

# GOD ANSWERS

## Week 4 | Unceasing

### Deeper Dive

One of the most raw, honest, and lamenting prayers in the Bible is the prayer that Jesus offered to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane before His death. This prayer is a good reminder that God knows exactly what it's like to cry out in pain and suffering. That night, Jesus asked the Father over and over to take the suffering from Him. In the end, God said "No", and Jesus faithfully surrendered to God's Will. When we get upset with God's "No", or question His goodness, or doubt if He hears us, this is the prayer we need to remember. God calls us to have faith and trust that His "No's" are for the greater good of His greater purpose, because He is always working for our good.

**Matthew 26: 38-39** ~ Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

### Day 1 - God ALWAYS answers

As kids we probably all remember a holiday where you asked your parents for something over and over, and you didn't get it. For some of us that disappointment is probably so engrained in our memories that we can tell you the exact year and what the gift was!

In a similar way, as adults we have most likely had moments where we asked God for a job, a move, a relationship, a cure, or some type of immediate rescue from a struggle. Maybe we asked over and over, we fought really hard for it, and it just didn't happen (or hasn't happened yet). Naturally, these disappointments are met with confusion, frustration, and sometimes pain or grief. It's in these moments that we can start asking, "Was it something I did wrong? , Did I not ask hard enough?, Does God hear me?, Does God care?, Is God really good?" We can truly spiral down some dark paths in our minds, even becoming bitter and resentful towards the Lord over seemingly "unanswered" prayers.

Our faith & trust in God's goodness are tested most in these moments. Having faith that He WILL answer, and it WILL be good is hard when we can't see the light at the end of tunnel. However, just like a muscle under strain, faith testing moments allow us to exercise our faith muscles. Muscles grow stronger when they are stretched, strained, and even torn. In contrast, muscles atrophy during seasons of unuse. This is why God tells us in scripture that through perseverance we will get stronger each and every time! Muscle strain isn't usually fun or easy. It often comes with pain, sweat, and even tears. However, it will grow our faith stronger for the next hard season in your life.

If you are in a season of disappointment, seemingly unanswered prayers, and your faith muscles are being strained, don't give up hope. Often, it's the hardest seasons of life, that make space for God to work.

**DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY:** Offer a "Hope Check" to the Lord. This is a lamenting prayer about the things you've given up waiting for God on. *"God, forgive me for giving up hope in You. I trust you with \_\_\_\_\_. Help me to have faith that you are good no matter what happens."*

- Often, hindsight is 20/20. Looking back, can you see where struggles strengthened you in some way? Has there been disappointments that actually may have protected you from future pain?

## Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Romans 12:1-2** ~ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.
- **Galatians 5: 16-18** ~ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.
- **Romans 8:28** ~And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
- **Isaiah 55: 8-9** ~"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

## Day 2 - God FORMS vs. INFORMS

If you have ever worked in a corporate job, then you have heard the term "roadmap". No, it's not a directional map for your car, it's a visioning map for the future of the company. Typically, the "roadmap" details goals, next steps to get there, and the changes or challenges along the way. Often, we ask God for the exact same thing. We tell ourselves if God would just reveal His plan or His Will, then we could be less anxious, better prepared, more on board, and be able to trust in His goodness. However, if we are raw and honest with ourselves, would that be true? Most of us like being in control of our roadmap, right? Even in corporations, after those big "roadmap" meetings, there's an infamy of chatter. Every department seems to question different decisions, every employee seems to suddenly know better than the CEO's at the top, and people often get negative about the direction they feel like things are heading. Before we roll our eyes in judgement, don't we do the same with God? We want to plan our goals, vision, and major life decisions. Without realizing it, we often plan our own roadmap, THEN ask God to bless it, and THEN get frustrated when He doesn't do what we want Him to. Of course, God is in control whether we recognize it or not. When we get this backwards, we will always be like those employees chattering and complaining that God isn't answering our prayers, and bemoaning the mess we got ourselves into following our own map.

Now, you might be thinking "Okay, I get it, I need to trust God's roadmap, but how am I supposed to know what He wants me to do?" Here's the secret - we're asking the wrong questions and looking for the wrong roadmap when it comes to God's Will. We're looking for answers like, "What job?, What house?, What college?". We want nice easy "to-do" list of goals that we can check off. While it's good to ask for God's help with decisions, God's goals for us are so much bigger than simple life choices. God's Will is to form us, not just inform us. He cares more about your character, heart, and soul. God's roadmap is about WHO you are becoming. His roadmap shows you becoming more loving, obedient, humble, patient, Christ-like, and surrendered to Him. It's only when our hearts are in a posture to be formed by Him, that we can be informed to clearly follow Him.

**DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY:** Where in your life have you been asking God for a roadmap? What big decision are you praying about? Spend 5 min. today listening to God after praying ~ *"God, WHO are you inviting me to become through this & what are you trying to form in me through this decision?"*

- How did this prayer change the way you are viewing this upcoming decision? Will this change the way you approach future decisions?
- Was there anything you felt God calling you towards during your time with Him today? What is God trying to form in you while you wait for His discernment?

## Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **2 Corinthians 12: 7-10** ~ I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
- **Isaiah 40:31** ~ Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.
- **Ecclesiastes 3:11** ~ He has made everything beautiful in its time.
- **Psalms 130:5** ~ I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word, I put my hope
- **Hebrews 11:1** ~ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.
- **Proverbs 3:5-6** ~ Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Week 4: Unceasing

## Day 3 - God's answers > your preference

One of the hardest things about "unanswered prayers" is that they could actually be "answered prayers" that we've missed. What happens when God's answers are: "no, wait, or yes - but not the way you expect"? Many times we miss out on the answers to our prayers because of two reasons.

### 1. We get stuck on the wrong questions.

- **"Why?"** - "Why did I lose my job? Why was my child born with a disability? Why did my spouse leave me? Why am I sick?" - We often think we need this answer to have peace. However, is there truly any answer that would ever bring you peace? When we get stuck here, we fail to trust & know in God's love, goodness & grace.
- **"How?"** - "How will you do this? How can I do that? How will this all work out?" - We think if we just knew the details of God's plan, then we could trust Him. However, wouldn't we still question Him and want to do it our way? When we get stuck here, we fail to trust, surrender, & follow God's plan & purpose for our lives.
- **"When?"** - "When will this get better? When will I have enough? When will the storm stop?" - What happens when God's "when" doesn't match our "when"? When we get stuck here, our anxiety and impatience often get us into trouble. We move ahead in our own strength without waiting for God's provision & equipping.

We get stuck when these questions become our focus. Instead, our focus should be on the ONE that answers all our questions - "**WHO?**" - "Who does God say He is? Who is in control? Who am I following & listening to? Who is God trying to form me into? Who does God say I am?" The more we know the "who", the more we know His answers.

### 2. When God's answers don't match our preferences.

- We say - "take this away" / God says - "my grace is sufficient for my power is made perfect in your weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9)
- We say - "hurry up" / God says - "those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31; Ecclesiastes 3:11, Psalm 130:5)
- We say - "I need to know why, how, when?" / God says - "trust in the Lord with all your heart" (Hebrews 11:1, Proverbs 3:5-6)

**DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY:** Make 4 columns in your prayer journal - "Yes, No, Wait, Different than expected". List your current prayer concerns, and prayerfully discern each category. Can you see areas where God might be working in unexpected ways right now?

- Have you mistaken "silence" for "different"? Are there areas where you are stuck & focusing on the wrong questions? Are there areas where God might have answered, but you missed it? How is God <sup>3</sup> calling you to trust in His wisdom verses your preferred outcomes?

## Deeper Dive

- **Acts 17:11** ~ they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.
- **1 John 4:1** ~ do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world
- **1 Thessalonians 5:19-21** ~ Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.
- **Proverbs 19:20** ~ Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future
- **Proverbs 12:15** ~ The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.
- **1 Kings 3:9-10** ~ So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.
- **James 1:5** ~ If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.
- **Hebrew 5:14** ~ But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

## Day 4 - Developing the discernment filter

Daily we are faced with countless influences, questions, decisions, choices, voices and opportunities. With all the noise, it can be hard to distinguish between an answer from the world, from our own selfish desires, or an answer from God. The difference between what sounds good, and what is genuinely from God can be hard to discern at times.

How do we develop and strengthen our filter of Godly discernment? How do we know for certain when God is answering, and it's not just something we thought on our own? Similar to strengthening our faith muscles, we also have to exercise our discernment muscles for them to grow wiser, stronger, and clearly visible. Let's look at a few practical steps that will help us practice discerning God's Will in our lives.

1. **Test against scripture** - (Acts 17:11, 1 John 4:1, 1 Thess. 5:19-21)  
An answer to prayer will NEVER go against God's Word or His character. Reading and studying God's Word daily will keep you grounded in God's promises and truths. Always use scripture as the first and most important step in discernment. If it doesn't pass this first step, then it's NOT from God!
2. **Consult wise Godly counsel** - (Proverbs 19:20; 12:15) We all need a community of spiritually mature & growing believers in our lives. If you aren't in a church small group yet, consider joining one as the next step in your faith journey. Consult with your small group, or the faith leaders at your church, ask them to help you pray, discern, affirm, or gently challenge your decisions in a godly way.
3. **Pray & seek God's wisdom** - (1 Kings 3:9-12, James 1:5)  
Continually pray for wisdom and discernment from the Holy Spirit in your decision. Ask God to reveal His voice and confirm what you are hearing. Often there is a peace that comes with an answer from the Lord (but not always in ways we expect). As you spend time in prayer, ask the Spirit to reveal - *Will this decision produce Godly fruit? Will it draw me closer to the Lord? Does it invite humility or pride? Does it require trust & obedience?*
4. **Have consistent spiritual practices** - (Hebrews 5:14) It's much easier to discern God's Will, when you spend time with Him. This is daily time in the Word, in a community of believers, and in prayer - talking AND listening to God. Basically just be consistent with 1-3!

**DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY:** In your prayer time today, spend time walking through these steps of discernment. Even if you don't have a huge life decision right now, practice with something small. Just like our physical muscles, it's the daily practice that will train & equip us for those big heavy decisions in life.

- Discernment rarely comes as instant clarity. It's a process of faithfully walking with God over time. What would it look like to slow down, <sup>4</sup> and walk through the discernment process with the Lord? What would it look like to seek God's Will in all things (even small things)?

## Deeper Dive

- **Luke 22: 42-44** ~ "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.
- **Proverbs 3:5-6** ~ Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.
- **James 1:22** ~ Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.
- **1 Samuel 3:10** ~ The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."
- **Luke 9:23** ~ Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."
- **1 Peter 5:6-7** ~ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

## Day 5 - Surrender, Follow, Know

When Jesus said "Not my will, but Yours be done." (Luke 22:42), He modeled complete and total surrender in prayer. Jesus showed us over and over that our prayers should be about communion & surrender to God, not about controlling or dictating our desired outcome from God. We often say "I trust you God", while deep down we really mean "as long as you do *what* I want, *when* I want". If we are honest, we seek certainty before obedience, a plan before we have faith or trust, our way (or receiving blessings) before we recognize something as an answer to prayer. How can we become more like Jesus, and move towards a place of surrender in our prayers lives? First, we have to flip our backwards thinking:

	Before praying:	Pray this:
Surrender <i>BEFORE</i> Direction	Show me your Will	I will obey your Will, no matter what it is (Proverbs 3:5-6)
Take a step <i>BEFORE</i> knowing the plan	Where are we going?	I'm ready, just show me the next step (James 1:22)
Listen <i>BEFORE</i> ask	Help me with...	"Speak, Your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10)

How often are we waiting on answers from that first prayer column, when God has already answered in that second prayer column? Are we waiting on God, when in reality He's waiting on us to surrender? When we try to control the outcome, we miss God's voice because our hearts aren't open to hearing anything other than our own agenda. To hear God we have to surrender our plans, listen through scripture and prayer, follow Him with daily obedience, and trust Him in all things. Just as Jesus told His disciples in Luke 9:23, this is a daily commitment to surrendering our lives to follow Him.

**DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY:** Honestly & prayerfully ask yourself these questions through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With a posture of humility (1 Peter 5:6-7), look for prayers that may already be answered, or places where God is waiting for your surrender.

- Am I seeking God's Will, or am I seeking God's approval of my will?
- Is there something God has called me to do that I am delaying or resisting in disobedience? Is there someone He's called me to forgive, something He told me to give up, or a spiritual step that I haven't put into practice yet?
- Am I waiting for zero fear, perfect certainty, or complete understanding before moving forward in obedience to God, or am I ready to say "your will be done"?
- What would it look like to trust in God's goodness, faithfully surrender to His plans, and prayerfully commit to following Him wherever He leads?