

WHEN GOD SAYS “NO”
40 Days of Prayer – Part 7
Rick Warren

“Call to Me and I will answer you . . .” Jeremiah 33:3 (NIV)

3 OF THE MANY REASONS GOD SAYS ‘NO’

CAUTION: Use these to comfort yourself, but NEVER use them with someone in pain, because you don’t know why God said no to them.

1. GOD SAYS ‘NO’ WHEN HE HAS _____

“He knows about everyone everywhere. Everything about us is bare and wide open to the all-seeing eyes of our living God; nothing can be hidden from Him . . .”

Hebrews 4:13 (LB)

“(God) guards the course of the just and protects the way of His faithful ones.”

Proverbs. 2:8 (NIV)

2. GOD SAYS ‘NO’ WHEN HE HAS _____

God: “This plan of mine is not what you would work out, neither are My thoughts the same as yours! For My ways are higher than yours.”

Isaiah 55:8-9 (LB)

“These were commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned SOMETHING BETTER . . .”

Hebrews 11:39-40 (NIV)

God has all of eternity_____

3. GOD SAYS ‘NO’ WHEN HE HAS _____

“I cry out to God Most High, who fulfills his purpose for me.”

Psalm 57:2 (NIV)

“The purpose of these troubles is to test your faith as fire tests how genuine gold is. Your faith is more precious than gold.”

1 Peter 1:7 (GW)

“These present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they will produce in us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever!

So, we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever.”

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NLT)

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“There are some things the Lord our God has kept secret, but there are some things he has let us know.” Deuteronomy 29:29 (NCV)

“Just as you’ll never understand how the mystery of life forms in a pregnant woman, so you’ll never understand the mystery at work in all that God does.” Ecclesiastes 11:5 (Message)

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN GOD SAYS ‘NO’?

1. TRUST _____

“All the ways of the Lord are loving . . .” Psalm 25:10 (NIV)

“In everything God works for the good of those who love Him.” Romans 8:28 (ICB)

I don’t have to _____
to know that it is motivated by love.

2. WHEN IN PAIN, PRAY _____

“Going a little farther, Jesus fell to the ground praying that, if possible, he might not have to suffer what was ahead of him. Jesus prayed “Abba! My Father! All things are possible for you! Please take this cup of suffering away from me! Yet I want your will, not mine, to be done!” Mark 14:35-36

The Right Way to Pray

- _____
“Father, I know you can do anything!”
- _____
“Father, please give me what I ask!”
- _____
“However, what I want most is your will!”

3. EXPECT _____

(Paul) “Three times I prayed to the Lord about this and asked him to take it away. But his answer was: “My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak.” So, I gladly boast about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power can flow through me! . . . For when I am weak, then I am strong!”
Corinthians 12:8-10

2

“Those who know you, Lord, will trust you! You do not abandon anyone who comes to you!” Psalm 9:10 (TEV)

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Today we're gonna conclude the 40 Days of Prayer series. I have about 12 more messages. And so I'm gonna have to probably do a part two sometime this next year to be a part of that. But you know, many times in the Bible God promises to answer your prayers. One of the shortest examples of that is right there at the top of your outline:

Jeremiah 33:3 that says this, "*Call to Me and I...* [might answer you. Now that's not what it says, is it? Call to me and I what?] *will...* [You might circle that. Not might, not maybe, not if I'm in a good mood, not having a bad hair day. He says] *call to Me and I will answer you...*"

That's a promise from God. God answers every single prayer. Now, He doesn't answer them the way you like it every time. But it's an answer. No is an answer. Wait is an answer. Grow up is an answer. In a little while is an answer. In my way is an answer. God never leaves a prayer unanswered. Every prayer is answered. Not every prayer God says yes to. And there are many, many reasons for that.

And there are a lot of examples in the Bible where God says no to great men and women of faith. Prayers that were prayed by Abraham, God says no. Moses, no. Daniel, no. Job, Jonah, no. Elijah, no. Peter, Paul, God said no to them. Jesus, yes, even God's Son. There are prayers that were "unanswered", meaning they weren't answered the way Jesus asked. Even his own Son, God said no.

Now, that can be confusing. And I didn't want to close this series without dealing with when God says no. Because you're going to have many no's from God in your lifetime. That can be confusing. It can be, well, if God is truly loving and if God has the power to control everything, why is my request denied? Good question. It can be confusing. It can be frustrating. Why do some people get miracles and others don't? Why when we pray for people who are sick, some of them get well and some die? I've prayed for a lot of people who got well. I've prayed for a lot of people who didn't get well. That's frustrating.

Why do some people get relief from their pain and others don't? Why do some couples pray for a child and they get a child and others just as sincere, claiming the promises of God, they don't get a child? And their hearts are broken by that. In other words, why does God sometimes say yes and why does God sometimes say no?

Well, when you think about it, there are some mysteries but there are also some obvious things. For instance, one thing that's obvious is this: When two people are praying for the opposite thing, obviously God can't answer both. If a child is praying for it to snow so they don't have to go to school, and the parent is praying for it to be clear weather so they can go to work, God is obviously gonna say no to one of them.

Today, all over America at football games people are praying for the opposing team. Half of them will be disappointed. I don't really think God cares who wins the Super Bowl. I'm not sure

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that he answers a prayer for a team. But even if he did, only 50 percent would get it. It's like I'm praying for my candidate, you're praying for your candidate. Clearly, obviously, a lot of fervent people are praying for opposite things. That's not gonna work.

Then there are some prayers that we pray and if God was to answer them, he'd have to take away the free will and the free choice of other people. What if somebody came up to you and said, "I am praying that God forces you to marry me."? That isn't gonna happen. Because God's not gonna take away your free will. And that person could pray all they want, God's going to say no. Because God is not in the business of taking away your free choice. He made you in his image and he's not gonna overrule your choice.

God is not gonna force you to marry somebody. God can't force you to fall in love with somebody. And by the way, God can't force somebody to stay in love with you. Some of you have prayed that prayer, "God, make my spouse not leave." But they left. Why? Because God doesn't force anybody to do the right thing. He doesn't force you to do the right thing. You make bad choices all your life. He doesn't force you to do the right thing. That'd make you a puppet. He doesn't force anybody else. If you're praying, "God, I want you to change that person's mind and make them do this," well, God says, "I don't do that with you. Why would I do that with anybody else?" So that's a logical reason why people pray for things that actually don't happen.

But then there's another reason and it's sometimes when we pray for sick people and if everybody you prayed for never died, then anybody with great faith would never die. We aren't meant to live on this planet forever. You're meant to live forever. I want to live forever. I just don't want to live on this planet forever. Because there's sorrow and suffering and sadness and sickness and racism and injustice and sexual abuse and harassment and all kinds of war and all kinds of other things. I'm glad I don't have to live on this planet forever. I want to live forever, just not here. I want to live in a place where there's no sorrow, no suffering, no sadness, no sickness, no tears.

Everybody you pray for when they're sick, most of the time they may get well, but there is gonna be one point where the prayer is not going to be answered because God never meant for you to live forever on earth. Everybody dies at some point. I don't mean I don't know why we need to be shocked that because the fact is, we're all terminal. People say, well she's got a terminal illness. You have a terminal illness. Every human being is going to die at some point. So why are we shocked that at some point somebody dies? That's just not logical. But in spite of those things that ... Oh, I can see that. I can see it. There are times when God says no, it's just unexplainable. There are times when you ask a legitimate request, you don't see anything wrong with it, and it doesn't happen. It makes no sense. That's when it's unbearable. That's when it's heartbreaking. That's when you go, "I don't get it. I don't get it, that kind of no."

When that happens, when God says no, that is the greatest test of faith in your life. Prayers that are not answered the way you want will absolutely be the single greatest test in your life. God's saying, "Are you gonna trust me or you're not?" So we need to deal with this, what do you do when God says no? Particularly the times when there's the tragic accident, and the unexplained death, and the dashed dream, and the unfulfilled longing? And you've prayed and you've longed and longed and longed for it, and the denied request. That's when it feels unbearable.

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Today, what I want to do is two things. First, I want to give you just a few possible reasons why God says no in your life, two or three. There could be thousands, there probably are. I'm sure there are hundreds of reasons, legitimate reasons why God would say no to a particular request that we can't see. But I'm just gonna give you three. Then more important than that, the explanations. I want to share with you what to do when God says no in your life because you're gonna get a lot of no's. You're gonna get a lot of yeses, but you're gonna get a lot of no's, too. As I said, there may be a thousand good reasons why God says no. But before I share with you three of the possible explanations, I wrote a caution there.

Notice there on your outline, there's a caution, a warning: **Use these**, these reasons I'm about to share with you, **to comfort yourself, but never, never use them with somebody in pain because you don't why God said no to them.**

So I'm gonna give you three reasons but it could be none of these reasons for somebody you're talking to. It's very presumptuous for you to assume you know why, and it doesn't help them. Explanations never comfort. If my wife were to drop dead tomorrow night and I knew the reason, it wouldn't make it any less painful. We often think if we understand why something happens it'll make it easier. It does not. But when someone dies or tragedy happens, our first question is why, why, why? It's okay to ask why. Even Jesus did on the cross, "My God, my God, why?" But he didn't get an answer. What are you gonna do when you don't get the answer? Some things you're going to only understand in heaven. So never presume to know why God does something unless he tells you.

Clear example of this is the story of Job. If you open your Bible right to the middle, it almost comes to the story of Job. Job was the wealthiest man in the world. The Bill Gates, the Warren Buffett of his day. On a single day, he went from hero to zero, he lost everything. All of his children were killed by marauding terrorists. He had a big family. They were all killed on one day. All of his crops burned down, all of his cattle and sheep and goats died. He lost all of his wealth in a day. And then he gets a terrible, incurable, painful disease. You think you had a bad day. All on one day. Job goes out and sits down on the ground in an ash heap, just to mourn and grieve in his despair.

But Job had three friends, and those three friends come and at first, they do the right thing. The three friends come and they sit down with Job and they sit there in silence with him for seven days. That's what a friend does. When somebody's in grief, you show up and you shut up. The deeper the pain is in somebody's life, the fewer words you use. If somebody's having a bad day, you can talk with him for 30 minutes about it. If somebody just had a loved one die, you just need to show up and shut up.

People always say, "I don't know what to say to that person who had that tragedy." Don't say anything. You just need the presence of your life, the ministry of presence. For seven days, Job's friends sit there and they're the best friends you could possibly have. They sit with him on the ground, around him without saying a word for seven days. They're just carrying the pain with him.

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They didn't get in trouble until they open their mouths. You won't either. Until you open your mouth. The rest of the book of Job is they start trying to explain the unexplainable. Job, you're suffering because of this, or maybe because of that. They're offering all these different reasons. They think they're helping Job by offering explanations. They are not. They're making it worse. The point is they get it all wrong. They don't know why this is happening. And at the end of the book, God comes and before he restores Job's health and actually restored everything else, gave him twice as much wealth as he'd had before, God speaks to Job and then he speaks to Job's friends and he castigates them for trying to explain the unexplainable instead of just leaving it as a mystery. Here's what he says, look up here on the screen.

God says to Job's three friends, *"I'm angry with you for you have not been right in what you said about me! My servant Job is the only who spoke the truth and got it right"* [in all the entire book] (Job 42:7).

Now I like that. That's encouraging because a lot of the chapters Job is just flat out complaining to God. "God, this is terrible. I hate what's going on. I haven't done anything wrong here," and he's complaining. And God says, "You're right. It's okay to complain when you're in pain." God says, "That's okay." What's not okay is giving an explanation that isn't true. Isn't true. The reason I'm belaboring this point is because you're always on thin ice when you try to explain something that God doesn't explain.

I see well-meaning believers trying to do this, the stuff that happens in our world. In the last few months, we've had three hurricanes, an earthquake, a mass shooting in Vegas, all kinds of different things. Sometimes you'll hear people, well-meaning, stand up and they say, "Well, that hurricane hit that city. That is the judgment of God." No, it is not. You just need to shut up. I know that for a couple of reasons, practical and biblical.

I remember when Katrina hit and it hit New Orleans, that great hurricane hit that city. People called it Sin City, and they said, there were people that actually saying, "That is the judgment of God on the Sin City." Well, evidently, God did a lousy job because he missed the most sinful part. The most sinful part of New Orleans is Bourbon Street, the red-light district, the drug zone, the porno zone, and that part is the highest part in the city, and it was untouched so God missed. Everybody else got hurt except the worst part of New Orleans. It was untouched. It's the truth, look it up.

If God truly judges America, and he has every right to, but he hasn't, but if he does, I will tell you this, it's not gonna start with hurting unbelievers. He's gonna start with the church. How do I know that? Peter 1, Chapter 4, look up here on the screen.

The Bible says, 1 Peter 4:17, *"The time of judgment will begin first with God's own people, the family of God."*

If God decides to judge America, or any other nation for that matter, he's gonna start with us. He can start with his own family. He disciplines his own family not the neighbor kids. So what you see out there is not the judgment of God because the Bible says if it were, he'd start with us, what we're not doing right as his own children.

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Now, having given you all those cautions, I want to give you three possible of maybe a thousand reasons why God says no. Get out your pencil and you want to write this down. Three of the many reasons God sometimes says no. Number one:

1. God says ‘no’ when he has a bigger perspective.

God says no when he has a bigger perspective. He can see what you can't see. God sees the whole picture. We don't. We have a limited perspective. God sees the wider view. We don't. God can see the future. You can't. God will always see stuff you can't see. He can see around the curve. He can see 10 years in the future. He can see the implications of every decision.

Hebrews 4:13, *"He [God] knows about everyone everywhere. Everything about us is bare and wide open to the all-seeing eyes of our living God; nothing can be hidden from him."*

Because God sees it all. You don't see it all, I don't see it all, and sometimes God doesn't answer the prayer the way you want because he sees what you don't see. You see, our problem with our limited perspective is that we don't see the unintended consequences of what we're asking. God can see how the dominoes fall over. God can see that every prayer that is answered yes starts a chain reaction. You don't see it, but he does. He knows how that decision that you just asked for is gonna influence your grandchildren and great grandchildren and great, great grandchildren. He can see multi-generational. You can't. So sometimes God says no because he sees what you don't see.

If you could see your life the way God does, would your prayers be different? Yep. If you could see your life the way God does, would it solve many of your problems? Yep. You'd never have unexpected trouble. "Oh, I didn't see that coming," because you'd see it coming. You'd never have any unexpected difficulty, you could prepare in advance, you'd never ask for the wrong thing, because "I don't ask for that because it will create that in my life." I've asked you this before during this series, do you give your children everything they want? Of course, not. Why? Because you love them but also because you can see things they can't see. No parent would give their child everything they ask for. God loves you too much to give you everything you ask for. He can see what you can't see.

The fact is when I ask God for something, I can't imagine the implications, the consequences, the results. I don't know what good or bad that's going to bring, what's gonna be set in motion, the consequences. Every prayer has consequences to it and God can see ahead. Now sometimes God says no to your prayer to protect you from something that you can't see, to guard you. Look at this next verse on your outline.

Proverbs 2:8, *"(God) guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones."*

Notice guards and protects. Now, what does that mean? It doesn't mean God takes you all out of trouble. It doesn't mean he takes you out of the frying pan you're in. He may leave you in the frying pan, he just keeps you from getting burned.

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Remember when we studied the great guy in The Old Testament, Daniel? He was doing the wrong thing and the king was gonna throw him to the lions to be eaten? Daniel prays, "God, keep me out of the lion's den." God said, "No." He put him in the lion's den and shut the lion's mouth. Bigger story. Bigger story. Better results. Better miracle.

Remember the story the three Hebrew men who had defied the king and wouldn't obey him? He says, "We're gonna throw you in that giant fire pit, that fiery furnace." They said, "Lord, keep us out of the fiery furnace." God said, "No," He let them go into the fiery furnace, walked through it with them. They were untouched, they weren't burned. When they came out the ropes that had tied them down were burned off.

Sometimes you'll say, "God, don't let me go through this fiery trial." God says, "You're gonna go through it. But when you come out on the other side, you're gonna be free, free from that habit, free from that person, free from that fear, free from that guilt, free from that shame. The things that have been binding you up are gonna be burned off. It wouldn't happen unless you went through the fire. Sometimes God says no to set you free.

You know, Saint Paul, Paul who wrote much of The New Testament, his greatest desire, his deepest prayer was he wanted to go to Rome and preach the Good News because Rome is the center of the Roman Empire at that time, it's the capital of the world. I want to go to Rome.

Paul's idea on going to Rome would be, I'll go to Rome, take a Mediterranean cruise there, then I'll rent the Coliseum for a week and have Paul's giant harvest crusade in the Coliseum. Well, God actually said no to that but God said yes to getting Paul to Rome. Paul got to Rome, but he went in chains as a prisoner. While he's in jail, instead of out preaching in the Coliseum, he decides to write a few things, these letters, and those letters today are called The New Testament. Which do you think would had greater effect? Paul preaching in the Coliseum or Paul writing the letters that we study today? He would have never written the letters if God hadn't put him in a prison where he couldn't do anything else but write the letters.

God had a bigger perspective. God can see what Paul couldn't see. Paul thought, "You're keeping me, God, from doing what I'm good at. I'm good at public speaking. I should be out there teaching the Good News in the Coliseum." God says, "You're exactly where I want you, chained in this prison because you're writing letters that are gonna become The New Testament part of the Bible." Bigger, bigger perspective. God says, "That's what I'm gonna do in your life."

Number two, second possible reason. Not only does God say no when he has a bigger perspective,

2. God says ‘no’ when he has a better plan.

God often says no when has a better plan. What do you mean by that? I mean that sometimes God says, "I intend to answer your prayer, just not the way that you want it answered. I'm gonna say yes, but I'm not gonna say yes the way you want it said yes. I have a better idea." In His infinite wisdom, God has a better plan.

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Isaiah, chapter 55:8-9 says this, God says, *"This plan of mine is not what you would work out, neither are My thoughts the same as yours! For My ways are higher than your ways."*

Now, I want you to circle the word 'ways'. "My ways," God says, "Are higher. They're better. I've got a better plan than yours." Notice it's plural, ways. God never just has one way of doing something. Unlike you, God's options are unlimited. He has many alternatives. He's never forced to answer in just one way.

Let me give you an example. Let's say you're in deep debt, you're in financial stress. You pray, "God, I have spent money I didn't have to buy things I didn't need. And God, now I'm really deeply in debt." It was my own decisions that got me in debt. God didn't get you in debt. You got yourself in debt by overextending. You say, "God, even though I blew it, it's my fault, I'm gonna ask you to help me out, bail me out." Now, how can God answer that prayer? Oh, many ways. There are multiple ways, many ways that God could increase your income. There are many, multiple ways that God could reduce your expenses, where you spend less.

You see, the problem is when we pray, we don't just tell God what we want, we tell him how we want it. We want it in our preferred way. Our preferred way is always the easiest way. "God, I need you to get me out of debt. What's the easiest way?" Win the lottery. I guarantee you, God is not gonna use that way. God isn't gonna use that way because you don't grow. God doesn't want to use the easiest way to answer, he wants to use the best way, and the best way that will keep you growing. Because God's more interested in your character than he is your comfort. He wants to answer, help you get out of debt, but he doesn't want to help you get out of debt in an easy way and tomorrow you just get right back into it. He wants you to learn some stuff so you stay out of debt. Not the easiest way, but the best way, the way that grows your faith.

Now the way that grows your faith, listen closely, sometimes requires a delayed answer. God is not a vending machine, we've said this, God is not a genie. God is not a jackpot or a slot machine where you put in the prayer, pull the lever, and boom, you instantly get the answer. That doesn't grow your character. It just makes you less likely to grow. Sometimes, God, in order to get you grow, delays the answer to your prayer. He says, "We're gonna go slow until you grow, and then we'll give you the answer."

Did you know that in the Bible many of the greatest people of faith did not get the answer that was promised to them before they died? Now this blows the whole health and wealth prosperity gospel out of the thing because some people actually teach, "Well, you know, you're supposed to get whatever you want and if you didn't get whatever you want it's because you didn't have enough faith." There's a word for that, it's what you get when you cross a crocodile and an abalone, it's a crock-o-baloney.

Lots of great people in the Bible did not get what they asked for. They stayed sick, they stayed poor, or whatever. The Bible says this about the greatest things. In Hebrews 11:39-40, which is God's Hall of Faith, it talks about, *"These were commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. [Why?] God had planned something better..."* Circle 'planned something better'. God had planned something better. I want you to write this down because it's an important lesson of life, it's a principle of life.

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God has all of eternity to fulfill His promises.

God has all of eternity to fulfill his promises. There are about 6,000, some say even 7,000 promises in the Bible to you. But God is not limited by your 80 or 90 years on earth. God has all of eternity to fulfill his promises. Some of the promises that God has given to you are gonna be fulfilled in heaven, in eternity.

When you look back, you probably, if you're true to yourself, you're honest, your glad that God didn't answer some of your prayers. I am. There are a lot of prayers that I'm glad God said no to. In the 1970's when I was a sophomore in high school, my plan was to become a politician. Man, was I dumb. It just showed my immaturity. I'm just kidding. But that was my plan. When I was a sophomore in high school, I received an appointment to the United States Senate to work as a Senate Aid. I thought, this is great, I'm going to move to D.C. and I'll start my career in public service, in government. I was praying, "God, I want to go and be involved in government." God said no. They said, "You're not gonna come the beginning of summer, you're gonna come at the end of the summer." And that summer, I got a job as a lifeguard at a Christian camp. My life was revolutionized, and by the end of the summer, I didn't want to go. I'm glad God said no.

In 1979, Kay and I prayed to be missionaries overseas. We were actually thinking about going to Japan because I had been a short-term missionary, helped plan a church in Nagasaki, Japan. God shut the door and we weren't able to go. We weren't able to go. That was a heartbreak to me. I said, "God, I don't understand why we wanted to go and you closed the door. You closed the door." It was heartbreaking to me, but I'm glad he said no. There'd be no Saddleback Church if we'd gone to Japan.

In 1980 when we moved here to this valley, my plan, we didn't have any funds, finances. My plan was to enlist five financial sponsors who would underwrite the first year of this church. I worked for about a year trying to find financial sponsors to underwrite the first year of this church, and nobody would step up. I went everywhere. Finally, I just said, "Forget it. Kay, we're going. We're just gonna move on faith." So we packed up everything in a U-Haul truck and moved to Southern California, kind of like the Beverly Hillbillies you know, "Come and listen to my story 'bout a band named Jed... California is the place you ought to be."

Many of you know this story from Class 101, we got here at 4:00 in the afternoon. I pulled off at El Toro Road, off the first offramp we could find in this area. Found the first real estate office I could find, walked in, it was late in the day, it's about 4:30 now, and one guy is in the office. His name is Don Dale. I walked in, I said, "Hi. My name is Rick Warren. I've moved her from Texas to start a new church. I don't have any money, I don't have any members, I don't have any building, and I need a place to live." He did what you just did, he laughed. But where God guides, God provides. He said, "Let's see what we can do."

And to make the story short, within about two hours, he'd driven us to a condo over in Laguna Hills; we signed the papers on it. We said, "We'll take it," and he talked to the owner of that condo and somehow convinced the guy to give us the first month rent free and nothing down. Only God could do that. As we're driving there, I said, "Hey, Don, you go to church anywhere?"

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He goes, "No, I don't go to church anywhere." I go, "Great, you're my first member. I'm gonna start a church for people who hate church. You're in." And we started this church a week later with my wife and I, and our baby, Amy, Don, his wife, his little girl, Heidi, and one other person. The rest is history.

I'm glad God said no to those financial sponsors because I would have never had the lessons of faith that I had in those early days. We were here, we had a house, but we had no money. We had no money. Then about the third day I get a call from a guy who says, "Is this Rick Warren?" I said, "Yeah," he said, "Are you the young kid who's starting a new church in Orange County?" Yeah. He goes, "My name is Bill Grady. We've never met, but I live up here in Fullerton and I just feel led to pay your rent for the next three months." I go, "Hello. You are my new best friend."

I could tell you a hundred stories like that. There was a time we were planning the first service, an Easter service, and I had no members. Nobody. I'm just planning it myself. Then Don and his family come. One day Kay and I are out buying used baby equipment for the nursery, the garage sales. We went to this one garage sale and there was a diaper changing bed, a swing, and some little toys and stuff for the kids. Kay goes, "We'll take it all." She had a doubt, they said, "How much did it cost you?" \$32.50. I'll never forget that amount, \$32.50. So she wrote a check, \$32.50, knowing that we had just a little bit of money in our savings account and that was money for us to live on, and I had no income and it was gonna be four months until we had our first service. She wrote, on faith, \$32.50. We got in the car, we drove home.

Same day I go out, when I walked in and I opened the mailbox, and there's a letter from a little old lady that I had met one time. I preached in a church in Dallas and she evidently liked the message and never forgot it. Later she said, "Where did that young whipper snapper go?" They said, "They went to California to start a church." Somehow, she got my address, somehow, and she wrote me a note, I'll never forget it, handwritten note from an elderly woman. She said, "I'm on a limited income, just a pension, fixed income. But I want to be a part of what you're doing and maybe this can help." It was a check for \$32.50. That is the lamest clap I've ever heard from a miracle of God.

Now, do you think that would happen if I had lined up five sponsors? No, because I won't even be living on faith. I remember in the early days when I found a piece of land over in Laguna Hills. I thought, "12 acres, this is cool." Most churches have like half an acre. Twelve acres, this is great. We were all ready to go for it. God said, "No. I've got a little bit bigger plan for you than that. Not 12, 120 acres." I'm glad God said no because if we had bought that piece of property, you wouldn't be here. God has a bigger perspective and God has a better plan.

We see this all through Scriptures. I remember, by the way, one time I remember asking Kay, "Honey, can you remember what you were glad that God said no to?" She said, "Yes, because there were two guys I wanted to marry and God said no." I said, "I'm the lucky dog." To those guys, I say, "Na, na, na, na, na, na. I got her, you didn't."

If you've ever been to a high school reunion, you should thank God he didn't answer your prayers. Okay? Because that hunka burning love in high school is now big fat tub of goo. He's a

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mega church pastor. Garth Brooks wrote that song, thank God for “Unanswered Prayers”. He's got a bigger perspective and he's got a better plan.

Number three:

3. God says ‘no’ when he has a greater purpose.

God always acts for good and in love in you and he has a greater purpose. God will never let your prayers interfere with your purpose. Let me say that again. God has a purpose for your life, he's never made anything without a purpose. God will not even let you interfere with your purpose through your prayers. If you're praying something that's not according to his purpose, he's just not gonna give it to you.

Psalm 57:2, *"I cry out to God Most High, who fulfills his purpose for me."*

See God isn't obligated to explain why he does what he does. He doesn't owe you an explanation. He's God. There's some things you couldn't understand. But he does say, "I have a purpose for your life."

Now not everything that happens in your life is good, you know that. A lot of bad stuff happens because you make bad choices, and other people make bad choices. But God goes, "I can even use that. I can even use your dumb mistakes, I can even use other people's dumb mistakes, and I could fit it into the purpose." In everything God does, he allows in your life, even the bad stuff he allows it, for a purpose. That purpose is good, including the problems and the unanswered prayers. They're part of the purpose.

You may be in a tough spot right now. You're going through a really tough spot right now. Look at the next verse, *"The purpose of these troubles is to test your faith as fire tests how genuine gold is. Your faith is more precious than gold"* (1 Peter 1:7).

So what do you do? Anytime you're discouraged, this is not working, I'm hitting my head against the wall. It's not happening and it's happening too slow. Anytime you feel discouraged, you remind yourself that God has a greater purpose for your life. You need to remember that. He's got a bigger perspective, he's got a better plan, and he's got a greater purpose.

Look at this next verse, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, *"These present troubles [the ones you're going through right now] are quite small [compared to eternity] and they won't last very long. Yet they will produce in us an immeasurably great glory [that's the reward in heaven,] that will last forever! So, we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not yet seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever."*

Friends, as your pastor who prays for you, I pray for you all the time, who loves you, I love you, if you're gonna be happy in life, you're gonna have to learn three facts of life, three realities. The first reality is that there are some things in life that you're just not gonna understand until you get to heaven. The Bible says there are secret things that God doesn't reveal, you couldn't even

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understand them. There's some things in life you're just not gonna get the answer to until you get to heaven. But you don't need an explanation to be happy, you just need the presence of God.

Second thing you need to know is that there are some things that are gonna happen in your life that are never gonna change. Some problems in your life are never going to change until you get to heaven. If I got this arm cut off, it's not growing back. It's never, ever growing back. It's not gonna change until I get to heaven. Permanent problems happen because we're in a broken world, and there are some problems, no matter how much you pray, God says, "I'm not taking it away, you're in a broken world, and I just want you to learn to manage it. I want you to learn to trust me and I want you to learn to grow up."

So there's some things I'm never going to understand why they happen. There are some things that are never gonna change, no matter how much I pray because God's more interested in your character than your comfort, as I said.

But there's another thing you need to learn and it's that sometimes you're going to suffer for the benefit of other people. That's called redemptive suffering. I was thinking this week about all of the ministries that were started in this church because people had prayers that they had prayed and God said no to. They prayed for a child and they didn't get a child. And so they started the adoption ministry. They prayed for instant healing of an addiction, but it didn't happen so they started the recovery ministry. I could give you a hundred other ministries that started because God said no to an easy answer, and instead God says, "I'm gonna take your pain and bless other people."

You have no idea how many famous people, Kay and I, and non-famous people, have counseled about suicide in the four years since Matthew took his life. We're not gonna waste our pain. You have no idea how many people who've come forward to say, "I struggle with a mental illness," and we've been able to help because we had mental illness in our family, in my youngest son, for 27 years.

God wants to take the greatest pain in your life and use it to benefit other people. Do not waste your pain. Not only is this true in your own life, it's true of Christ. God even allowed his own Son to suffer for our salvation. That's redemptive suffering. If God allowed his own Son to go to the cross and suffer all that suffering for the benefit of you, for your salvation. When he allows you to go through suffering, for the benefit of helping other people, you are most like Christ in that moment. It's not easy, it's not fun, but you're growing up and you're becoming like Christ when you suffer and you use that pain to help other people, and you don't waste that pain.

Now, what do I do when God says no? Write quick. This is real fast. Three things here.

When God says no, number one,

- 1. Trust that God does everything in goodness and love.**

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Trust that God does everything for me in goodness and love. God does not do anything unloving. God does not do anything evil. Everything God does is always for your own good and because he loves you.

Psalm 25:10, *"All the ways of the Lord are loving..."*

There are no unloving ways of God. God cannot act in an unloving way. *"God is love."*

Romans 8:28, *"In everything... [not some, in everything, even the bad stuff,] "In everything God works for the good of those who love Him."*

You need to remember that and you need to trust that God does everything in goodness and love in your life even when he says no. Because anytime God says no, Satan is gonna start shooting darts of doubt at you. "God doesn't love you. He didn't care about you, otherwise he'd give you everything you want. He doesn't love you." Satan is a liar. I want you to write this down on your outline,

I don't have to understand God's answer to know it's motivated by love.

I do not have to understand God's answer to my prayer to know that whatever answer it is, it's always motivated by love.

As I said, God loves you too much to give you everything you ask for. So really when God says no, you've got three options: you can resist it, resent it, or relax in it. You can resist it and you can fight God, and when God says no you get mad at God, and you turn your back on God and say, "Okay, God, if you don't play the game my way I'm leaving you, I'm out of here. I'm gonna take my ball and go home." I've met a lot of people who walked away from God because God said no. They didn't trust that he had a bigger perspective, a better plan, and a greater purpose. They walk away in resentment and rebellion.

That's the second thing you can do is you can resent it. You can resist it, you can resent it, you become rebellious and you become bitter and miserable and you doubt God's love. I know a lot of people who've lived their entire lives in misery and they're miserable because they're resentful and they've never accepted the fact that God only does what's good in their lives.

Or you can relax, knowing that God always has your best interest at heart, "God, it doesn't make sense. I don't understand it. It's incredibly painful. But I know this. This is not good, what's happened to me right now, but I do know this. You are good. You are good. You're a good God, and you are loving, and you will never stop loving me. And even in this your love still remains."

Number two, second thing you do when God says no,

2. When in pain, pray what Jesus prayed facing the cross.

You pray what Jesus prayed facing the cross. Jesus prayed a prayer the night before he went to the cross. He was in the garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane is a word that means 'where they

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press the olives' and it's a garden of olives. It was a garden or orchard of olive trees on the Mount of Olives and it was Jesus' favorite place to pray. He knows tomorrow, tomorrow he's going to be suffering. He's gonna be tortured. He's gonna be put on the cross. He's gonna be shamed. He's gonna be spit on. He's gonna be whipped. He's gonna be crucified. He doesn't want to go through this pain any more than you or I do.

The Bible says that in that agony he went to the garden to pray and the prayer that he prayed is the same prayer you should pray when you're in pain. So follow this closely.

Mark chapter 14:35-36, *"Going a little farther [into the garden] Jesus fell to the ground... [He's in agony] praying that, if possible, he might not have to suffer what was ahead of him."* What's that? Crucifixion. He's saying, "God, if it's possible, I don't want to die on the cross. If there's any other way for the salvation of the world I don't want to die on the cross." It's okay to say, "God, I don't want this. I don't want to go through this suffering." It's okay for you to say that. "I don't want to go through this. I don't want to face what I'm about to go through." Cancer, surgery, divorce, death, whatever. "God, I don't want to do this."

He prayed that, if possible, he might not have to suffer what was ahead of him. *"Jesus prayed, 'Abba, My Father!' [remember Abba? Daddy. The intimate term, Daddy, Father, my Father. He says three things] 'All things are possible for you! Please take this cup of suffering away from me! Yet I want your will, not mine, to be done!'"*

Those are the three things you should always pray when you're in pain. Write these down. Here is the right way to pray when you're in pain. First,

- **Affirm God's power!**

That's first thing you do. He says, God, "Father, I know you can do anything! All things are possible for you." So you know, "God, I know you could take care of this situation. I know you could keep me out of this suffering. I know you could take away the pain instantly. Father, you're all powerful." That's the first thing you do.

Second, then you ask with passion. You affirm God's power, "I know you can do anything." You

- **Ask with passion!**

"Father, please give me what I ask! Father, please take this cup of suffering away from me." It's okay for you to pray, "God, please take away the pain. Please, take away the suffering." That's okay. There are some times God will. But sometimes he won't.

So then you pray the third. You affirm God's power, you ask with passion, and you...

- **Accept God's plan!**

"However, God, I want most what is your will! Yes, I don't want to go through this suffering. I don't want to go through this problem. I don't want to go through this pain. But, nevertheless,

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what I want even more than that is I want your plan, I want your purpose, I want your perspective. I want your will. However, your will, not mine, be done." That's what I want. When you pray that prayer, God smiles because he knows you trust him.

Number three, what do I do when God says no. I trust that everything he does is in love. I think in his goodness. I pray the prayer of Jesus. I'm honest about what I want and I say I really want more than anything else, I want your plan and your purpose.

Number three, I

3. Expect God to give his grace to handle his answer.

I expect God to give his grace, that's his strength, his power, to handle his answer. What is grace? Grace is God's power to handle pain. Grace is God's power to do the right thing anyway, even when it's painful. I'm gonna do the right thing even though it's painful.

You know, even the Apostle Paul who's the greatest Christian who ever lived next to Jesus Christ himself, did not get answers to all of his prayers. In fact, he has what he called a thorn in the flesh. We don't actually know what it was, but it was a lifelong problem that caused great pain in his life. He says, "God had blessed me so much that he gave me this problem, this thorn in my side that just wouldn't go away to keep me dependent upon him." He said, "Many, many times I prayed for God to take it away, and God would not take it away. He said no." Here's what he says about that problem.

2 Corinthians, 12:8-10, "Three times I prayed to the Lord about this and asked him to take it away. [God, take away this pain.] But his answer was: 'My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak.' So, [Paul says,] I gladly boast about my weaknesses, [my pain, my problems, my difficulties] so that Christ's power can flow through me!... For when I am weak, then I am strong!"

I'm not going on my power. I'm going in God's power. Many of you know that I've struggled with a handicap since childhood. I was born with a brain disorder that makes public speaking painful and makes sleeping very difficult among other things. I won't go into all the details. I've been to the best doctors in the world. I went to Mayo Clinic and they said, "We may name a syndrome after you," because they said we know about 15, 16, 17 other people in the world who have this. My brain, simplified, runs extremely hot and extremely fast, and it causes all kinds of problems in my body. For 50 years, I've asked God everyday to heal it. He has said to me every time, "My grace is all you need. My grace is all you need."

When I started Saddleback, I said, "Lord, you know how painful it is for me to speak. I could do one service but I could never do two." This is before they invented video, the salvation. I could do two but I could never do three services. We went to three services. I said, "I could do three but I could never do four." I'd go home and finish after four services, go home and just get in bed and crash, for about 24 hours. I could do four but I could never do five, and then we go to five services. The church keeps growing and pretty soon we're doing six. I remember that decade when I'm doing six services every week and at the end, if you didn't even have this, you'd be a

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basket case, after doing six services. The emotional, physical energy that it takes to give out to thousands of people. God just kept saying, "My grace is all you need." The very thing that has been the most painful in my life God used to shape me and make me depend on him.

Then for 27 years I prayed every day for God to heal my youngest son's mental illness. We're all broken. And then it happened one day. Four years ago, he took his life. God said, "My grace is all you need." I will use this to help other people in pain.

Everything I've learned in life I have learned from pain. I have learned nothing from pleasure. I've learned, everything important I've learned through pain. I have learned nothing from praise and compliments and having my picture on the cover of dozens of national magazines. Everything I've learned I've learned to criticism and attacks.

The things that I've prayed about the most God has chosen to not remove. But like Job, Job says, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust him"* (Job 13:15). God could kill me, I'm still gonna trust him. If God never said yes to another prayer in my life, I still owe him the rest of my life, and you do, too. If God never said yes to another prayer in your life, you wouldn't even be alive if it weren't for him. You wouldn't be saved if it weren't for him. You wouldn't be on your way to heaven if it weren't for him. All the things that God has done for you, if he never did another... Yes, he has a bigger plan, a better plan, a bigger perspective, and a greater purpose.

So what have you been praying about so far that hasn't happened? Some of you have been praying, "God, I just want somebody to love. I just I want to be married." And as your pastor who loves you, I want that for you, too if that's what you want. It breaks my heart when there are prayers like that that aren't answered. I don't know, but you need to remember this, when something hasn't happened yet, God has a bigger perspective. He maybe protecting you from an unforeseen problem and pain. God has a better plan. The story has not ended yet.

Some of you went through a divorce. That was an end of a chapter. The chapter has ended, but that's not the end of the story. God has not finished with you. That's not the end of your story. It's the end of a chapter. Are you going through something else? That's the end of a chapter. It's not the end of your life.

God has a greater purpose and right now he's working on you and he will give you the grace and the power to handle. He will never put more on you than he puts in you to bear it up.

The last verse in your outline says this, *"Those who know You, Lord, will trust You! You do not abandon anyone who comes to you!"* (Psalm 9:10)

If you don't trust God when he says no, it means you don't really know him. Those who know the Lord trust him. They know he's good. They know he's loving. If you don't trust him it means you don't know him yet. You can get to know him starting today.

I'll end with this poem by Russell Kelfer,

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"You are who you are for a reason. You're part of an intricate plan. You are a precious and perfect, unique design, called God special woman or man. You look like you look for a reason. God made no mistake. He knit you together within the womb, and you're just what he wanted to make. The parents you had were the ones that he chose, and no matter how you may feel, they were custom-designed with God's plan in mind, and they bear the Master's seal." It wasn't that they were good or bad parents, or indifferent, or you never even met them. They had the DNA that created you and God was more interested in creating you and they were the only two that could create you. He's more interested in your being alive than in their parenting skills. That's why he chose your parents, he wanted you alive. Nobody else could've made you.

"No, that trauma you faced was not easy. [It wasn't easy.] And God wept that it hurt you so. But it was allowed to shape your heart so that into his likeness you'd grow. You are who you are for a reason. You have been formed by the Master's rod. You are who you are, beloved, because there is a God!"

Let's bow our heads. You're not gonna get a yes answer to every one of your prayers. You ought to thank God for that. Some of them we can figure out why. But some of them we're never gonna know why until we get to heaven. But we do know this, God is a good God. He's a loving God. He has a greater perspective. He has a better plan, and he has a greater purpose.

If you don't trust him it's because you don't know him. So why don't you take the first step today to knowing God, really knowing him.

Say, "Dear God, I want to get to know you." Just say that in your heart. "Dear God, I want to get to know you. I want to open my life to you. I want to learn to love you and trust you, and I want to feel your love toward me. I don't feel it, but I want to feel it. I want to be close to you. And God, I want your plan for my life not mine; mine hasn't worked out real well. God, I want your purpose for my life, not mine. God, I want your power in my life, not mine. God, I want your pardon for all the things I've done wrong. I need your peace. I need your presence."

"Thank you for letting your Son, Jesus, suffer for me so he could pay for all my sins. God, if you want to use the pain in my life to help others, do so. I want to be more like you. So today, as much as I know how Jesus Christ I ask you to fill me with your life, and your love, and your Spirit, and start me on the journey to trust in you more every day. Then one day, I ask you to take me home to your home in heaven where all the questions will be answered, and all the problems will be removed, and all the pain will be replaced with your joy. I look forward to that day. Help me to tell other people about this. In your name, I pray. Amen."