

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



The Challenge of Wavering Faith

KEY PASSAGE: James 1:2-8 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Psalm 33:1 | Matthew 7:7 | Hebrews 13:5

► SUMMARY

How do you respond when God doesn't answer your prayers?

Does your faith waver if He doesn't provide what you've requested in the time and manner you expected? Although it may seem that the problem of fluctuating faith is the result of unanswered prayer, it's actually caused by a misunderstanding of what God is doing in your life.

► SERMON POINTS

The book of James tackles the issue of doubting by first addressing God's purpose for our trials. He says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1:2-3). Sometimes God doesn't immediately give the relief we seek because He's using that particular trial to produce something good in us.

Then He tells us what to do. "And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (vv. 4-8).

God wants us to come to Him with our requests, trusting that He hears us. However, if He doesn't answer them

immediately, it's not because He doesn't care. His purposes are always accomplished according to His timing, not ours. He may answer in a different manner or a later date than we expect. That's why we must wait and trust Him even when we see no evidence of an answer.

James says, when we doubt the Lord, we are like "the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind" (v. 6). One minute we're confidently trusting God, and the next moment we're wondering if He answers prayer at all. Perhaps we'll only believe Him if He gives us a little encouragement along the way. Or sometimes we fuss and argue with the Lord, thinking this will motivate Him to answer sooner. But all our doubts simply reveal that we are impatient, we don't know God's will, or we're not yet ready to receive His answer.

Whenever God delays in responding to our petitions, He's teaching us to consistently trust and believe Him, not because we see the answer, but because He's promised to hear and answer our prayers. When doubts arise because God delays, it's due to our lack of trust in Him, not a lack of care or ability on the Lord's part.

What causes our faith to waver?

- **We choose to rely on our feelings rather than on the Word of God.** If we shift our focus from the promises in His Word to our feelings, our faith will become unstable. But when our faith is grounded in the Word, we never have to question what God says because we stand on truth.
- **We yield to reason rather than believing God.** Human reasoning and faith are not always compatible. We may have all kinds of good reasons for making a particular

request to God, but He sees more of the situation than we do. If the Lord delays in answering, He has a divine reason that is good, legitimate, and helpful.

- **We fail to see God at work in our circumstances.** If the Lord doesn't change our circumstances, it's because He's using them to bring us to maturity. His primary purpose is not to give us everything we desire but to shape us into the image of His Son, and He knows the perfect way to accomplish this. Knowing His good purpose frees us from worry and doubt and allows us to relax and wait patiently for the Lord to accomplish what He desires in our lives.
- **We listen to the negative counsel of other people.** Sometimes those around us may discourage us from persevering in prayer since it appears useless from their perspective. They reason that since God hasn't answered, there is something wrong with our request, and we should stop praying about it. That's why it's wise to keep some of our prayer requests between just us and the Lord.
- **We focus on the circumstances rather than God.** His desire and objective is to increase our love, devotion, and commitment to Him, yet often all we want is for Him to fix our situation. If He doesn't intervene according to our time schedule, it's because He's working in us to build and strengthen our loving relationship with Him.
- **We are ignorant of God's ways.** When we understand more about God's ways as revealed in His Word, we will become more patient when His answers are delayed, knowing that He gives us what is best at just the right time. But if we are ignorant of His ways, we'll react with anger, blame, and accusations toward God.
- **We carry guilt over present or past sins.** Instead of looking forward and trusting God, we look back at our sins, forgetting that He has forgiven them. Then we doubt that He will ever answer our prayers since we are undeserving.

How do we correct our wavering faith?

We begin by asking ourselves the following questions:

- **Where are these doubts coming from?** If we are currently living in sin, we can expect confusion and doubt to arise.
- **Did God promise to meet your needs?** Yes, He did. However, we must learn to distinguish between our needs and our wants, some of which may be in conflict with His Word.
- **Did God not promise to be with you all the time?** Hebrews 13:5 says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (NKJV). His presence with us is a fact that does not depend upon our feelings.
- **Have you come to a fork in the road in your life?** Our faith will waver if we are not living in God's Word. The Bible is our spiritual compass to guide us, and it will never lead us the wrong way.
- **Did God not give you the greatest gift of all—the indwelling Holy Spirit?** He is our guide, helper, and source of strength, who empowers us and gives us a sense of security.

► RESPONSE

- What causes your faith to waiver? Is it feelings? Circumstances? Uncertainty regarding God's will? What means has God provided to strengthen your faith in Him? Are you availing yourself of these means?
- How have you seen God answer your prayers in an unexpected way or on a later date than you wanted? What has this taught you about God's ways that will encourage you to trust Him the next time your faith begins to wobble?

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