



Week 5

KEEP GOING

Start

Welcome to group session 5 of Pathways.

Do you find it easy to trust God?

In what circumstances are you more willing to trust God? In what circumstances would you be more reluctant to trust Him?

Before we begin, read aloud Esther 6 together as a group. The passage is summarized below.

The night after the banquet, the king was unable to sleep. The unstated reason for the king's insomnia was God's providence. To pass the sleepless night, servants brought the royal annals and read the entry that had been recorded when Mordecai saved the king's life (see 2:21-23). The king consulted Haman about the best way to honor Mordecai, but ironically, Haman's egotism unintentionally caused him to be the one to bring honor to his enemy. Once again we see God's providential hand at work behind the scenes.

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Watch

Complete this viewer guide as you watch video session 5.

Your God and my God is the God of the unexpected.

God knows how to reach back and pull things forward when He's ready to use them because His pathways include yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Keep your eye on God's timing. Keep going even though you don't know what's happening at the moment.

God is the God of details.

God in His providence is steering things—even small things—to accomplish a greater purpose.

Keep your eyes open because providence can sneak up on you.

The providence of God can use the dirt of hell to lift you to the pathway of heaven.

Keep Going

Discuss

Discuss the video with your group, using the following questions.

At the beginning of the video teaching, Dr. Evans cautioned against putting God in a box. How have you most often tried to box God in?

In Esther 6 God used something as seemingly insignificant as insomnia to change history. When have you seen God use something inconsequential to make a tangible difference in your life?

Until the king needed some midnight reading, Mordecai's help in saving the king's life went unnoticed, unpublicized, and unrecognized. What does this fact teach us about daily, ordinary faithfulness?

If God is the God of details, why do we have so many problems trusting Him with the details of our lives?

For what details do you need to trust God right now?

Earlier in this study we saw that our faith needs to be coupled with action. This week's study focuses on trusting God when we don't know what to do. How do these two ideas work together?

Dr. Evans mentioned that Christians should keep going in hard times because providence can sneak up on us. Why should the doctrine of God's providence fill Christians with hope and confidence?

What tempts you to doubt the confidence that God has given you in His Word?

It's important to be encouraged by the faith stories of others. Share a time when God has shown up exactly when you needed Him to.

Read week 5 and complete the activities before the next group session.

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Florence Chadwick, a world-class swimmer, had already successfully swum the English Channel. Now she wanted to take on the twenty-six-mile course from Catalina Island, California, to the California mainland, which no woman had swum before.

Florence entered the Pacific Ocean with a number of boats surrounding her. Hour after hour she swam in thick fog. As darkness set in, she could barely see her hand in front of her face as she stroked. After swimming for almost 16 hours, she waved to the boats and said, "I can go no farther. I quit." They hoisted her out of the water and asked her, "Why can't you keep going?" She said, "Because I can't see. The fog is just too thick."

After getting on the boat, Florence discovered that she was only one-half mile from the coast of California. After all her hard work, she didn't quite make it, though she was ever so close.

Florence Chadwick decided to try again two months later. When she got into the water, the weather was bright and sunny, but after about 12 hours, fog set in once more, even worse than during her first attempt. Even though she couldn't see, this time she kept swimming. She not only swam from Catalina Island to the coast, but she also beat the world record by 2½ hours.

When Florence arrived at the California coastline, she was asked, "Last time you tried this, you quit. How did you make it this time?"

She said, "This time it was easy because I kept a mental picture of the California coastline in my mind. And as long as I didn't lose sight of where I was going, I could handle the trip getting there."

Traveling along the pathway God has for you often means traveling in the midst of dense fog. The end is rarely in sight. It's easy to want to give up when you don't know how much further you have to push through in order to reach where you hoped to go. But the lesson from Florence Chadwick and from Esther is to keep your eyes focused on God and His plan for you. Keep your heart tied to the truth that He has a plan for you, a good plan filled with a future and a hope (see Jer. 29:11). Trust His promises and His direction. Keep swimming. Just keep swimming. You're almost there.

Keep Going

◉ DAY 1 ◉

THAT NIGHT

Esther had just been given the second opportunity to ask for anything she wanted, up to half of the kingdom. The king waited on her next word, willing and able to grant what she asked. But Esther didn't ask for much. Yet again she asked the king and Haman to come to another banquet.

Timing is everything when it comes to arriving at your purpose. God is up to so much more than just what you can see in your immediate surroundings. When we began this study, I mentioned that God is the great puppet master. He's arranging, changing, maneuvering, and establishing connections so that when you arrive where you're supposed to be, your destination will be ready for you.

Esther 6 begins with these telling words:

During that night the king could not sleep.

ESTHER 6:1

The words *that night* are very important because this was the night between the two banquets. This was the night after Esther had previously turned down the king's offer to have up to half of his kingdom (see 5:3,6). This was the night when the fate of her people hung in the balance, and despite having two chances to request the king's intervention, she postponed asking.

Nevertheless, this night was necessary for events to unfold for her people's favor. Because this was the night when God moved the heart of the king as simply as "channels of water" (Prov. 21:1). This wasn't just any regular night. This was a very particular night when a very particular thing occurred: the king couldn't sleep.

Insomnia set in. The king tossed and turned, rolled over and complained. He sat up in bed. The king was meant to be awake because God had something He wanted him to know before the next banquet took place.

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Read Proverbs 21:1. How should we feel to know that God is ultimately in charge of even the highest people in authority over our lives?

Describe what happened next in Esther 6:1-9. What did the king ask for when he was unable to sleep? What was Haman thinking when the king asked him how he should honor someone?

God's providence is tied to time. The Book of Esther covers years, even decades. Providence weaves through time and circumstances like a spider carefully crafting its web. Each movement may not appear to lead to anything significant until the entire web has been completed, but every movement and motion matters. This is why you must trust God's heart even when you don't see His hand.

Mordecai had saved the king but had never been recognized. Have you ever been denied the recognition you felt you deserved for helping someone? How did you respond?

Why should we trust that God is always working even when it seems as though He is absent?

God sits outside time, while we live within it. Describe the tension these realities sometimes create for our faith.

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During his sleepless night the king requested the reading of the chronicles. This book was a record of significant events during the king's reign. In them he learned of Mordecai's heroic act in saving his life. What came next, though, is a sequence of events we might find in a Hollywood movie. Consider the irony. The king asked Haman how to honor the very man Haman wanted dead without revealing to Haman that he was referring to Haman's enemy, Mordecai. This is the stuff of great cinematic plotlines.

There Haman stood, his head enlarged with pride, his chest puffed out, and his shoulders squared, casually listing a number of things he wanted the king to do for someone he would want to show honor. Of course, Haman thought that someone was himself. But his assumption couldn't have been further from the truth.

Not only did Haman guess wrong about whom the king intended to honor, but he also guessed wrong about his own role. Rather than being the one led through the streets in great esteem, Haman now had to lead Mordecai through the streets publicly calling people to honor him. This twist of fate came at the hands of God Himself. Through Esther's obedience in inviting the king and Haman back for a second banquet, God utilized the time between the meals to orchestrate an unexpected turn of events.

Never in Esther's wildest imagination could she have come up with the idea of Haman's parading her uncle around to bestow honor on him. That's about as absurd as a military general who orders the people of Israel to walk around a city's walls for seven days in order to defeat the military camped in it (see Josh. 6). But that's how God works. He works above and beyond our wildest imaginations. That fact is why your progress on your pathway to purpose is largely tied to your obedience to Him on a daily basis.

If Esther had felt afraid and decided to manufacture her own solution by accepting the king's second offer of anything up to half of the kingdom, there would never have been a "that night" (Esth. 6:1). Far too many times believers rush ahead of God because we can't see what He has in store. And we can't see what He has in store because it's often beyond our wildest imaginations.

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Why is it critical to wait on God's timing of events when pursuing His purposes for you?

Have you seen God come through for you in a way that was unpredictable or beyond your wildest imagination? What happened? If not, ask God to work in your circumstances to create such an opportunity.

Haman's plan to publicly display brutality against Mordecai turned around to become an even more public display of favor. This reversal highlights one area of God's sovereignty and providence we often overlook. God is a God of intersections. He connects events that don't look connectable. He dislodges and alters situations that appear set in stone. He maneuvers through the maze of what appears to be unrelated occurrences. Because we can see only what's immediately before our eyes, we rarely get a glimpse of how He works. But in stories like Esther's, even though His name doesn't appear in the book, God offers a full view of who He is and the way He orchestrates His will.

God always has a plan in play, even though He often speaks to us in ways we don't recognize. That's why when we fail to set spiritual priorities in our lives, we'll often fail to pick up on the signals that are all around us. When the receiver is off the hook, we can't answer the call. We can't connect the dots. We can't see the forest through the trees. Failing to detect signs of God's work can prevent us from traveling the full pathway to our purpose.

★ PRAYER ★

Jesus, I want to see Your hand mightily work in my life. Help me abide and grow in my intimacy with You so that I can discern and respond to Your activity in my circumstances, opening the door for You to work wonders in the challenges I face. In Your name, amen.

◉ DAY 2 ◉

CHASING DONKEYS

Providence means God intentionally stops, starts, delays, quickens, directs, moves, changes, allows, blocks, and transforms as part of His sovereign plan. And He does so on purpose to intersect people, thoughts, and processes with His intended aim. We see this pattern throughout the stories of Scripture. Let's take a look at an example that occurred in the life of another royal, Saul, before he became king.

Read 1 Samuel 9:1-6. Describe the situation Saul found himself in.

What are some common emotions Saul must have felt while he was searching for the lost donkeys?

Have you ever been in a situation in which you felt lost, hopeless, or lacking in direction? Is it possible that God could have a purpose in what looks like aimlessness? Why or why not?

Read 1 Samuel 9:15-20. What had God told the prophet Samuel about Saul prior to his coming to meet him?

While Saul had been wandering around looking for his lost donkeys, God had instructed the prophet Samuel that He would send him the future king of Israel the very next day. If Saul hadn't lost his donkeys in the first place, his pathway

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wouldn't have approached the proximity of the prophet. God turned what appeared to be an unfortunate event into a divinely designed promotion.

Often we may feel we're aimlessly wandering around, unable to connect the dots of where God has allowed us to go and what He has allowed us to do. But when we stay committed to Him and His Word, He can bring about order from what looked like confusion. Yet unfortunately, in our frustrations we sometimes want to give up. First Samuel 9:7 tells us Saul's initial response when his servant urged him to go see the prophet Samuel:

*Behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man?
For the bread is gone from our sack and there is no
present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?*

1 SAMUEL 9:7

Because Saul couldn't make sense of the situation, he wanted to turn around and do what was most logical to him: return home to his father. But because he listened to wise counsel and sought the advice of the prophet, God intersected the situation with His plan to promote Saul to king.

Read 1 Samuel 10:1,24. Summarize what happened to Saul.

**We often see the way God was working in our lives only in hindsight.
Why is this pattern actually good for us?**

At just the right time, God intersects people and events with His intended aim. Believing this truth will free you to live in a depth of faith that allows for what you can't explain. This faith will enable you to move forward even when you feel you're being overlooked. In the moment, Saul didn't have the ability to realize what was happening. When Mordecai sought to protect the king, he didn't know how God would use that deed. This kind of faith recognizes that God works behind the scenes to arrange events until the proper season brings them to fruition.

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Read Galatians 6:9 and Colossians 3:23-24. What encouragement do these verses provide when we labor for the Lord but don't immediately see results?

Nothing ever goes to waste in God's economy. No kind deed you perform. No act of devotion or sacrifice for Him. God keeps a record of all you do and rewards your faith and your actions. That reward may not take place in the time frame you expect it to, and some rewards won't come until heaven, but God is both just and faithful. He sees you, just as He saw young Saul and just as he saw Mordecai.

Don't allow yourself to get frustrated and upset when it looks as if other people are blocking your progress in life or creating problems for you to deal with. Why? When you align yourself under God's rule, He can change things in a moment. He can turn circumstances around. He turned Mordecai's situation around in less than twenty-four hours. The man was supposed to die the very same day he wound up riding on the king's horse through town.

When God is ready to move, He doesn't need a lot of time. He can move suddenly. Furthermore, He doesn't need anyone's help. In His providence God can take forces in your life that were meant to harm you or keep you from moving forward and can use them to usher you into your destiny. God is always at work when circumstances appear out of control. Always.

Is yielding to God's providence an excuse to do nothing? Why or why not?

According to Proverbs 16:7, what's required for difficult people to be at peace with you?

God is the God of reversals. He can make your enemies your footstool and can cause them to be at peace with you. But these results are conditioned on your alignment underneath His rule and authority in your life. His Word must govern

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your thoughts and actions. When that happens, buckle up because you're about to witness the extraordinary hand of God move in your life., just as it did with Mordecai. The same man who had set out to hang him on gallows was now leading him around town on the king's horse. God is the God of reversals.

Read Romans 8:28. What does this Scripture teach about God's providence?

What assurance can a Christian have in knowing that all things work together for their good?

The same God who sovereignly intervened to flip that script is the same God who knows how to address whatever or whomever you're facing. He can alter your situation and reverse it for your good and His glory. If you'll let go of the pain that comes from confusion, release the distrust that rises from the dust of disappointments, and replace both with trust in the providential heart of God, you'll see Him reverse circumstances in your life you thought could never change. He can turn things around, even overnight.

Are you facing a situation you need God to turn around? Pause and take time to pray and ask God to intervene. Also ask Him to give you wisdom and patience not to try to intervene yourself.

★ PRAYER ★

Dear Lord, I want to witness Your hand moving in my life.

I need You to turn around particular circumstances and obstacles, so I call on You to do so, asking You to guide me along the path You have for me. In Christ's name, amen.

◉ DAY 3 ◉

NO MORE WORRY

The average person is born with more than one hundred thousand hair follicles on his or her head. Sure, a large number of those hair follicles no longer produce hair by middle age, but we all get a fair start. Multiply that average number of hair follicles by seven billion people on the planet, and you're now in the octillion range of mathematical computation. When most of us think of octillion, we think of that slimy creature living in the sea, not a number far beyond our natural ability to compute. Yet God says not one solitary hair falls from your head with which He isn't fully acquainted (see Matt. 10:30; Luke 12:7).

This God is so much bigger than we often give Him credit for. He's so much more able than we often realize. He's so much more sovereign in the daily workings of our lives than we often dare to fathom. He's so brilliant that He can make sense of details and events that appear to be totally unrelated, disconnected, and random. He can put a billion-piece puzzle together in less time than it takes us to blink.

It's this greatness of God we need most when life has become a mess. It's this strategic sovereignty we must rely on when life no longer makes sense. It's this control by our Creator we must trust when circumstances appear chaotic. As children of the King, we're called to believe in this doctrine of sovereignty because that's how we live by faith. In times when things aren't going our way, we believe in this God who strings together the incomprehensible in order to make sense of the senseless.

Yet even so, it's easy to feel in uncertain times that if we don't take care of our problem, it won't be taken care of.

Why do we at times doubt that God can't take care of our daily needs?

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In what ways do your thoughts or actions indicate that you might not truly believe God can or will take care of every issue you face?

Read Jesus' words.

Who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?

MATTHEW 6:27

How did Jesus approach the subject of worry in this verse?

To worry is to question God's integrity. In Matthew 6:31-32 Jesus said the Gentiles—pagan people who didn't know God—were concerned with what to eat, drink, and wear. God's people, who know Him and have a relationship with Him, shouldn't live or think the same way as those who don't. God is insulted by our worry.

If we, who know God, are constantly worried, what does our worry communicate to unbelievers about our confidence in God?

Kingdom life requires faith. Faith is trusting that what God says is true, even when we can't understand it or see its connection to our circumstance. Faith is taking steps that demonstrate what He has said is true. It's acting as though something is so even when it's not so in order that it might be so, simply because God said so. Faith requires risk beyond reason because we trust that God knows what He's doing.

How does trusting God reduce worry?

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Read Psalm 56:3. What's the antidote for fear?

Esther is often applauded for her bravery and courage. She's frequently remembered as a woman who was strong enough to risk her life by approaching the king. But Esther was no stoic warrior. She had fears to overcome. She had worry to face. As we'll see, Esther 8:3 reveals that when she asked for the king's intervention on behalf of her people, she literally wept at his feet. That's a position of submission and humility. Esther's tears reflected the essence of her humanity. Yet regardless of all she must have felt inside, she acted in complete faith.

Perhaps even more admirable than entering the king's inner court uninvited was Esther's willingness to follow God's leading. Her faith gave her wisdom, discretion, and restraint. God was busy setting up all of the pieces of the grand drama and putting everything in place, but He still needed Esther to walk by faith. He needed someone who was willing to trust Him with a pause. He had to have someone who was willing not to rush ahead and try to solve the problem herself. He had to have someone who, when asked what she wanted up to half of an entire kingdom, could stick to the plan and simply say, "I want you to come to dinner" and then, when asked the same question again, could reply, "I want you to come back for dinner once again." God needed someone who was willing to submit her personal strategy to His Spirit's reign.

What worry, obstacle, or delay in your life do you need to turn over to God?

★ PRAYER ★

Heavenly Father, help me trust that You're in control of all of life. Have patience with me and lead me to see Your care for me daily. Show me how to stop worrying and follow Your Spirit's leading in every step I take. In Christ's name, amen.

◉ **DAY 4** ◉

YOUR PERSONAL GPS

The Holy Spirit is your very own global-positioning system. His role involves guiding you to where you need to go and leading you to speak when you should speak up or to be silent when you should remain silent. He opens doors and shows you that they're open. Or He closes doors and seeks to prevent you from pushing on through. The Holy Spirit has been given to you in such a personal way that you have a direct link to the mind of Christ Himself.

Read the following verses and identify the roles of the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26

John 16:13-15

Acts 11:22

Acts 16:6-7

As followers of Jesus Christ, we have no excuse for not knowing which way to go and what pathway to take. Christ's death, burial, and resurrection provided us with all we need for the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit to guide us each step of the pathway to God's purpose. The Holy Spirit is the antenna that allows us to receive the signal God sends. He's the conduit that applies God's truth to our lives.

The Holy Spirit directs not only what we do but also when we do it (see Acts 11:22; 16:6-7). At times God won't give us the freedom to move forward on something, nudges us to move forward more quickly than we thought, holds us back from saying what we feel, or leads us to say something we never thought we would. The Spirit connects us to Jesus and gives the freedom or the restriction we need to remain on the path of God's will. Yet if we don't have a spiritual antenna connected to God's presence, we won't pick up on His leading. We won't know which step to take and when to take it.

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Read the following verses.

A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For “who has known the mind of the LORD, that he will instruct Him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16

According to these verses, who has the mind of Christ? What does the mind of Christ enable a person to do?

If you choose to live with a worldview rooted in secular thinking, you'll interfere with God's program for your life because you'll move when He doesn't want you to move, and you won't move when He wants you to move. You'll speak when He doesn't want you to speak, or you won't speak when He wants you to speak. If your receiver is turned off, you can't discern how to pick up heaven's signal. Then you won't know which step to take in the right direction. It would be like trying to hike up a mountain at night without a light—dangerous, disastrous, and deadly. The Holy Spirit's work in your life illuminates God's guidance as you travel this journey called life.

One of the main reasons you and I need the Holy Spirit's illumination is that God often acts counterintuitively to the way we think and plan. Many times God uses negatives to accomplish positives. He uses what appears to be something bad to bring about something good. He even uses the devil to achieve His righteous goals. And if He's willing to use the devil to bring about His intended outcomes, He's willing to use devilish people as well.

Read Matthew 4:1. Why did the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness?

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Why would the Holy Spirit lead us into circumstances that don't seem beneficial or safe from our perspective?

What do you think God's purpose is in allowing us to face challenges, temptations, or difficulties in life?

Spiritual development often comes through the challenges we face. Just as athletes can't improve in their sports without the pain of working out and practicing, we can't develop the spiritual muscles of faith, trust, belief, and resilience without testing. At times that means the job of the Holy Spirit includes leading us into situations designed to strengthen our character. When we work with God in these circumstances instead of against Him, we can overcome them at the speed with which Christ overcame the devil in the desert.

Read Matthew 4:1-10. Briefly summarize Jesus' responses to all three of the devil's temptations.

1.

2.

3.

Now read Matthew 4:11. What did the devil do when Jesus responded as He did?

Jesus responded to each challenge and temptation by relying on the power and truth of God's Word. He didn't break into a long speech, take a workshop, make a list, or draft a New Year's resolution. His response quickly and concisely demonstrated the power of God in that situation. All the devil could do was leave.

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After Satan left, angels came and ministered to Jesus in order for Him to regain His strength. Following God isn't a lifelong party. Sometimes you feel drained and need to be ministered to. Sometimes challenges seek to defeat you or take you off course.

As we saw earlier, Esther laid it all on the line. But in these times of trial, God ushers in His greatest interventions. He sent angels to minister to Jesus. And He gave Esther the answer for which she had pleaded. If you'll remain faithful as the Holy Spirit leads you, whether through good times or hard times, you'll discover that God is there to meet you, strengthen you, and encourage you just when you need Him most. Trust the process. He knows exactly how to take you to the greatest possible fulfillment of your purpose if you'll stay on the path He has sovereignly ordained.

Trusting in sovereignty doesn't mean we don't risk. Often it means the opposite. What risk might God be asking you to take for the sake of His kingdom?

How do we stay in sync with the Holy Spirit so that we can respond to His leading, even when it's hard or risky.?

★ PRAYER ★

Father, thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit, whom You've given to me as a guide, helper, minister, and encourager. I often neglect to acknowledge the Spirit's presence in my daily life and choices, to my detriment. I ask that You'll remind me to stay connected to and filled with the Spirit so that the full manifestation of His leading and care will be evident in my life and in the lives of people around me. In Christ's name, amen.

◉ DAY 5 ◉

SUDDENLY

I love the lessons we've learned from the life of Esther, Mordecai, Haman, and the king. These stories provide a unique vantage point for seeing ways God guides us and arranges events behind the scenes. At the beginning of this week's lesson, we saw that the king couldn't sleep on the very night Esther and Mordecai needed him not to sleep. God kept the king awake long enough to get more information on Mordecai—information that would drastically change his view of him and the Jewish people.

Next we chased some donkeys with a guy named Saul, who, as a result of this chase, would be named the king of the Israelites. Through Saul's story we discovered how God works in the meanderings of life, connecting them with other people, places, times, and events in order to bring about His intended plan.

After that we considered the amazing truth that God has given us His Holy Spirit to guide us along the pathway to the destiny He has appointed for us. The Spirit's role is to tell us which steps to take, which ones to avoid, and how to move forward on the path. We also saw that the Spirit sometimes allows us to face challenging situations because in them we get to witness God's deliverance and power and have an opportunity to experience spiritual growth.

Today we're going to look at one of my favorite words in the Bible: *suddenly*.

Read 2 Chronicles 29:36. Summarize this verse in your own words.

**Read Acts 16:25-26. What situation were Paul and Silas in?
How did God address it?**

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One reason the Book of Esther was recorded was to demonstrate God's unique way of orchestrating events and circumstances. He normally doesn't work things out straightforwardly. Rather, He weaves as we wait. He positions as we pause. He maneuvers as we move. Then when the time comes, as it did for Esther, He sets the stage. Suddenly. In less than twenty-four hours God flipped the script, and the curtain rose on a brand-new scene.

Throughout Scripture God suddenly moved to arrange, rearrange, position, and promote His plan. Waiting on God means we're waiting for Him to put details together in the perfect timing for His purpose to come about. God is a God of *suddenly*.

Has God ever acted suddenly in your life or in someone's life you know? Describe what happened and what was learned through it.

Is there any area of your life in which you want God to act suddenly on your behalf? Take a moment to pray and ask for His intervention. Also ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom for what you should do, say, not do, and not say in the situation. Record your thoughts.

Read God's words in Isaiah.

*I declared the former things long ago
And they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them.
Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.*

ISAIAH 48:3

Does God require a particular length of time to bring to pass what He intends? Why do we try to place time constraints on God?

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I wish I could tell you how much longer you'll have to wait for change to come to your situation. I wish I could tell you how much longer you'll be disrespected or overlooked in your job. I wish I could tell you how much longer you'll be treated unjustly. I wish I knew how long the waiting game would be in God's plan. But I don't. There are too many pieces of the puzzle. There are too many people on the pathway. There are too many processes in the plan.

I can tell you that when God shows up, He will often come suddenly and in an unexpected way. He often lets things get worse before they get better. Sometimes He allows you to go all the way to the end—to hit rock bottom—so that you'll discover that He's the Rock at the bottom. In doing so, He builds your faith muscles and strengthens your spirit. He also gets the glory and the praise because only He can produce a miracle from a mess.

According to Matthew 15:28, how long did it take for the woman's daughter to be healed?

What did Jesus identify as the root of that healing?

Describe the link between faith and God's sudden movement in our lives. How is faith demonstrated?

When the kids were much younger and I was in seminary, my wife stayed home to take care of the two children we had at that time. I worked while going to school full-time, but the income wasn't enough to adequately provide for our family. One morning before heading off to school, I sat down with my wife for our morning devotion together. She broke into tears as she shared that she couldn't go on with the bleak amount of money we had.

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I felt like a failure at that time and committed to do all I could to take care of my family, even if that meant quitting seminary and working full-time. But before I quit, I asked her to give me twenty-four hours in which we would both seek God for His wisdom and leading. I asked her, “How much money would you need in the next twenty-four hours for you to believe God is leading me to stay in school?”

“Five hundred dollars” was her reply. In the 1970s five hundred dollars was a lot of money. But when I arrived on campus just a few hours later, I opened my mailbox to discover an envelope containing five one-hundred-dollar bills. I hadn’t told anyone about our request to the Lord that morning. Only God knew. But that’s all who has to know. Because God can change things suddenly.

God often allows us to get backed into a corner, where we no longer know what’s going on or how to solve our challenges. He does so in order for us to discover that He alone is God. But if your spiritual antenna isn’t up—if you’re thinking worldly thoughts, living worldly values, and making decisions based on your own insight—you won’t be able to pick up the signals of His Spirit. You’ll miss the leading that’s necessary to take you along the pathway of providence.

★ PRAYER ★

Lord, I want to see You move suddenly in the challenges I’m facing. I commit my heart and mind to You and seek Your will and provision, knowing as I trust in You, I can also rest in the confidence of that trust. You can move quickly. You can bring about change.

I believe that, and I ask for that. In Christ’s name, amen.