preacher they have travelled to see. None of these things compel God. God is not compelled. God is sovereign. When He acts, He acts because He has chosen to, in accordance with His own purpose and the grand design of His will. And when He chooses not to, that choice is also part of the same purpose and the same design.

The Balanced Posture

What Scripture commends is neither the resignation that says “there is no point in praying because God will do what He wants anyway” nor the presumption that says “God must heal me because I have prayed and believed.” Both are wrong. Both miss the heart of the biblical posture.

The biblical believer asks boldly and trusts completely. They pray for healing with the same confidence with which they would ask a loving Father for bread. They stand on the promises without apology. And in the same breath, they release the shape and timing of the answer to the One who alone has the right to determine both. “If it be Your will, let this cup pass – nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” If the Lord Himself prayed that way in Gethsemane, no believer is above praying the same.

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And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

— 1 John 5:14 NKJV

Note the careful clause – *according to His will*. Not according to our will. Not according to our fervency. Not according to the formula of any preacher. The confidence the believer has in answered prayer is bounded by, shaped by, and finally completed by the will of God. To pray well is to pray with this bound built into the very heart of the request.

Pray boldly. Ask plainly. Stand on the promises. And then release the answer back to the One who alone has the right to shape it. This is the faith that has stood through every storm of Scripture and history. This is the faith that will stand through yours.

The Scriptures We Hold On To

Before we walk into the difficult ground, let us bring to mind a few of the promises we have been carrying. They are scattered across both Testaments – in the Psalms, in the prophets, in the words of the Lord Himself, in the letters of the apostles – far more than any single chapter could collect. The few that follow are representative of a much larger witness. Scripture is not silent about what God has said He will do. The believer who stands on these promises does so on solid ground. Their problem is not that they have believed too much. Their problem, often, is that they have understood too narrowly.

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He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

— Psalm 107:20 NKJV

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Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

— Matthew 7:7 NKJV

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And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

— John 14:13 NKJV

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A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you.

— Psalm 91:7 NKJV

These four are only a small sample of a far larger witness. The Psalter alone is filled with such promises — “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want...”, “He shall give His angels charge over you...”, “He heals the broken in heart...” So are the prophets — “I am the LORD who heals you...”, “By His stripes we are healed...”, “Call to Me, and I will answer you...” So are the words of the Lord Himself, and the letters of the apostles. To list them all would fill another book. The believer who has held on to any of them has held on to ground that is not imagination — it is what God Himself has said.

These — and the hundreds like them across the canon — are the texts the believer turns to in the night. They are the texts the widow whispers to herself in the hospital corridor. They are the texts a young couple repeats to each other after ten years of empty pregnancy tests. They are the texts a father stands on when the school does not call back, the visa does not come through, the contract does not arrive.

And these texts are true. Every word of them. *It is impossible for God to lie* (Hebrews 6:18). The God who spoke these promises has not changed His mind. He will not change His mind. The question for the waiting believer is not whether the promise is

true. The question is whether we have understood the breadth of how God fulfils what He has spoken.

“It Is Impossible for God to Lie”

Hebrews 6:18 is the single bedrock under everything that follows. The writer is reasoning with a discouraged community: God has sworn by Himself, the writer says, because there is no one greater by whom He could swear. We therefore have “two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie.” His promise and His oath. Both stand. Both are true.

If we are willing to hold this verse in one hand and our painful circumstances in the other, only three possibilities remain. Either God lied – which Scripture forbids us to entertain. Or God was unable to do what He promised – which would contradict everything Scripture says about His power. Or the promise is being fulfilled in ways our pain has not yet allowed us to see.

The third possibility is the one the believer must learn to hold. It is not a denial of the promise. It is a deeper acquaintance with how God keeps His word. And it requires us to make a distinction that modern believers' minds, conditioned by the demand-formula of prayer have often refused to make: the fulfilment of God's promises is not bounded by the span of this present life.

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These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

— Hebrews 11:13 NKJV

Read that verse slowly. The great heroes of Hebrews 11 – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the prophets – *died in faith, not having received the promises*. If anyone had a right to think God had failed them, it was these. And yet the Spirit calls them not failures but victors, who saw the promises “*afar off*” and “*embraced them*.” They knew something we have often forgotten. The story does not end with the grave.

It is important to be careful here about what this does and does not mean. The promises Hebrews 11 is speaking of are the larger, ultimate promises – a heavenly country, a city whose builder is God, the resurrection itself. The verse is not saying that every specific earthly request a believer ever made will be literally granted retroactively in the Kingdom. That is not the promise. The childless couple who longed for a son will not be given that specific son in the Kingdom in the same way they imagined. The man who prayed for the promotion that never came will not find the same promotion waiting on the other side. The Kingdom is not a delayed delivery of every earthly desire.

What the Kingdom is – and what makes the believer's waiting not vain – is a state of being in which the very things that drove most of those requests are themselves put away forever. The Scripture is clear about this. In the resurrection “they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven” (Matthew 22:30). The deepest earthly bond is not abolished, but transformed – loved ones will know one another with the full memory of their earthly bond, no longer as spouse or sibling or parent in the old sense, but as kindred in the larger family of God. And in the new heaven and the new earth:

“

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

– Revelation 21:4 NKJV

Read that list carefully. Death – gone. Sorrow – gone. Crying – gone. Pain – gone. These are the very wounds that lie behind so much of our unanswered prayer in this life. The mother weeping over a sick child, the husband watching his wife fade, the believer crying out under persecution, the long ache of barrenness, of loneliness, of poverty, of loss. Every one of these wounds finds its end – not by retroactive delivery of the specific request, but by the abolition of the very condition that made the request necessary. The Kingdom does not enumerate every earthly desire and grant it. It transcends them all by removing the very brokenness that gave rise to them.

But Not Always in the Way We Imagined

The hardest part of waiting on God is not the waiting itself. It is releasing our hold on the specific shape we had decided the answer must take. We do not just pray for healing — we pray for healing now, in this body, before that date, in this way. We do not just pray for provision — we pray for it through that contract, from that client, in this amount. We have shaped the answer in our minds before we ever brought the request before God.

Scripture, by contrast, shows us a God whose answers are almost always larger than the request and almost never in the shape we would have drawn. He sent Joseph to Egypt as a slave to save the family Joseph loved. He gave Hannah a prophet when she had only asked for a son. He delivered Daniel through the lions, not from them. He raised Lazarus four days late. He answered Paul's three-fold prayer for relief with a sufficiency he had not asked for. And He brought Israel out of Egypt by a path that took forty years longer than the map suggested.

The God of Scripture is not careless with our requests. He hears every one of them. But He is too good a Father to give us only what we asked for when something larger is on offer. The waiting believer must learn to trust the Giver as much as they have trusted the gift.

When Healing Tarries

1

Job — The Righteous Man Who Was Not Spared

Job 1-2; Job 13:15; Job 42

Job was a blameless man, and God Himself said so in the hearing of heaven. He lost his ten children in a single afternoon. He lost his livestock and his wealth in the same hour. He lost his health to a disease that left him scraping his sores with broken pottery on an ash heap. His wife told him to curse God and die. His three closest friends arrived to comfort him and, after seven days of silence, accused him of secret sin. For thirty-seven chapters Job demanded an explanation from God and received only silence. When God finally spoke from the whirlwind, He did not give Job the explanation Job had demanded. He gave him a vision of His own greatness. And somewhere in that vision, between the first chapter and the last, Job had already said the words that have outlived every other line in the book: *“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”* Job did not understand what God was doing. He never received an answer to the *why* of his suffering. He simply made his peace with not being told, on the grounds that the One who was not telling him was still good. That is the posture this little book is calling us back to.

Of all the promises that wound the waiting believer most deeply, the promise of healing wounds the deepest. Because here we are not just waiting for ourselves — we are often waiting for someone we love, watching them slip into pain, watching the Scripture we believed seem to slow before our eyes.

Let me say this clearly, because it has been said unclearly too often: when a believer is not healed in this life, the promise of healing has not failed. It has been carried forward to the place where its fulfilment will be complete and permanent rather than partial and temporary.

Consider what a healing in this life actually is. The lump is removed; the body recovers; the patient lives perhaps another twenty, thirty, forty years — and then dies of something else. The healing was real. The healing was a gift. The healing was also temporary. Even Lazarus, who was raised from the dead by the voice of the Lord Himself, died again. Every miraculous healing in Scripture, except those who will be alive at the Lord's return, was eventually undone by death.

Now consider what the resurrection promises. A body that does not break down. A body free from pain. A body that does not age, does not decay, does not require medicine, hospital, or doctor. *“This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”* That is not a temporary healing. That is the final, complete, permanent healing every other healing in Scripture has been pointing toward.

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Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

– 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 NKJV

“In a moment. In the twinkling of an eye.” This is the phrase Paul reaches for to describe what the believer experiences at the trumpet. Here is where the principle is taught directly. For the believer who has died in faith and is now at rest, awaiting the trumpet, the passage of time between their last conscious moment of pain and their first conscious moment of resurrection glory will be experienced as instantaneous. There will be no awareness of the intervening centuries. The trumpet that sounds in our future will sound, to them, in what feels like the very next breath after the last. The doctrine rests on this verse, not on a homiletical guess.

Once the principle is anchored here, the poetry of Isaiah finds a quiet resonance with it. Isaiah’s primary subject in chapter 58 is true fasting and right-living before God, and the promise of “your healing shall spring forth speedily” sits inside that immediate context. But for the New Testament believer who reads it with Paul’s trumpet in their ear, the word *speedily* takes on a second, deeper colour:

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Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

– Isaiah 58:8 NKJV

For the believer whom God chose not to heal in this present life – healing was not denied. It was, in the language of the prophet, brought *speedily* at the trumpet of the apostle. Their last conscious memory was the pain of a failing body. Their next

conscious moment will be a body that cannot break. As *speedily* as anything Scripture ever promised.

When Breakthrough Tarries

2

Joseph — The Dreamer Who Waited Thirteen Years

Genesis 37; Genesis 39–41; Genesis 50:20

When Joseph was seventeen the Lord gave him two dreams. Sheaves of grain bowing. Sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing. The dreams were clear; the meaning was clear; the only thing unclear was the timing. Within months of receiving those dreams Joseph was in a pit. Within weeks he was a slave in Egypt. Within a few years more he was in prison on false charges, forgotten by the cupbearer he had helped, with no rescue in sight. From the moment Joseph received the promise to the moment Pharaoh placed the ring on his finger, thirteen years passed. Thirteen years in which the dream looked utterly dead. Thirteen years in which any reasonable observer would have concluded that God had either forgotten Joseph or never really spoken in the first place. And yet, looking back, Joseph saw what he had not been able to see while he was inside the thirteen years. *“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.”* The same pit, the same slavery, the same prison, the same forgetting, was the only road that could have placed Joseph in Pharaoh’s court at the exact moment seven years of plenty turned into seven years of famine. The waiting was not the absence of the answer. The waiting was a part of how the answer was being assembled.

Not every unanswered prayer is for healing or for the life of a loved one. Some of the longest, hardest waits in the believer’s experience are for things the Scripture itself encourages us to ask for — provision, work, marriage, children, an open door, a closed chapter.

And the silence in these areas can shake faith just as deeply. A young couple prays for a child and walks fifteen years of empty pregnancy tests and disappointed family. A man prays for the promotion and watches it pass three times to colleagues who do not even claim a faith. A woman prays for a husband and watches her thirties pass. A graduate prays for the visa and the visa does not come. A pastor prays for revival in a

city and after twenty years preaches in a half-empty hall.

Scripture does not shy away from these waits. It records them in detail. Abraham waited twenty-five years for Isaac, and was ninety-nine when the promise was renewed in his hearing. Sarah had given up so completely that she laughed in disbelief when the angel said it would happen in a year. The Israelites cried out under Egyptian bondage for four hundred years before God raised up Moses. David was anointed king as a teenager and did not sit on the throne of Israel until he was thirty — spending the intervening years fleeing for his life from the man whose throne he had already been promised.

The pattern of Scripture is not that God answers quickly. The pattern of Scripture is that God answers at the right time, which is almost never the same as ours. And that the waiting itself is doing something to the one who waits that the answer alone could not have done.

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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 NKJV

The verb in that verse is not *endure*. It is not *tolerate*. It is *wait* — an active, patient, expectant posture. The believer who waits well is not passive. They are being shaped. By the time the answer comes — if it comes in this life — they are a different person from the one who first made the request. That difference is part of what God was working all along.

3

Hannah — The Mother Who Wept Year After Year

1 Samuel 1-2; 1 Samuel 1:10-18

Hannah went up to the house of the Lord at Shiloh year after year and watched her husband's other wife mock her barrenness. Year after year she came home empty. Year after year she wept and would not eat. Year after year she made the long pilgrimage with no different answer than the year before. And one year, in the bitterness of her soul, she prayed so intensely that the high priest mistook her silent prayer for drunkenness. She made a vow: if God would give her a son, she would give him back. And He did. We tend to remember Hannah's answered prayer. We tend to forget how long she waited. Scripture does not say how many years passed before Samuel was conceived, but the phrase "year by year" in chapter one suggests many. And here is what is most precious about Hannah's story: the answer, when it came, was not just a son. It was a prophet whose ministry would anoint two kings of Israel and transition the nation from the time of the judges to the time of the monarchy. Hannah asked for a son. God was assembling a prophet. The waiting was the time God was using to prepare a mother whose heart was deep enough to give the son back.

When the Door Closes

There is a kind of unanswered prayer that is harder than waiting. It is the prayer to which God says *no*. Not *not yet*. No. The marriage that does not happen. The child that does not survive infancy. The career that ends. The dream that dies. The loved one for whom we prayed every day and who is buried anyway. We did not get a delay. We got a closed door.

Scripture is not silent here either. It records, in painful detail, the story of a man who prayed for deliverance and was not delivered. A man closer to the Lord Jesus than any other man of his generation. A man the Lord Himself called "*more than a prophet*."

John the Baptist sat in Herod's dungeon in the final weeks of his life and sent disciples to ask the question that had begun to gnaw at him: "*Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?*" Commentators have read the question two ways.

Some hear in it genuine theological wrestling — John, in his lonely cell, asking whether the gentle Galilean rabbi he had baptised really matched the axe-at-the-root, fire-and-Spirit Messiah he himself had announced (Matthew 3:10–12). Others hear, beneath the theological wording, the cry of a prisoner facing execution — at least in part a quiet appeal to be rescued. *If You are the Messiah, the One I prepared the way for, the One whose sandals I am not worthy to untie — come and get me out.* Both readings honour the text. Either way, the answer the Lord sent back was not what John would have needed for relief.

And what did the Lord send back? Not deliverance. Not a key to the prison. Not even a personal visit. He sent a recital of the messianic signs — the blind seeing, the lame walking, the lepers cleansed, the dead raised — and one short sentence for John alone.

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And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.

— Matthew 11:6 NKJV

Read that quietly. The Lord was, in the gentlest possible way, telling His forerunner that the rescue was not coming. That John would die in that prison. That the kingdom John had announced would not, in this hour, free him from Herod's sword. And in the same breath, the Lord called for John to remain faithful in his disappointment — *blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.* Not offended that the deliverance did not come. Not offended that the Messiah did not match the expected shape. Not offended that the answer was *no*.

Within weeks John was beheaded. And the Lord, who had not rescued him, turned to the crowd and pronounced over the executed prophet the highest compliment ever paid to any human being: *“Among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.”* The man God did not rescue was not the man God did not love.

4

John the Baptist — The Prophet God Did Not Rescue

Matthew 11:2–11; Matthew 14:1–12

John was a man Heaven had been preparing since the womb. The angel Gabriel had announced his birth. He had leapt in his mother's belly at the voice of Mary. He had baptised the Lord Himself and watched the Spirit descend like a dove. He had pointed to the Lamb of God before any other prophet had a name for Him. And in the final season of his life he sat in Herod's prison waiting for a Messiah who could open every prison and chose not to open his. We are told nothing of what John felt in those final weeks. We are told only what he asked, what the Lord replied, and what happened next. Herod's wife wanted him dead. A foolish promise at a drunken banquet gave her the opening. A platter was carried to the dancer who had asked for the head. And the greatest prophet ever born of woman was buried by his disciples in obscurity, while the Messiah he had announced continued His ministry in Galilee. Heaven did not rescue him. But heaven did not forget him. The Lord later spoke of him with a tenderness reserved for no other human being, and he will rise at the resurrection of the just to receive the crown of righteousness laid up for all those who have loved His appearing.

That last phrase deserves to be heard widely. The “crown of righteousness” Paul speaks of in 2 Timothy 4:8 is not reserved for John the Baptist alone, nor for Paul alone, nor for any rare class of believer. It is *“laid up...not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”* Every believer who waits with longing for the second coming of Christ — not as a metaphor, but as the literal return of the One who will come as a conquering King to set every wrong right — has that same crown waiting. The prison cell does not matter. The cause of death does not matter. The visible circumstances of the believer's final breath do not matter. What matters is that they loved His appearing. And Scripture holds out a promise larger still:

“

And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.

— Revelation 5:10 NKJV

John the Baptist will reign. Paul will reign. Stephen will reign. The persecuted believer cut down in a village raid for the name of Christ — in any age, on any

continent — will reign. The widow whose husband was not healed will reign. The barren woman whose womb never opened will reign. Every believer who has died in faith, having loved the appearing of their Lord, will rise to reign with Him in His Kingdom. The outcomes of this present life are not the measure of any of this. The measure is His promise, sealed by His blood, guaranteed by His resurrection, and brought to its fullness at His return.

When the Thorn Remains

And there is one more shape of unanswered prayer that Scripture names with particular care — the thorn that does not leave. The chronic condition. The recurring weakness. The persistent limp. The unhealed wound that follows the believer from decade to decade and refuses to be removed.

Paul knew this prayer. We do not know exactly what his “thorn in the flesh” was — commentators have guessed at eye trouble, malaria, epilepsy, or a chronic persecutor. What we know is that he prayed about it three times, with the apostolic confidence of a man who had seen the dead raised by his own ministry, and that the answer he received was not relief.

“

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.

— 2 Corinthians 12:9 NKJV

Paul was not given the healing he asked for. Paul was given something else. He was given grace sufficient for the thorn. He was given a strength that was made perfect through the weakness, not despite it. And by the end of his life he had come to such peace with the unremoved thorn that he could write that he rejoiced in it — not because he was a masochist, but because he had learned that the thorn was the very place the power of Christ rested upon him.

There is a kind of intimacy with God that is only possible on the other side of an unanswered prayer. There is a kind of humility that only sustained weakness produces. There is a kind of usefulness in the kingdom that depends, perhaps

counter-intuitively, on the believer carrying a wound that Heaven has chosen not to heal. Paul did not understand this at the start. By the end he did.

5

Paul — The Apostle Whose Thorn Was Not Removed

2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Philippians 4:11-13

Paul had been caught up to the third heaven and shown things “which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” And lest he be exalted above measure by the revelation, he was given a thorn in the flesh — a messenger of Satan, in his own description, to buffet him. He prayed three times for it to be removed. He received in reply not a healing but a promise: the grace would be sufficient. The strength would be made perfect in the weakness. The thorn would stay. And Paul, the same man who had raised Eutychus from the dead and had seen handkerchiefs from his body carry healing to others, lived with the unremoved thorn from his Damascus road conversion to his execution in Rome under Nero. He never received the healing he had asked for. He died, in human terms, a martyr. And yet by the end he could write from another prison: “*I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.*” Some answers are larger than the request. Paul’s thorn was the doorway to a depth of grace he would never have known if the thorn had been removed.

When the Answer Is Ordinary Means

For every believer whose unanswered prayer has the shape of Paul’s thorn — the affliction God in His sovereignty has not removed — there is another whose unanswered prayer has the shape of Timothy’s stomach. The chronic condition. The recurring weakness. The body that does not break catastrophically but does not function cleanly either. The diabetic on insulin. The asthmatic with her inhaler. The believer with hypertension watching salt. The one whose ulcer flares with stress, whose joints ache in the wet season, whose digestion has never been right, whose energy has always been low.

These believers often carry a quiet shame Scripture itself never placed on them. Perhaps they have heard it from a pulpit. Perhaps they have read it in someone’s article or book. Perhaps they have come to it on their own, in sincere conviction,

longing to hold fast to the God who said, “I am the LORD who heals you” (Exodus 15:26). Whatever the source, the conclusion has been the same – that the doctor is a substitute for the Healer, that to swallow a tablet is not to exercise true faith, that medication is a quiet denial of the promise. And they have prayed – often very fervently, often more so than anyone who might accuse them – and the condition has remained. So they take their medicine reluctantly – some under quiet pressure not to disappoint the loved ones caring for them, others alone with the slow ache of disappointment and resignation, feeling, after all the praying, that God has refused to honor their faith.

To them, the apostle Paul sent a word that has carried across two thousand years.

“

No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.

– 1 Timothy 5:23 NKJV

This was not written to a stranger. It was written to Timothy – Paul's beloved son in the faith, the young pastor he had set over the church at Ephesus, the spiritual son he loved more than any other. Paul, through whose hands miraculous healings had flowed and through whose ministry the dead had been raised, did not pray Timothy whole. He did not write Timothy a correction about insufficient faith. He did not summon him for a laying on of hands. He sent him the most ordinary piece of pastoral counsel in Scripture: take care of yourself. Mind what you eat and drink. Use a little wine.

From the pen of a man who had every gift of miraculous healing at his disposal, this is its own kind of sermon. God's answer for chronic infirmity is often not the miracle. It is wisdom. It is dietary care. It is the right sleep, the measured cup, the prescribed dose, the kept appointment, the slow walk every morning. These are not the betrayals of faith. They are the gifts of a Father who has placed in this world doctors and medicines and wise counsels for the bodies that He Himself fearfully and wonderfully made.

Scripture is not silent here either. Consider Hezekiah, one of the few kings of Judah of whom Scripture testifies that “he did what was right in the sight of the LORD,

according to all that his father David had done” (2 Kings 18:3). When he fell mortally ill, the prophet Isaiah was sent to him with the hardest possible word: “Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). Hezekiah did not argue. He did not demand. He turned his face to the wall and wept and pleaded with the LORD for his life. And before Isaiah had even left the middle court, the word of the LORD came to the prophet again: “Turn again and tell Hezekiah... I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you” (2 Kings 20:5). Fifteen years would be added to his life.

And the means by which the healing came? Not a word of power. Not the laying on of hands. Not even a touch from the prophet. “Then Isaiah said, ‘Take a lump of figs.’ So they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered” (2 Kings 20:7). A fig poultice – the very remedy practitioners of ancient and traditional medicine had used for centuries on inflamed sores. Modern research has begun to confirm what those practitioners knew by experience: figs contain antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory compounds – ficin and related enzymes that break down dead tissue, along with phenolic constituents (eugenol and psoralen among them) that act against the kind of bacterial inflammation a deadly *shechin* would have been. The LORD who had just promised a miraculous extension of life did not, in the giving, bypass ordinary means. He spoke healing – and then He gave the remedy that worked through the very physical properties of the fruit He Himself had made. The miracle and the means were not in competition. They were the same act of one God, working through the world He had ordered.

This is not an isolated case. The Good Samaritan poured oil and wine into the wounds of the beaten traveller before he carried him to the inn (Luke 10:34). Luke himself, the writer of the third Gospel and of Acts, was a physician – and Paul called him “the beloved physician” without a single word of correction (Colossians 4:14). And Scripture closes its long testimony on this theme with a vision: in the new Jerusalem, John saw a tree whose “leaves... were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:2) – the same image Ezekiel had seen centuries earlier, of trees beside the river of God whose “fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine” (Ezekiel 47:12). The God of Scripture is not embarrassed by ordinary means. He works through them. He gave them. He gives them still.

And so the believer with the unhealed body need not carry a hidden shame. The pill, the inhaler, the careful diet, the regular check-up – these are no more a denial of God than Hezekiah's poultice or Timothy's wine. They are part of how the same God who heals miraculously also heals quietly, day after day, through the wisdom He has placed in the world and the means He has put within reach. Take the wine. Take the medicine. Walk the morning. Sleep the night. And trust, in the quietness of it, that the God who is sufficient grace in Paul's thorn is also wisdom-in-the-cup in Timothy's stomach.

6

Timothy — Paul's Beloved Son Who Was Often Ill

1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 1:5; Acts 16:1-3

Timothy was the spiritual son the apostle loved most. He had been raised in the faith by his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, joined to Paul's missionary band as a young man at Lystra, and entrusted with the care of the church at Ephesus while Paul was still alive. Paul called him "my beloved son" and "a true son in the faith," and sent for him in his final imprisonment. But Timothy's body was frail. Scripture preserves for us, almost in passing, that he suffered from a recurring stomach ailment and "frequent infirmities" – a constitution that did not match the strenuous demands of pastoral work in a hostile city. And here is what arrests us. Paul, the same apostle whose handkerchiefs had carried healing to the sick and through whose hands Eutychus had been raised from the dead, did not heal him. He did not write Timothy a correction about insufficient faith. He did not summon him for a laying on of hands. He sent him, instead, the most ordinary piece of pastoral counsel in Scripture: "use a little wine for your stomach's sake." Take care of yourself. Mind what you eat and drink. From the pen of a man who had every gift of miraculous healing at his disposal, this is its own kind of sermon. God's answer for the believer with a chronic infirmity is not always a miracle. Sometimes it is wisdom, discipline, and the quiet use of ordinary means.

Standing in the Waiting

So we come to the practical question. If God's promises are eternal and not always fulfilled on our timetable, if some answers are deferred to the resurrection, if some prayers are answered with a closed door, if some thorns are left in the flesh by

design — how then does the believer stand?

Hold the promise without forcing the shape.

Believe the promise of healing without dictating that the healing must come this side of the trumpet. Believe the promise of provision without dictating the channel. Believe the promise of an open door without dictating which door. The promises are true. The shape is God's. A faith that holds the promise but releases the shape is the faith Scripture commends.

Refuse the temptation to assign blame.

When a beloved believer is not healed and dies in faith, do not look for fault. Do not blame the dying person's faith. Do not blame the praying community's faith. Do not blame God's silence. The Lord did not blame Lazarus for dying before He arrived, and He did not blame Martha or Mary for the lack of a miracle in those four days. He simply wept with them, and then He did what He had already planned to do, in the timing He had already chosen. Death does not invalidate the promises of God, nor does it automatically mean there was a lack of faith from the departed or in those caring for them.

Receive what is being given in the waiting.

Something is always being given. Joseph was being prepared. Hannah was being deepened. Paul was being humbled. Job was being shown the face of God in a way he had not seen before the loss. The waiting is not an empty hallway between the request and the answer. The waiting is itself part of the answer. Ask, in the waiting, what is being given. The Lord is rarely silent about it for those who are looking.

When you no longer know what to pray.

There comes a season in many believers' lives when the words simply run out. The mind no longer knows what to ask for. The same petitions have been brought before God so many times that they have begun to feel hollow on the tongue. Scripture knows this season too, and it provides exactly for the believer who has reached it:

“

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 NKJV

Read that promise carefully. The believer who has stopped praying because they no longer know how is not, in that silence, alone before God. The Spirit Himself takes up the groan and carries it into the throne room in a language the mind cannot form and the words cannot reach. When prayer fails on the lips, prayer is still rising in the Spirit. Sit, on those days, in the silence. The intercession is still happening. You are still being heard.

Keep the company of believers.

I cannot overstate this. The believer who waits alone bends. The believer who waits in fellowship with the saints is held. Tell someone what you are praying for. Let them pray with you. Let them bear part of the burden. Let them remind you of the promise on the day you have forgotten it. We were not made to stand alone, and the enemy of our souls knows this.

And to the community around the suffering believer — the friends, the church, the small group, the relatives — a word also. Job's friends sat with him in silence for seven days, and in that silence they did him good. The moment they opened their mouths to explain his suffering, to assign cause, to suggest where his repentance had failed, they ceased to comfort him and began to add to his wound. The Lord rebuked them at the end of the book — not Job. Take the warning. What the suffering believer most needs from their community is presence, patience, and the refusal of easy explanation. Do not diagnose their faith. Do not suggest the sin you imagine must be hidden somewhere. Do not promise outcomes God has not promised. Sit with them. Pray with them. Bring food. Drive their children to school. Be near. The right ministry to the deeply wounded is almost always quieter than we think.

Remember the resurrection.

Beneath every other comfort lies this one. The resurrection is not a footnote to the gospel. It is the doorway through which every promise reaches its fullness. For the believer whose healing did not come, the resurrection is the healing. For the believer

whose breakthrough did not come, the resurrection is the breakthrough. For the believer who buried the one they prayed for, the resurrection is the reunion. Death does not cancel God's promises. For the believer, it becomes the doorway through which their fullness is ultimately realised.

“

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 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 4:17-18 NKJV

A Personal Examination

Sit with these ten questions before turning to the closing. They are written for the believer who has waited long. They are written without judgement and without easy answers. Take them slowly. Some of them will sit on you. That is part of their work.

- 1 *Have I held God to a timetable He never agreed to?*
- 2 *When prayers seem unanswered, do I question God's faithfulness – or my own understanding of how He answers?*
- 3 *Am I willing to trust God's no as deeply as I have trusted His yes?*
- 4 *Have I treated death as a defeat of God's promises, when Scripture treats it as the doorway to their fullness?*
- 5 *When someone I prayed for did not recover, did I blame their faith, mine, or God's silence – or did I rest in His will?*
- 6 *Do I read God's promises as guarantees of comfort in this life – or as anchors of hope across this life and the next?*
- 7 *Has my prayer, after years of waiting, drifted into complaint or demand – or does it still rest in trust?*
- 8 *What has God taught me in the waiting that He could not have taught me in the answer?*
- 9 *Has unanswered prayer made me drift from God – or draw nearer to Him?*

10

If I die tomorrow with promises still unfulfilled in this life, can I say with Job, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him”?

Final Word

The same God who let Job sit on an ash heap for thirty-seven chapters of silence, and who never once gave him the explanation he demanded, gave him in the end a vision of Himself larger than every loss.

The same God who let Joseph wait thirteen years in slavery and prison, and who allowed every plausible reason for hope to die along the way, was using each year to assemble the table from which a starving family would be fed.

The same God who heard Hannah's tears year after year and answered them not with a son alone but with a prophet, is still hearing the prayers you have prayed for so long that you have begun to wonder if they are heard at all.

The same God who did not rescue John the Baptist from Herod's prison, and who sent His forerunner a gentle word and not a key, has reserved a crown of righteousness for that executed prophet at the appearing of the One he prepared the way for.

The same God who refused three times to take Paul's thorn, and gave him sufficient grace instead, is still saying to you and to me: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

The same God who did not heal Timothy's frequent infirmities but sent him a little wine and the counsel of ordinary care, is still teaching the believer with the unhealed body that the medicine in their hand is not a denial of faith but a quiet gift of His.

The pattern is the same. The promises stand. The shape of the answer is His. The timing is His. The fulfilment is complete, eternal, and never, ever late.

Hold the promise. Release the shape. Refuse the temptation to assign blame to your faith or anyone else's. Keep the company of the saints. Remember the trumpet.

And on the days when the silence is the loudest, when the diagnosis is the heaviest, when the waiting is the longest – remember that the believer who has died in faith has not lost the promise. They have only stepped across the doorway through which its fullness will come, in what will feel to them like the very next breath.

Death does not cancel God's promises. The promises were never bounded by death in the first place. They were always larger than this life, and the integrity of every one of them is held by a God for whom it is impossible to lie.

So when the body is failing, when the answer tarries, when the door has closed, when the thorn will not leave – say with Job, in the integrity of a faith that has refused to let circumstances become the measure of God's character:

Yet will I trust Him.

“

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

— Romans 8:18 NKJV

Oludare Akinbo