

YOU ASKED FOR IT

Part 1: Winning the Hand You're Dealt
Five Winning Choices from God's Word
That Will Make a Difference in My Life

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Words of Encouragement Days 71-77



The Bible has much to say about the issues we deal with each and every day. **YOU ASKED FOR IT** is a series that looks at a few of those issues:

- **How to deal with stress**
- **Getting over what people think about me**
- **Learning to be who God wants me to be**
- **Recognizing God's voice**
- **Discovering my true identity in Jesus**

So what does the Bible say about us? It says we are created by God as complex, multifaceted, not easy to understand, and not easy to explain people. And with good reason! Layer upon layer, God made us unique. During this series, we'll take a deeper look at those complexities and **discover a sense** of who we were **made to be**.

YOU ASKED FOR IT sermon series is based on some of the most requested "How To" answers from God's Word for some of life's most perplexing issues.

This Week's Memory Verse:

***I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
Psalm 139:14***

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 71

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Matthew 6:6

THE POWER OF THE SECRET CLOSET

DO you have a prayer closet? I don't mean an actual clothes closet (though that could do), but rather do you have a habit of shutting yourself in with God? To have a “secret closet” simply means to be shut in with God anywhere, anytime – giving quality chosen time to yearn after Him, seek Him, and call on His name. “Prayer closet” means “prayer habit.” Do you have a daily practice of getting alone with God? Practice is what the prayer closet is all about. It is about disciplining yourself to come before God, to answer when the Holy Spirit's wooing calls you. It means having a heart that says, “I must get alone with God; I must talk with my Father today!”

Don't be deceived, it takes concentrated effort to pray! When you go into your secret closet, shut the door and turn off the phone. Any child of God who sets his heart to seek the Father is going to face what can be called “satanic interruptions.” The devil will come to interrupt you, to get your mind to focus upon anything except your heavenly Father. Jesus clearly said, “When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father, who is in the secret place.” (Matthew 6:6). In other words, when you go into your closet, don't start praying until you shut the door. You need to approach your Father with a clear, uncluttered mind, so shut out all the thoughts that keep you drifting away from Him, and be awake and focused, not wasting words or thinking of something else. You can let your mind wander when you talk with your friends or when you

are on the job or in school, but when you come into the presence of the King, the Bible says, “He sees in secret!”

Do you go into your secret closet and pray haphazardly for hours, scatter-gun-style, never directing focused prayers, never hitting the target of God's ear because you don't know what you want or need? Many people pray for long hours, yet they are powerless in their daily walk. They wonder why the answers don't come, why they don't have victory. It is because they pray with their closet door wide open and leave open the door of distractions. God does not answer half-hearted, insincere prayers.

Beloved, this discipline of uninterrupted, focused prayer is absolutely imperative. If we are to meet with God and be heard by Him, we have to be where He is: in secret! “Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” (Matthew 6:6). God has invited you to come boldly to His throne of grace, and His throne of grace is behind closed doors!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you that You desire to meet me without interruption and without delay. Help me today to approach You with an uncluttered mind. When we meet to talk, help me to shut out all the thoughts that cause my mind to drift from you, and help me to stay awake and focused on our conversation, not wasting words and thinking of something else, as I spend time with You. Strengthen me to keep my eyes on You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 72

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Philippians 4:6

LEANING ON GOD’S PROMISES WITH PRAYER

SCRIPTURE makes clear that the answer to everything in our lives is prayer with faith. Paul writes, “Seek the Lord about every area of your life and thank Him ahead of time for hearing you!” He emphasizes that we are always to pray first and not as a last resort after going to our friends, then to a pastor or counselor, and finally ending up on our knees. Jesus tells us, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33) We are to go to the Lord first!

Our ministry receives heartrending letters from multitudes of broken Christians. Families are breaking up. People who walked faithfully with Christ for years are living in fear and defeat. Discouragement is overwhelming to some. In each situation, people have been overcome by something – sin, depression, worldliness, covetousness – and year after year, their problems seem to get worse. Yet, what shocks me most about their letters is that very few of these Christians ever mention prayer. They turn to tapes, books, counselors, call-in radio programs, therapies of all kinds, but rarely to prayer.

Why is it so hard for Christians to seek God for their desperate needs when they are in times of crisis? After all, the Bible stands as one long testimony that God hears the cries of His children and answers them with tender love.

- *“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.” (Ps. 34:15)*
- *“The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles.” (Psalm 34:17)*
- *“This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us, And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” (1 John 15:14-15)*
- *“Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” (Matthew 21:22)*

These promises are overwhelming evidence of God’s care. When was the last time you turned first to the Lord in prayer?

TODAY’S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You that You are but a prayer away. Help me not to lean on my own understanding but in everything to acknowledge You so that You can direct my words, thoughts and actions. Thank you for Your promise to always hear me when I call to You.

In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 73

"Christ is the mighty power of God and the wonderful wisdom of God." 1 Corinthians 1:24

TAKE IT AWAY, JESUS

THERE once was an old scientist who traveled from university to university delivering lectures on his field of expertise. After long weeks of travel, the scientist and Bob, his chauffeur, became friends.

After some time, the scientist grew tired of giving the same lecture over and over, so one day—knowing his chauffeur had heard his lecture so many times that he had it memorized—the scientist asked Bob to give the lecture for him. Bob gave it a whirl, and the lecture went off perfectly. No one knew that the “scientist” talking to the audience was the chauffeur and that the “chauffeur” sitting in the front row was actually the scientist. There was even a question-and-answer time, but Bob had heard the scientist answer the same questions so many times that he answered them all perfectly.

Then someone asked a new question—a question Bob couldn’t answer on his own. “That’s a great question,” he said confidently, “but it has a simple answer. It’s so simple, in fact, that even my chauffeur can answer it.” Nodding toward the front row, he added, “Take it away, Bob.”

Bob was wise not because of what he knew, but because of whom he knew. He knew the answers because he had hung around the scientist, and as long as the scientist was close by, Bob had nothing to worry about.

As a Christian, you might not look too wise to the non-Christians around you. When people toss you tough questions about God, you might not always have the answers, but isn’t it encouraging to know that you have a close friend who does know all the answers? Not only that, but He is the answer. His name is Jesus Christ, and Paul calls Him “the wonderful wisdom of God.”

Just as Bob the chauffeur spent a lot of time with the scientist and learned from him, so you need to make time to learn from Jesus. That means reading the Bible and listening to your parents, pastor, or Sunday school teachers when they talk about the Lord. Even if you don’t always know how to answer the tough questions, you can know that Jesus is always with you. Just look His way and say, “Take it away, Jesus.”

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You that You are both wisdom and power. Your word says all I have to do is to look to You when I need to know an answer about You. Help me to know You better so I can answer the questions my friends ask, and thank You that You always know the answers. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 74

“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Ephesians 4:14-16

LOVING PEOPLE . . . HONESTLY

SUPPOSE you spotted a friend asleep in the middle of the street and a car was approaching. What would you do? No question, right? You would run into the middle of the road and shake your friend until they were awake — even if you had to slap him or splash a soda in his face. You would point to the oncoming car. You would grab him by the hand and run for safety.

That one was easy. But sometimes we see the people we know making poor choices —choices that in the long run can be just as destructive as waking up in the middle of a road to meet an oncoming car face-first. Maybe you have friends in the habit of lying, cheating, stealing, or some other destructive behavior. You know what you should say and what you want to say, but it’s a little harder to spit out the words, isn’t it?

Once again, since Jesus was the perfect example of love. Let’s look at how He loved people in tough situations. The Bible tells us about a time when religious leaders dragged a woman who had been caught sinning before Jesus. Jesus didn’t trash the woman for her sin, but neither did He ignore her wrongdoing. He kindly told her to “go and sin no more.” (John 8:11)

Another time, Jesus met a Samaritan woman—a foreigner most Jewish people wouldn’t have talked to. He knew she was living a sinful lifestyle. Once again, Jesus didn’t put her down, but neither did He let her sin slide by. He lovingly helped her to see that He was the only one who could truly meet her needs. (see John 4:4-26)

Jesus even confronted Peter, one of His best friends in the world, when Peter stood in the way of God’s purposes. (see Matthew 16:21-23) And again, Jesus didn’t attack Peter, but He didn’t ignore his mistake.

Jesus spoke the truth to these people because He loved them. He knew they weren’t living in a way that was pleasing to God, and He wanted them to experience God’s best in life. He showed how truth and love can go hand in hand.

True love is honest because it seeks God’s best in the lives of the people we love. It’s hard to see our friends making poor choices— choices that keep them from God’s best and eventually bring them great harm, but Jesus has given us the perfect picture of how to help them. Follow His example. Be honest with your friends. It’s the most loving thing you can do.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Lord, Speaking the truth in love to a friend or someone we love who is making wrong choices is a challenge that we all will face one time or another. When the opportunity presents itself, help me first to check my own life and make certain I am being honest with myself about choices I am making. Then, help me to look to You for strength and wisdom to speak the truth in love. Thank you for helping me to make the right choice at the right time in my life and to help others in need. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 75

“Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

SOMETHING TO BOAST ABOUT

HAVE you ever seen pro-athletes from rival teams being interviewed before a big game? They come on camera all pumped up, talking up their team—and trashing the other guys. “We have the strongest defense in the nation,” they brag. “There’s no way they’re getting past us today.” Bragging is part of the game. But it’s pointless. No matter what athletes say and no matter how sure they are of stomping the other team, the game is still won or lost on the field.

It’s easy to laugh at sports figures who try to impress others with their triumphs. But Christians often fall into the trap of relying on all the good things we’ve done to win God’s favor. Take a vote: Which of these great deeds are good enough to impress God—and maybe get someone into heaven?

- I got straight A’s on all my Sunday school report cards.

- I played the accordion in church every week for fifty years.

- Oh yeah? Look at my Swahili translation of the Old Testament.

- Every Sunday I walked ten elderly ladies to church through a blizzard when the snow was up to my throat. And it was uphill both ways.

Those words sound as ridiculous as athletes before a game, don’t they? God doesn’t accept us because of the great things we do. We don’t have to jump through any hoops to earn his love. Why? Because Jesus is the One who already won our acceptance with God. He was the one-and-only adequate sacrifice for our sins. That’s why the Scriptures say, “The person who wishes to boast should boast only of what the Lord has done” (1 Corinthians 1:31).

We could never have earned our way into God’s family, but He accepted us anyway. And someday when we’re together in heaven, we will all proclaim that we are there because of the grace of God. He provided Jesus Christ for our salvation, and God will get all the glory.

PRAYER THOUGHT

Father, For your great, perfect, and complete a salvation, I worship and adore you. I pray that Your steady, full, continuous love for me in Jesus compels me to live for Your glory. With every choice I make, help me to strive to bring glory to Your name. I pray this In Jesus’ matchless and merciful name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 76

“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time He waits for His enemies to be made His footstool. For by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”
Hebrews 10:11-14

CLAIM IT AND ENJOY IT!

Trish told Angela a secret. Guess what? Angela told someone else. Ever since then, Angela has felt like a traitor, a two-timer, especially since Trish found out about it. Now every time she sees her, Angela apologizes to Trish.

Finally Trish stopped her. “Angela,” she said, “I’ve already forgiven you.”

“But I want to make sure that our relationship is solid. I value our relationship,” Angela insisted.

“Of course we are,” Trish said. “I need you to believe that I’ve forgiven you.”

Just as with our human relationships, some Christians have a hard time believing God has really forgiven their sins. They imagine God keeps a record of all their sins, waiting for the day when He will bring them up again and use their sins against them.

To experience the freedom of God’s forgiveness, take these steps:

1. Remember that God loves you unconditionally. You are special to God. He paid a high price for your salvation from sin—the death of His one and only Son. When you accept God’s gift of salvation, you receive His forgiveness and become His own child.

Sometimes you still disobey God, and you grieve Him (see Ephesians 4:30). Sure, He might discipline you when you sin, but He does that out of love because He wants you to share His holiness and enjoy the peaceful fruit of righteousness (see Hebrews 12:5-12).

2. Confess your sin. At times we all disobey God because of our sin nature (see Romans 7:20-25). According to God’s Word, the solution begins with confession (see 1 John 1:9). To confess means to agree with God that your disobedience is sin. God is already totally aware of your sinful attitudes and actions, but He wants you to admit it — to humble yourself before Him and experience His saying “I forgive you.”
3. Claim God’s forgiveness. Christ has already forgiven you once and for all through His death on the cross (see Hebrews 10:12-14; 1 Peter 3:18). But in order to turn from your sin and start down the right path, it’s important that you admit your need for forgiveness and accept the forgiveness that is already yours.

Claiming forgiveness is like discovering a treasure that’s buried in your own backyard. God’s loving forgiveness is already yours. Unearth it and enjoy it!

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You that You love me unconditionally! It is good to know that despite my flaws and the times I mess up, Your love for me is consistent. I confess that I’m not perfect and my sins are ever before me. Lord, I confess my sins to You and accept that I need and receive Your forgiveness. Thank You for Your free gift of grace today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 77

“To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, “If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:31-32

BLIND FAITH

YOU'RE trying to tell a friend about Jesus when she starts to sound like a college professor. “So,” she says with a creaky voice and one eyebrow raised, “can you prove with 100 percent certainty that Jesus rose from the dead?”

You're not sure where your friend suddenly got the jumbo-sized brain and smart-sounding question. Your answer comes out in a mousy squeak. “Umm, no.”

Some people call our Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection a “blind faith,” that is, a belief accepted without any proof. Or they label our faith with nasty labels like “ignorant,” “irrational,” or “unreasonable.” Those are all big words that more or less mean the same thing as “dumb.” If someone has put you down this way, you've probably been left feeling red-faced. Odd. Foolish. Defeated.

Some people figure that if a truth can't be proven with 100 percent certainty, it's useless or untrue. If Jesus' resurrection or His claim to be the Son of God can't be proven with 100 percent certainty, they say, then the Christian faith isn't worth believing. That's a myth. Few things can be proven with 100 percent certainty. In a court of law, for example, a jury can never be 100 percent sure that someone committed a crime. But the jury weighs the evidence to declare that someone is guilty—or not—beyond a reasonable doubt.

In the same way, belief that Jesus is God can be proven, through scripture, with 100 percent sureness. The apostle John wrote, “Jesus' disciples saw him do many other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book” (John 20:30). In other words, Jesus did many other things that demonstrated that He was the Son of God. The evidence the Bible provides doesn't include everything Jesus said or did, but what it does tell us is enough to form a well-grounded belief. John wrote in the next verse, “These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him you will have life” (John 20:31).

Your belief in Jesus is plenty smart. As Blaise Pascal—a famous French mathematician, philosopher, and scientist—said, “There is enough evidence for the Christian faith to convince anyone not already set against it. But there isn't enough evidence to bring anyone into God's kingdom who doesn't want to come.”

TODAY'S PRAYER

Jesus, I want to be able to share You with others. Give me opportunities to talk with others about the truth of who You are and what You have done for me. Thank You for helping me learn how to speak clearly and freely with others about You! In Your name, Jesus, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves!