

BY JULIA JEFFRESS SADLER

PRAY BIG THINGS

25



DAY 01

More Than We Can Imagine

Before we begin this week together, I want to ask you to make the decision to start praying intentionally—to ask God regularly for very specific requests. The decision to do so in my husband Ryan’s and my life single-handedly changed the course of our lives forever. Such willingness has the potential to change your life as well. Please don’t miss this opportunity to go before the Lord so that He shapes the prayers that you are eager to ask.

The second thing we need to address is that some of us are not receiving what we ask because we are not really children of God. If you have never received Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, then I urge you not to read another word before inviting God to forgive you and save you and asking for Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross to count for you. Romans 10:9–10 says, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...” If you are in relationship with Jesus, your access to the Father is unhindered. He welcomes us with fullness of joy and acceptance before His throne.

For most of my life, I was never really interested in prayer. Prayer seemed boring, honestly. Why was this so? The answer is I lived on borrowed prayers. I benefited from other people’s knee work. I was encouraged by other people’s testimonies. My lack of enthusiasm about prayer was not a theological issue; it was an ownership issue. Why is owning our faith and owning our prayer life so vital? The Bible repeatedly refers to God’s people taking ownership of the blessings God has promised to His children. For example, Deuteronomy 28:12 says, “The Lord will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.” It is a complete contradiction for us to live as if we have no tangible way to get what we need, want, or desire while having full access to the God of all creation.

READ

Deuteronomy 15: 6

1 Peter 3: 12

Pray for God to give you an increased desire to talk with Him. Confess whatever may be a hindrance to your prayer life today.

DAY 02

What Do You Believe About God?

What we believe about God is the most important thing about us. Knowing God's character and believing He is good despite circumstances are what anchored my husband Ryan and I when we walked through three miscarriages in less than a year. This heartache was not what we planned when we began our prayer journey of intentional, specific, and bold requests.

To us, such personal setback despite a flourishing ministry felt like another dagger in what seemed like an unending attack or attempt to mock our faith. Our pain definitely did not look like answers to our prayers!

Life and life's experiences caused each of us to question God. We question His goodness. We question His plan. We may even question His existence. The hopeful thing about our questions is that God's word directs us. The questions are certain, and so are the answers. In the Bible, God tells us who He is, what He thinks, how He acts, and how much He loves us.

The unrest comes because we don't want to believe that God has that much control over our lives. It's hard surrendering to the idea that our lives are bigger than we are. Determining who we believe God is and how He works will determine how we handle tragedy, how we handle blessing, how we handle doubts, and how we handle life.

What we believe about God is the choice we make before the tragedy, before the pain, before the questions, and before the heartache. We must decide what we think about God and choose what we believe about Him before our beliefs are challenged, questioned, or threatened. This is the order that will help preserve your faith: decide what you think about God, then live it out when difficult times come. This firm foundation is vital for spiritual survival and for dream survival.

Deciding to hold on to the dreams God gives us even when we lose pregnancies, jobs, friends, or status is what sets dreamers apart. I had to choose to believe that God is good, He is in control, and He loves me in order to keep going during our season of miscarriages and loss. This is also the choice you can make in order to not lose heart and to keep going.

READ
Deuteronomy 3: 24

Numbers 23: 19

2 Samuel 22: 32-34

Ask God to give you faith to believe He is who He says He is and to take Him at His word.

DAY 03

Joseph—An Example of Refusing to Let Go of God-Given Dreams

When I think of a person in the Bible who exemplifies refusing to let go of his dreams, even in the face of difficult circumstances, I think of the Old Testament character Joseph. Joseph was the great-grandson of Abraham and one of the twelve sons of Jacob.

In Genesis 37, God gave Joseph a dream that someday he would be a leader over his older brothers. When we read Joseph's story, it's important for us to remember that Joseph heard from God before he heard his brothers' plot to take his life. Joseph received his dreams before his slavery. And Joseph refused to let go of them when all evidence pointed to his dreams being over and unfulfilled.

God often gives us the dream first to help prepare us with hope for the future. The dreams are what sustained Joseph during extremely difficult circumstances. And your God-given dreams will sustain you too, no matter what your future holds. How do we stay devoted to our dreams, our family, and our faith when we are in the midst of our holding cell, like the one Joseph experienced?

First, when we doubt God, we must be honest about our feelings and questions. Being honest lets us move toward our relationship with God. Hiding our doubts and questions will keep us stuck and powerless. We will not reach our dreams by accident. We will not end up with a stronger faith after times of trial by default. This is an active stance—a battle.

Second, identify and deal with thoughts that are contrary to what we know to be true about God and His plan for our life. While he was in prison for a crime he didn't commit, Joseph continued to believe God was in control. When the cupbearer talked about his dream to Joseph, Joseph replied, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (Gen. 40:8). Abandoned by his family, alone in a foreign country, and wrongfully sentenced to prison, Joseph certainly had an excuse to wonder if God was present.

God has every right to remedy our situation or to let our worst fear come to be. Even if He doesn't answer the way we want, God is still good and on His throne. Our responsibility is with our faith and actions.

READ
Romans 8: 38-39

Psalms 51: 6

Psalms 51: 10-12

Father, help me to accept the dreams You give me, so that I know how to protect them and hold on to hope.

DAY 04

Take Action

The Bible commands us to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh” (Romans 13:14) and to take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). He tells us to take control of our thoughts because we are, in fact, able to do so. Expressing our feelings is an important part of healing, but we cannot get stuck in our emotions. Feeling cannot replace thinking. We have no choice in our feelings, but we have great choice in our thoughts.

During my years in postgraduate work, I would hear psychologists affirm this phenomenon in research on brain function and intrusive thoughts, concluding that humans actually have ninety-five percent control over their thoughts. Let’s say the remaining five percent are spiritual warfare or automatic responses from trauma and triggers. The theology and psychology are clear: we have a choice in the majority of what we believe about our situation, about others, and about God.

The issue of suffering comes into play when we want to ask God for big prayers, but pain and suffering on both a personal and global level have a way of stopping us before we begin. Even Jesus, the Son of God, cried out on the cross, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). This makes questioning God’s presence seem almost fated for those closest to Him. After all, as children of God, we have tasted His goodness. We know His power. We have a relationship with Him—and so perhaps we are more likely to feel His perceived absence than those who do not.

Nothing seemed good about Jesus’s dying on the cross. The disciples were terrified, the cause of Christ was halted, and Jesus was dead. But that was the perspective of Friday. On Sunday morning, when Jesus rose from the dead, people finally understood that all things really had happened for a reason—Jesus defeated death, so that we could have eternal life.

God did not answer Jesus’s prayer before the cross to “remove this cup from Me” (Luke 22:42), but Jesus “learned obedience from the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8). Running to God instead of away from God in the midst of suffering is not a natural response. It is the supernatural response that God equips His children with as we stare grief, uncertainty, fear, and sometimes Satan himself in the face.

READ
Philippians 4: 8

James 1: 5

James 3: 17

Confess what is keeping you from trusting God with your dreams. Ask Him for wisdom and faith to rest with the way He chooses to answer.

DAY 05

Knowing Your Purpose in God's Plans for You

While God has many callings and commands that apply to everyone, He also has unique purposes for each of us that are to be discovered. God gives you your dreams, talents, and desires, which means He not only has a great plan for your life but also has equipped you with the personality, talent, and interests you need in order to accomplish this plan.

What are the things you are passionate about? What problems or causes stir your heart when you read about them? What you want for your life right now may not be bad, evil, or sinful. Maybe what you want is even in the plan for what God has for you. But it's not what God has given you yet. And this thing is keeping you stuck, miserable, and ineffective.

I remember being introduced to a whole subgroup of married adults who were struggling with infertility. I had no clue how many struggle with infertility for years, sometimes resulting in the end of their relationship. I also was interested in the different responses of couples who were struggling. Some seemed to have purpose outside of trying to get pregnant. They still served in church. They still had fun as a couple. They still were actively working toward kingdom purposes. But other couples could talk about little else besides trying to get pregnant. The topic consumed their conversations. The struggle took over their entire lives.

This trap is not just for people desiring children. Many singles talk about little else besides wanting to be in a relationship, and many business people talk about little besides their next deal. While there is nothing wrong with these dreams, they keep many people stuck in their struggles instead of figuring out what God has for them today.

I once heard a great quote about balancing our desires with God's plan: "God knows what we need, so if we don't have something, it's ultimately because we don't need it yet." God hasn't accidentally put us in our current situation. He has a purpose, and He has a plan. We can trust that He made us in such a way that our desires and talents will be used to bring about His intended purposes for us and for His glory.

READ
Exodus 31: 3-5

Ephesians 2: 10

1 Peter 4: 10-11

What brings you joy and a sense of fulfillment? How might this reflect the dreams God is giving you for your life?

DAY 06

When Answered Prayer Looks Very Different Than What We Expect

The birth of our three children was a miracle. However, their premature arrival ushered us into uncertainty regarding their health, my health, and even our lives. For the first three months, we watched them fight for their lives as, I'm convinced, thousands fought for them in prayer.

I felt as if I was living in some weird alternate universe, a time warp where the outside world was a distant memory and my new reality was listening to my babies' heart rates fail, watching nurses rush in to resuscitate them, and praying with Ryan every night that we would wake up to still having three living babies. The NICU changes you. Seeing two and three pound newborns struggle to breathe is haunting. What a humbling picture of James 4:15: "If the Lord wills, we will live . . ."

But God had been faithful to prepare me. Shortly after my first trimester finished, I Googled triplet moms. The stories were unbelievably heartbreaking. I was horrified, Ryan wasn't home, and I felt a nervous breakdown coming on. I decided once more to go to God with my questions and overwhelming emotions. Then I heard as clear as day: These are not your children.

I burst into tears. God continued to minister to me as He reminded me that He loved Blair, Barrett, and Blake more than I did and that "no purpose of [God's] can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). I had never been in control, I still was not in control, and ultimately I didn't want to be in control—because God was the One who knew what needed to happen. And He had promised to help me every step of the way.

This lesson saw me through the longest hours and the darkest nights: relinquishing my false sense of control into the faithful, loving hands of the One Who cannot fail nor forsake His own. My little family was safe, because God had us. As Matthew 16:25 says, "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." Losing my control allowed me to find my faith. The freedom God gives us as we learn to surrender provides the peace needed to pray big things.

READ
Psalms 27: 1

Job 42: 2

2 Timothy 2: 3-4

Have you accepted Christ's invitation to become part of something bigger than yourself? Confess the fear you hold toward letting go of the control you think you have.

DAY 07

The Extraordinary Power of Praying God's Word

I was hesitant to write on prayer. Other writings seem to be about theological theories on the spiritual discipline of prayer and stories of nineteenth-century preachers exercising old world prayer disciplines that maybe we should consider implementing in the twenty-first century. I just don't have a lot to say about any of that. But what I do know is that in my time of praying big things, I unlocked a power I never knew before and it changed my life, my family, and my world forever.

Looking back, the main change I made was taking God at His Word. I claimed the promise of James 4:2–3, which says, “You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” And I reminded God of His promise in Ephesians 3:20–21, which tells us that God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.

God answers the prayers that align with His will. The best way to know God's will is to read Scripture. Praying Scripture aligns our words with God's perfect will, creating a new power behind our requests. We have an imperishable inheritance and an invincible power that Satan is hoping we never tap into but is waiting, wanting, and ready to be unleashed. This power is more fantastic than Pandora's box and more adventure-filled than the wardrobe to Narnia. This power is your destiny waiting to be claimed.

We build intimacy with Jesus by facing our problems, our doubts, and the struggles that seem to threaten our very existence. We get it by choosing to never give up. We wake up daily, our eyes fixed on Jesus, with the resolve, “Though He slay me, I will hope in Him” (Job 13:15). There is an ultimate war to be won, but until that day comes, God gives us the power to win every battle leading up to it. Difficult times remind us that this world is not a playground but a battleground that demands we pray big things. We are not alone. Because of Christ, we have the power even in the midst of defeat to persevere and to keep praying big things.

READ
1 Peter 1: 3-5

Ephesians 1: 19-20

Father, teach me to pray your Word, to align my will with Yours, and to never give up in worshipping the One True God with all of my heart, soul, and mind. In Jesus Name, Amen.