

Removing the Stumbling Blocks - Part 2

by Dan Augsburger

Dan Augsburger emphasizes the importance of persistent prayer and praise in understanding and receiving God's answers in our lives.

Duration: 43:41

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:11, Daniel 10:12, Luke 11:8, Romans 8:28, Romans 12:12, 2 Corinthians 12:7, Ephesians 5:20, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Topics: "Persistent Prayer", "Trusting God"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of persisting in prayer and praising God in all circumstances. It shares stories from the Bible, like Hannah's persistence in prayer for a child, Elijah's persistence for rain, and Joseph's journey of surrender leading to blessings. The speaker also shares personal experiences highlighting how God works in mysterious ways for our good, even in challenging situations. The key message is to trust God's timing, persist in prayer, and praise Him in all things, knowing that He is working for our good.

Transcript

I'm very pleased with your interest. I know it's a long time, but I know in my own life these things really help. I talked earlier about this matter of praying, Bless me in Egypt prayers.

To me that was a significant breakthrough. I suddenly realized where I could see where I stood in the old continuum of prayer and getting answers. One of the things that I mentioned early on was that if we don't understand how God works in our lives, in terms of prayer, in terms of overcoming, when it comes to dying to self and to trusting him in bad experiences, we're going to often be in confusion about what God is doing.

And that's why this matter of praise and persistence is so important. So I'd like to talk about the reason we have to persist praying, and then why praise helps us in our persisting. If you would, look at 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 17.

1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 17. And if you find I'm speaking too quickly, please let me know. I was told after the church service that I talk too fast and I forget all the time.

I'm really bad about that. Please forgive me. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 17.

Paul says very briefly there, we should pray without what? Pray without ceasing. Look at Romans chapter 12, verse 12. Romans comes right after the book of Acts.

Romans 12, verse 12. He's talking about what they should be doing. Romans 12 is a great book in terms of what it means to live as a Christian.

And in verse 12, he says, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, and continuing what? Steadfastly in prayer. So just as we should be rejoicing in God, we should be patient when we're going through trials, we should always be continuing to pray. And we could go on.

Let's also look at Luke chapter 11. And we're not going to read the story. We already talked about it.

But I just want to remind you of the last phrase of that little parable, Luke chapter 11, verse 8. It says, I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence, notice that, because of his persistence, he will give him as many as he needs. And so the question comes, why do we have to persist in prayer? Now, during the break, someone came and asked me some questions about how to pray. And I really appreciate the questions, because sometimes, you know, I could be talking and sharing and be missing all of you.

So if you have a question, feel free to come and ask me a question. But one of the books that is very, very helpful, very simple, Steps to Christ has a section on prayer. That's very helpful.

Another book that helped me greatly was a little book called With Christ in the School of Prayer by Andrew Murray. He was a Dutch Reformed pastor. So our friend Keith is probably a fan of Andrew Murray, should be.

But Andrew Murray's book, With Christ in the School of Prayer, is wonderful. It has short little chapters. So you can read one chapter every day for your devotional.

It's only like a page and a half of a fairly small book. But as a result of that book, I learned how to pray. He makes the following statement.

Of all the mysteries of the prayer world, the need of persevering prayer is one of the greatest. That the Lord, who is so loving and longing to bless, should have to be supplicated time after time, sometimes year after year, before the answer comes, we cannot easily understand. It is also one of the greatest practical difficulties to prayer.

Would you agree? That is a great mystery, why we have to continue praying and praying and praying. Well, I'd like to share some examples from the Bible why they needed to pray. And I think perhaps it will be instructive.

The first person I'd like to talk about is Hannah. Remember Hannah? She was the mother of Samuel. Do we need to look up the story, or can I just share the story? Share the story.

Hannah was a godly mother. Well, she was a godly wife. But she found herself in a home with a woman by the name of Penina, who was also married to the same man, Elkanah.

And Penina had many children, but Hannah had how many? None. Zero zip nada. And Penina was not shy about kind of making Hannah feel sad.

Hannah prayed and prayed and prayed. And then finally, what was the breakthrough in her prayer life? Who can tell me? What was the breakthrough? She said, 1 Samuel chapter 1. Look at that. I guess we're going to look some of these up.

1 Samuel chapter 1, verse 11. Samuel comes before kings. 1 Samuel chapter 1, verse 11.

Then she made a vow. It says, O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maid servant, and remember me, and not forget your maid servant, but will give your maid servant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head. Hannah said, God, if you'll give me a male child, a baby boy, I will give that baby boy to you.

And also, it's interesting. Sometimes, I won't put a razor in his head. In other words, she was saying, I'm going to surrender this child to you, not only that, but I'm going to also surrender, listen carefully, the way I'm going to raise that child to you as well.

Very significant point. Sometimes we get children, and we try to raise them the way we feel is best. But she said, no, I'll raise him the way you want as well.

When she said, I will not allow a razor to come to his head, she was going to raise him as a Nazarite. Set apart especially for God. Now, it's interesting.

After that, she had many other children. But until she was prepared to give this son to God, she didn't have that baby. Why? Here's why.

She was praying for a son, but her prayers were too small. God was holding out for a prophet, and God couldn't safely entrust that son with her until she was prepared to give Samuel to God, because he had been chosen for God. And once he'd been given to God, then God could safely give her all the other children that would be really her children.

That first child belonged to God, and God had to make sure that that was understood. And I believe often when we're praying, we are praying prayers that are too small, that they're all about our needs and our desires, and sometimes our broken heart or what we're missing. And God is saying, hold on until you pray the bigger prayer that includes my will, my future.

I can't answer your prayers. And I think often our prayers are delayed, because our prayers would limit God, or we would receive the answer and use the blessing for ourselves instead of the way it needs to be used. That's a major reason why our prayers are not answered.

She wanted a son, but God needed a prophet. Another story where we find that praying went on was when Elijah was praying for the rain to return. You can find it in 1 Kings 18.43. 1 Kings 18.43. It says there, verse 42, they had prayed and fire came down, and now Elijah was going to pray.

It says, and Elijah went up to eat and drink. He went up on a mountain right there, Mount Carmel. 1 Kings 18, verse 42.

And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel. Then he bowed down on the ground and put his face between the knees and said to his servant, go up now and look towards the sea. So he went up and looked and said, there's nothing.

And seven times he said, go again. Why did he have to pray so many times? In doing some study, the suggestion is made, and I believe it's the right suggestion, that had the prayer come the first time, he might have taken it for granted. He might have taken it for granted.

In fact, this is what I read. Had there was no sign that his petition was granted, but with a strong faith he urged his plea to the throne of grace, had he given up in discouragement at the sixth time, his prayer would not have come. God does not always answer our prayer the first time we call upon him.

For should he do this, we might take it for granted that we have a right to all the blessings and favors bestowed upon us. We would become careless and fail to realize our dependence on him. In other words, when we pray, we need to remember that this is something that God is doing for us and give him the credit for this.

Had he only prayed six times, apparently, it would not have worked. Now who can tell me another story in the Bible when a person had to do something seven times? We've already talked about the children of Israel, right? The story of Naaman, right? Naaman was sick and a little girl knew about a prophet that could help him and he was given specific instructions, did it seven times, right? I think the point is that we need to obey completely and pray until the answer comes. Another story where we find that there was a long delay was in the story of Joseph.

Remember how Joseph was growing up and he was taken in captivity, right? Sent off to Egypt. There he was sold as a slave to a man by the name of Potiphar. It wasn't an easy life, but God was preparing him.

Somehow, when Joseph was at home and things were going well, Joseph was still a little full of himself. But in the process of being sold, he began to turn to God and trust God. You know when you're sent off to a distant country as a slave, suddenly I'm sure prayer becomes more important.

When I was traveling here and we were several hours over the ocean and they said, we're sorry to inform you that we've lost control of the heating system. And we don't know if you're going to be super hot or we're going to have no heat at all. And I knew that a few years earlier, a jet over Greece had just flown until it crashed because it was an autopilot.

And they sent up fighter jets to see what was wrong. And everyone in the jet was immobile because they'd frozen because the temperature up there was like minus 60 or something. I knew it was not a good thing.

And I prayed with a bit of fervency at that moment that God would bring us back without freezing to death. I was glad they took us back. And when tough times come, you pray.

Joseph prayed more. And God really blessed him. But God knew that there was still too much of self inside of Joseph.

So he allowed Joseph to be falsely accused and sent to jail. And there, interestingly enough, just as he'd been faithful to Potiphar, he was faithful in the jail. And eventually, though he was forgotten, and he stayed there quite a long time, when he got completely empty of self, when he got to the point of saying, apparently, God, I'll never leave here, God said, now I can trust you with great responsibility.

And he was promoted from the dungeon to being, in effect, the prime minister of Egypt. You see, he'd gotten to the point of being God's man, doing God's work. Listen carefully.

God's way on Pharaoh's throne. And often, we're praying and saying, God, use me. And God's saying, there's too much of you left for me to use in a great way.

Oftentimes, when we pray, God says, you need to die to self before I can really change things. You've got to die to the point where you're willing to listen to me and actually do what I tell you to do. We've already talked about Israel.

Remember, they were praying, bless me in Egypt prayers when God wanted to deliver them from Egypt. And until they were prepared to leave from Egypt, God couldn't really help them. Actually, things went the other way.

Another time, Daniel was praying. Remember the story of Daniel? It's found in Daniel chapter 10. Look at Daniel chapter 10.

Daniel chapter 10. Daniel is amongst the first, if not the first, of the minor prophets. Daniel chapter 10, verse 12.

It says there, then he said to me, do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your feet to understand and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I've come because of your words. From the first moment that Daniel was praying, his words were heard. When we pray, we need to believe that God is here in our prayers.

Lord, please do such and such. Please intervene with such and such a person. And then we close the prayer.

Thank you that you've heard our prayers. If you want to have a prayer experience where you truly feel that you're being heard, always thank God at the end of your prayer that it's being heard, that God is already intervening. Daniel couldn't see a change, but God said from the first day that you prayed, I was responding.

But notice verse 13. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me 21 days, and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I've been left alone there with the king of Persia. In other words, something came up that prevented God from working as quickly as he wanted.

And oftentimes when we pray, something comes up, but we need to keep praying. God said, from the first day I heard. From the first day I heard.

Now notice 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 7. 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 7. Paul was having a problem. He speaks of having a thorn in the flesh, something that God gave. Notice verse 7. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, Paul said, God was really blessing me.

And he says, a thorn in the flesh was given me, a messenger of Satan. He says, God actually allowed something to come to me, lest I be exalted. God allowed something to come, lest I feel too good about myself.

Concerning this thorn that came from Satan, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would depart. And he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, most gladly, I would rather boast in my infirmities that the power of God may rest upon me.

It's possible that there are some who are struggling with some kind of physical ailment, but God has allowed that to come. Because that very thing is the thing that is allowing you to walk in a strong way with the Lord Jesus Christ. And what I would suggest to you is, if God has allowed that to be a blessing, why would you desperately go from place to place trying to get it changed? Now, Paul prayed three times, right? Did God answer Paul? Did God answer him? Three times I pleaded, and he said to me what? My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

God answered, but the answer was no. He was answered, but the answer was no. And I believe that sometimes God allows thorn kind of experiences to come to us, because he knows those very things are the things that are helping us.

Doesn't mean we go out and get help. Maybe that very experience will cause us to go get the advice of someone else, but we need to persist and pray. Now, I want to read from Andrew Murray again.

Listen carefully. When after persevering supplication, our prayer remains unanswered, it's often easy for our lazy flesh to stop praying. I'm trying to use easier word, because he uses complicated words here.

It's often easier for our lazy flesh, and it has all the appearance of pious submission, to say this is a spiritual thing to do, to think that we must now cease praying, and may have his secret reason for withholding his answer to our request. In other words, we ignore that there's something else. It is by faith alone that the difficulties overcome.

When once faith has taken its stand upon God's word in the name of Jesus, and has yielded itself to the leading of the spirit to seek God's will and honor, it need not be discouraged by delay. He says, when we've been praying and there's a delay, we don't need to be discouraged. Be hopeful.

Be confident. In fact, he says sometimes it's easy to say it must not be God's will and move on. And he says that's actually an indicator of the diseased state of the church or the individual.

Why? Because we choose not to search our hearts, or search our prayers, while God is not answering our prayers. Did you hear me? We choose not to search our hearts, or search our prayers, while God is not answering. Is there something, God, about the way that I'm living that's keeping you from answering? Is there something about what I'm asking for that's keeping you from answering? It's easier to say it must not be God's will than to actually say, I wonder if maybe it has to do with me in some way.

I prayed for a long time. And remember, I felt convicted that I needed to write some letters. And that was the breakthrough for me.

And I would urge all of you to say, and we need to do it on a regular basis, Lord, where do I stand with you? Is there something in my life that is standing in the way? Is there something standing in the way? Anyway, often there is a delay, but God knows what he's doing. Now, the question is asked, why should we praise? Why should we praise? Look up Romans 8, 28. Look up Romans 8, verse 28.

It says there, and we know, I'll wait for just a moment. I apologize for going so quickly sometimes. It says, and we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.

It says, we know that how much is working for good? All things. If that is true, do we have any reason to not praise God? No, it says in all things, God is working for good. Look at Ephesians chapter 5, verse 20.

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 20. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. G-E-P-C.

I was taught that by Mark Finley. That's how he taught me. He says, G-E-P-C.

Remember that, and you'll always know those four books. OK, 520. Giving thanks always for how much? For all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Paul said we should thank God at all times for all things. And maybe you're standing there or sitting there saying, Dan, are you sure? Yes, I am quite sure. Look at Philippians chapter 4, verses 6 and 7. Philippians chapter 4, verses 6 and 7. Paul says, Philippians 4, 6 and 7. Be anxious for how much? For nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

So Paul says, when you pray, Lord, you know I'm facing this problem. But Lord, I know that all things work together for good. Somehow this is meant for my good.

Please change my situation. I'm going to trust you in the way that you deal with it. Some of you have perhaps read the books of Corrie Tenboom.

Remember The Hiding Place? She used to go lecturing around the world. She would have a briefcase, and she used to struggle. She would pray, and then she would worry.

And someone said, you know, Corrie, the problem is your prayer life is like your briefcase. You bring your briefcase, you sit it on the table, and you pull all your books out, you give us the lectures, and then you put them all back in, and you go off carrying your briefcase. She says, when you pray, she says, they said, you unload all your troubles, then you say amen, then you load them all back in the briefcase, and you go on your way carrying your burdens as if you'd never prayed.

Many of us pray that way. I was just praying from a book I found of George Miller actually while I was over in New Zealand, where he said, if when we pray and we're burdened after we pray, we have failed to cast our burdens on the Lord. He says, when you pray and you've really given your burden to God, you should leave that prayer with a light and happy heart.

Why? Giving thanks to God always for all things, for we know that all things work together for good. Now, I'd like to share with you just a bit of a story, the story of Daniel. I would like to suggest that from beginning to end, Daniel's life was a much-blessed life.

And you just help me with this. Daniel is taken in captivity to Babylon. His parents are at home.

So they call their friends up and say, praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Our son has been taken captive.

Was that a good prayer? It wasn't. But when everything is said and done, was that a blessing? Absolutely. Daniel gets there, and he's tested on what he's eating.

Daniel has a chance of a lifetime to make a difference for his people and people all over the world if he gets through this special school that King Nebuchadnezzar set up. But they were serving the kind of food that he'd been taught went against his ability to learn. And Daniel could have said, God, just this one time, it won't matter.

But he went to the one in charge and said, you know, I can't do this. Give me a 10-day trial. And as a result of his faithfulness to God, he was shown to be 10 times wiser.

Praise the Lord for the test. And as a result of that, he's one of the wise men. And there's a knock at the door, and there are some executioners there saying, we're to take you out and execute you.

Was that a praise the Lord moment? Was it? Was it? Well, it wasn't, but ultimately, was it? It was, because you see, King Nebuchadnezzar was given to fits of temper. He got upset quite easily. Said, hold on, let me go and pray with my friends to our God.

You know? And so he went and he prayed. He asked for time. And he came back and said, King Nebuchadnezzar, there's a God.

And Nebuchadnezzar discovered there was a God who knew the future. That was truly a praise the Lord moment. Daniel told him about this wonderful vision.

There was the head of gold, you know, and all the body parts and different metals representing the fact that one kingdom would follow another. And Nebuchadnezzar wasn't happy about the dream, we know that. Because he set up a beautiful statue in the plains of Jura, right, with the head of gold and the arms and chest of silver.

Right? Wrong. The entire image was made of gold, because Nebuchadnezzar kind of wanted to help God with the future, to say, you know, here's the future. I'm the whole statue.

It's interesting in the story, we only find Daniel's three friends. Where was Daniel? I believe Nebuchadnezzar knew that Daniel might come up and say, hold on, King, there's a problem with the statue. Remember, you're going off the scene, and there ought to be the silver there.

I think he told Daniel, go as far away as you possibly can, you know, to such and such a place, because he didn't want anyone coming along and reminding him of the dream. Maybe he thought only the two of them knew. So he was gone.

And those boys could have been tempted to just say, God, you know, we're going to kneel, but we're really praying to you this time. No, they didn't want anyone to misunderstand that their allegiance was to God. And guess what? Nebuchadnezzar was told, and they were brought, and were they thrown in the fiery furnace? Absolutely.

You know, when we pray, it doesn't mean we avoid the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar had them heat the fire up many times more than normal. And the people that threw them in the fiery furnace died from the heat.

But for those boys, the only thing that burned was that which was unnaturally binding them. And sometimes God allows us to go into the fiery furnace, because there are things that are keeping us from being all he wants us to be. But it was a praise the Lord moment.

Then there's another kingdom. I'm not going into the whole story of Daniel, but there's another kingdom. A new king didn't know about Daniel.

And Daniel was one of the wise people. And some other wise men were a little jealous. And they thought, you know, how can we get at Daniel? They looked through his life, couldn't find anything.

Praise God that it's possible to live in such a godly way that others looking on can't find anything wrong for us. That's what we should aim for. Anyway, they looked through, and they said the only thing we can do with Daniel is get him on his religion, because Daniel will never deny his Lord.

So they set it up and had the king sign the decree. And Daniel heard it. And if you would, turn to the book of Daniel.

Daniel, I think it's Daniel chapter 6. Daniel chapter 6, verse 10. It says, now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, where? With his windows open, when Daniel knew that this decree had been made, he walked home.

He opened up his window, or he knelt at his window. And notice what happens. Open towards Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since his early days.

It says that Daniel went, and he could have said, God, today, I'm going to pray as I'm walking around. He could have said, God, today, I'm going to pray in the stairwell. Or, God, today, I'm going to push the furniture up against the window so they can't see me.

No, it says, he went to his open window because Daniel didn't want anyone to think that he was afraid of serving God, no matter what the consequences might be. And he was caught, and he was thrown into the lions then, wasn't he? And Daniel had a night never to be forgotten, right? A night like no other. Well, the next day, the king came rushing out, had enough confidence in Daniel's God to actually come and see if he'd survived.

And when he discovered that Daniel was well, he got the other wise men, and they threw those wise men in the lions' den. And before they hit the bottom of the pit, the Bible says, the lions attacked them. How many wise men were conspiring to get at Daniel after that? How many? I think the word was out in the street, don't touch Daniel, OK? He's OK.

We're not going to play with Daniel anymore. But did the new king know about his God? Would you agree that every single incident was a praise the Lord moment in his life? The Bible says, in all things, God is working for good. If we don't understand that, there's much that will happen that will confuse us.

But I believe with all my heart that when we surrender our lives to God, it says, all things work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose. If we have surrendered our lives to God, not if we haven't surrendered our lives to God. If you haven't surrendered your life to God, you're on your own.

I love you, but you know, that's not where God's protection comes. But if you surrender your life to God, it says that all things work for good. And that's why Paul could say, all things, giving thanks for how much? Some things? That's what some people do.

But Paul says, giving thanks for all things at all times. It's been my experience, personally, that as I have attempted to live for God, that I've discovered that this matter of saying thanks and all things really works. One of the things I was instructed by was a story in our family.

My dad was a Swiss person, lived in Switzerland. At the age of 19, decided to come to the United States. And as many young people do, he began selling books door to door to try to raise money.

And he came to a house in Geneva, John Calvin's city, knocked on a house there in Geneva. And a man came to the door, listened to a story, and said, you come back the next day, come back tomorrow, and I'll give you all the money necessary to go to school in America for a year. Well, that was a significant praise the Lord moment.

Dad went back, not sure it was true, and received the money. And then he went, it was 1939, World War II was beginning, so he went to the Swiss military to ask exemption from serving the military. Then dad went to a boat company and got a birth on a boat crossing the ocean.

And then he went to the US embassy and applied for a visa. And they said, a number will come from Washington. Without it, you can't go, but it will come in no time.

Don't worry. So dad rejoiced. I mean, it was full of praise the Lord moments.

But then as he would go back to the consulate to ask for that visa number, they said, we don't know what's wrong. It's not coming, but don't worry. You still have time.

Then one day when he returned, they said, we're sorry, but the number's not here. You've got to cancel that boat. Well, it caused my dad to wonder.

But what does the Bible say? Giving thanks at all times for all things or the other order. Well, dad was perplexed he was to have left in September 1. September 1, the first boat was sunk in World War II. That was my dad's boat.

That was my dad's boat. God had intervened with the consulate to make sure that that visa number didn't get there, so he went in November, November 1. As a result of that, my dad said, you know, my life belongs to God. I should be in the bottom of the Atlantic.

And so no matter how he was tempted, he always worked for God. Many of you, I believe, are facing situations that are difficult. If you don't trust God and you look for the exits, you may miss the greatest blessings that God has for you.

I like to use this phrase. It comes from someone else. Many of God's greatest blessings are delivered in rough packing cases.

They don't look that way when they sit at the post office. But when we unpack it, when we endure, when we're trusting God, we discover that there's a blessing there that could not have come any other way. A blessing comes that could not have come any other way.

Just one other story. I think I've made my point, but a personal story. I remember when I was moving from Pennsylvania to Michigan, I had moved everything.

And I needed to go back and pick up some things I'd left in a storage container and a trailer, because everything else was moved and it was just these last few things. So I went back to Pennsylvania, picked up the trailer, and was instructed by the man who had been doing some repairs on it that you need to put grease in the hubs every time you fill up the tank with gas. I said, OK.

And you may know me by now. I love to talk with people. I love people.

And so I'd spent the whole day talking to people. And I was only packing the stuff on the trailer at 9 o'clock at night. And I was going to just drive through the night.

And it was going to be an 11-hour drive home, a long drive home. And so I'd packed the stuff in the trailer. And there were some boxes, some moving boxes I didn't need.

So I'd gone to a dumpster. And I was putting all the boxes on the dumpster. And while I was doing that, suddenly a truck roared up.

Man got out and was very angry. He said, what in the world are you doing? That's my dumpster. How dare you put your trash in my dumpster? And I said, hold on, hold on.

I'm leasing space from you. It's here. I thought it was OK for the people leasing storage space to use it.

He said, no, no, no. You must take it. And I said, but it's only if you, he said, you have to unload all those boxes and put on your trailer.

Well, I wasn't a happy camper. But I had no choice. So I put all those boxes on this trailer.

And I headed down the road. It was dark. I couldn't see anything.

There was no moon that night. And where I lived in Pennsylvania, there were many hills. So it was this kind of thing going along.

And I finally pulled onto what we call a toll road. It's a road where you have to pay money every couple of hours to continue driving. And I pulled through the toll booth, pulled to the side, because I said, I'd better check the load to make sure everything's OK before I had to look further.

And I discovered, to my horror, that the tailgate had fallen off. And at that point, some of the stuff was just teetering on the back of my trailer about to fall off. So I pushed it all back on.

I did a U-turn, explained what had happened to the toll booth attendant. And then I kind of sat on the side of the road and said, Lord, what do you want me to do? But then something struck me. I have these boxes that I was forced to keep, picture boxes.

They're thick, they're narrow, because they're for pictures. And I'll just line them up vertically along the back. And that'll be my trailer, the back part of my trailer.

So I did that, and I headed down the road. It was completely dark. I couldn't see anything.

I must have filled the tank up a couple of times, or at least once. But when I crossed into Ohio, the next state over, I pulled into a gas station. And I'd filled up the car with gas.

And then I had gone to the back, and I was just putting grease in the trailers I'd been instructed when I suddenly felt a drop of rain. Now, when you're using cardboard as your tailgate, what happens to cardboard in the rain? It turns into notebook paper, right, eventually? So I thought to myself, and I said, I have a problem. So I rushed into the attendant, and I said, do you have any tall garbage bags? And they gave it to me.

I explained, and I rushed outside, and I put them upside down over my boxes. And I wasn't too worried. I said, you know, this is probably just a few drops right here.

I'll be out of it in a few minutes. No problem. Within 10 minutes, I was in a cloud burst that continued for the next two hours.

When I got to Michigan, all the boxes that had not been covered by plastic were truly notebook paper flopping in the wind. But the three boxes on the back were perfect like before. And here's what struck me.

Before I even knew that I needed those boxes, God sent someone along special that night to force me, against my will, to take them with me. And I was upset. And I told God that I was really upset about it.

It should have been a praise the Lord moment. And then God knew exactly when I would need the plastic to put over them, because he had me stopping and bending down outside where I could get the plastic. God not only knew my need, he knew my timing.

And I could share with you many stories of the same kind, where in my own life, I've realized that that which sometimes is frustrating has, in the end, turned out to be for good. When we pray, and I used to have a lecture, at least I used to tell it this way, how to answer, I mean, how to recognize answers to prayer. Because many blessings come all the time, but it doesn't look like the blessing we ask for.

And therefore, we say, that's not it, God. Come on, answer my prayer. When for all we know, that's the very thing that God sent in answer to our prayer.

If you understand what I've just shared with you, I believe it will change the way you pray. I believe you will find more answers than you have obtained here before, before that time. What does it say? In all things, God is working for good.

Remember I mentioned praying Haid? And I didn't want to share it until now. But he would pray and pray. And God had developed this deal with him where he would win four people every day.

And sometimes it didn't happen. It's interesting, he said, more times than not, I discovered it was lack of praise in my life, lack of joy in my life, that caused God to stop sending people my way. Somehow God, when we are genuinely happy Christians, I'm not talking about slap happy or whatever, but genuinely rejoicing in God because of what he's doing in our lives, having an authentic relationship with God, God is able to bring people to us because he knows that somehow their own experience will resonate from our experience.

But if we are unhappy Christians, God says, I don't need any more like that person. And God just kind of holds things off. Now if you'll humor me, I just have to read just a bit of a quotation.

I've been really good, haven't I? I could have read many more quotations. All of you know I have plenty of quotations here in front of me. But sometimes you have to let the speaker.

This is one of those times. This is from the Review and Herald, volume three, page 139. Those who follow inclination and judge from appearances are not good judges of what God is doing.

They are filled with discontent. They see failure where there's indeed triumph, a great loss where there's only gain. When we only look at appearances often, we miss what God is doing.

We see problems where there's only gain. Another one. I testify to those who love and serve God that we miss very much because we do not grasp the blessings that may be ours in affliction.

All our sufferings and sorrows, all our temptations and trials, all our sadness and griefs, all our persecutions and privations, and in short, all things work together for good. All experiences and circumstances are God's workmen, whereby good is meant and brought to us. And I don't know where it is.

I don't have it here in front of me. But I've read the statement as well that when we learn to follow the opening providences of God with gratitude, we will discover joy and victories we've never experienced before. When we learn to follow the opening providences of God with gratitude, we'll find a joy and victory of which we've never had before.

Either God is alive or he's dead, OK? If he's alive and he's promised to be good to us, we should tell our faces and tell our mouths, OK? And if we can't, then either God is lying. And if so, why bother reading the Bible? Or he's dead, why bother being a Christian? In my life, he's very much alive. He's an amazing God.

I hope you want him the same as I do. And if you follow some of what I've shared with you, and I've shared as best I could, not the best. It's been very shortened and condensed.

I believe you'll find a joy in prayer that perhaps you haven't had before. I wouldn't want to not know what I've learned about prayer. So I'd like to close with prayer, and then I'll turn it back to my friend, Johnny, here.

Father in heaven, I'm grateful that you have allowed me to come and share a little bit about prayer. I'm thankful, Lord, for all the people that stuck by to hear, because every part of this is important. I'm glad, Lord, that there are people like Hudson Taylor's mother, who persisted in praying until she saw results.

That, Father, there were students at Knox College in Canada who prayed and brought about somehow the gift of languages to Jonathan Goforth. I'm thankful as well, Lord, that for other people, Lord, in modern times, like praying hard, as they were rejoicing in you and persisting, you were bringing about the conversion and the transformation of people around them. On a personal basis, Lord, I'm grateful that my dad survived that boat.

I'm very grateful. Help us, Lord, to be thankful at all times for all things. Help us, Lord, to make our requests known to you with thanksgiving, because in all things, you're working for good.

Now, Lord, I don't know these people. They come from a variety of backgrounds. And Lord, I know that you have plans for them, plans for good and not for evil, to give them a future and a hope.

Father, no matter what the circumstances might be, might they, Father, simply say, Lord, I want to change. I want a difference. And follow as you lead them.

For those, Lord, those that are further along the way, help them to understand, Lord, why, if it's something in their prayers or something in their lives that might be hindering, or if, Lord, there's other factors outside. But help us, Lord, to keep praying. And for all of us, Lord, no matter what happens, help us to recognize that when we surrender our lives to you, when we're choosing to live in that way that is called according to your purposes, that all things are working for good.

All things, not just some things. Thank you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/X83gn7uAywg.mp4>

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