

How to Get What You Want



Gary Wilkerson October 15, 2018

A Timely Message on a Timeless Biblical Truth

Not long ago I was invited to a lavish lunch in a spacious New York City apartment. It was a beautiful home, 20 floors up with a wide balcony and a great view of the city. The woman who hosted the event put on a great feast, with luscious vegetables, salads, and pork loin.

Any guest that day would have thought this woman was a high-living, wealthy New Yorker with an executive position at a Fortune 500 company—or at least a huge inheritance. But the opposite was true. She was a struggling single mom who'd almost lost her previous apartment—and then suddenly found this one.

As we stood taking in the amazing view, she told us how her desire came to pass.

"I was in a smaller apartment in this same building, and the rent was going up," she said. "I couldn't afford it. I was already strained. Every part of New York is getting more expensive, and I realized something awful: I had to uproot my daughter and move out of the city. I had to look upstate for a place to live and face a long commute to my job in the city.

"My daughter was going to lose all her friends," she continued. "And we wouldn't be able to come to church here without a terrible strain." Then her situation got worse: All the towns within commuting distance had exorbitant rents too. She started to despair.

"I put it all in God's hands," she said. "I said, 'Lord, you know what I need: a place to live with my daughter. But you also know what I *want*. I want my precious girl to keep her friends. And I want to stay in our church—to share life with the people who love and support us. I don't want to lose these good and perfect gifts you've blessed us with.'"

She prayed this as she was riding the elevator in her building. As she stepped into the lobby, the building superintendent waved to her. "You're the one looking for a new place, right?" he said. "Well, something just opened up." He led her to the apartment she now lived in, with the wide balcony overlooking the city. "I don't know why this is," he said, "but the rent for this place is lower than your current apartment. Do you want it?"

Did she want it? She was blown away by God's extravagant mercy! She *needed* shelter—but she *wanted* more for her daughter, herself, and her relationships. The Lord met her needs, as he does for us all, according to his riches in glory: "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (*Philippians 4:19, ESV*).

Yet God met her *wants* as well. She made her good desires known to the Lord—and his answer blessed not just her but also her daughter and their beloved faith community.

Talking about wanting things is a taboo for a lot of Christians.

Getting what we want isn't a common topic among many Jesus followers. But in reality, it has everything to do with God's character and how we perceive him. Many of us approach the Father as if he only hears prayers for "spiritual" things. But Paul says God's care covers every aspect of our lives: "My God will supply every need of yours" (*my emphasis*).

Paul adds this: "Now to him who is able to do *far more abundantly than all that we ask or think*, according to the power at work within us" (*Ephesians 3:20, my emphasis*). I've never been good at math, but I know that "far more abundantly" means "a lot." The New Living Translation takes this even farther, saying God will "accomplish *infinitely* more than we might ask or think." I know "infinite" is even more than "a lot"; it's completely beyond us.

In short, God is interested in much, much more than meeting our *needs*. When Paul uses the words "ask or think," he's referring to our *wants* and *desires*. Moreover, Paul says God wants more than to grant our desires—he wants to *exceed* them. So, if we pray to have our cup filled, God wants to make it overflow—just as he did with the woman's apartment. You see, praying our desires isn't just about us and our need. It's about knowing a good, loving Father who delights to give generously.

We're supposed to imagine God this way. In fact, he blesses us with an imagination so that we can dream of and desire good things from him. When I was growing up, my hero was the New York Knicks basketball player, Willis Reed. As I developed my hoop skills, I imagined playing like him. Then, as I got older and set aside youthful dreams, I used my imagination to desire other things: bringing God's Word to people, meeting a good woman I would marry, raising children who would have kind and generous hearts. None of these things were "needs"; they were wants, desires, deep passions of my heart. And I thank God that all of them came to pass by his gracious, loving hand.

There's a wonderful reality behind my testimony here. That is, many of our desires originate with God. That's part of his ongoing work of sanctifying us: As we walk with him, his indwelling Spirit plants a desire in us to want good things. Like any loving parent, God wants our heart to align with his, so we'll be blessed. And according to Paul, he accomplishes this "not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us" (*Ephesians 3:20, The Message*).

I've learned over the years that Satan lays a certain kind of trap for faithful Christians.

I'm talking about followers of Jesus that the devil knows he can't tempt with overt, gross sins. If he can't get them to follow evil desires, he'll get them to *believe all desires are evil*. If he can accomplish that, they'll forsake every desire—and cut themselves off from God's extravagant blessings.

James addresses evil desires in Christians: "What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the *evil desires* at war within you?" (*James 4:1, NLT, my emphasis*). But Satan twists this verse in some Christians' minds. He simply removes the word "evil," so that the verse reads, "Don't those conflicts come from the desires within you?" In other words, all desires are evil. Therefore, if we don't want anything, we won't have conflicts.

What a demonic lie. We're meant to be passionate people, desiring to see God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. In fact, that was one of my very desires as a young man: to be able to preach God's Word to lead people into abundant life. None of my longings as a young man—for a godly wife, for kind children, for his anointing to preach—was evil. All of them were good. And he blessed my life with them all because it delighted him to do it.

Jesus says it plainly and simply in his Sermon on the Mount: "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who *ask* him!" (*Matthew 7:11, my emphasis*). Think about this: In one of his very first public sermons, Jesus urges us to seek good things—and to bring our desires before a Father who delights to answer us.

Do you think wanting something proves you're selfish or materialistic? James points out the tragedy of this: "You do not have, because you do not ask" (*James 4:2, ESV*). Maybe you're afraid to approach God, thinking he'll say, "Whoa, that's selfish! You're asking for way too much. I'll meet your needs, but no more." No, that isn't God's

way. Paul says the opposite: “God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!” (*Ephesians 3:20, The Message*).

Our Father isn’t some stingy miser who hoards blessings and withholds them because we don’t deserve them. It’s time for his people to see him as he really is—the generous, loving God of our wildest dreams!

I write this to every Christian who senses he or she may be leading a fruitless life—and who wants to change.

My passion is to see people live their lives to the fullest in the abundance of God’s blessings and grace. While the world is sighing, “Thank God it’s Friday,” I picture every Christian waking up and saying, “Thank God it’s Monday! I get to bask in the joy God has given me. I get to love on people all through the week. I get to share the Good News of Jesus with everybody.”

We all know not every week is like that. Certain seasons in life are a struggle. Yet God uses even those seasons to place a discontent in our hearts, a hunger to see his abundant goodness—just as the woman in the new apartment did. Sometimes these seasons last longer than we like, and we learn to trust Jesus through it. Yes, even those seasons are meant for our good. If you’re in that kind of season, I encourage you to do three things:

- 1: Eliminate all selfish wants. Resist all bitterness over what
- 2: Ask for what you need to be a witness (2 Timothy 2:1, 5, 10)
- 3: Ask for what you need to be a witness (2 Timothy 2:1, 5, 10)

I can’t say it any plainer: God wants more for us than we want for ourselves. It’s time for you to set aside all shame and fear, and bring all your desires before the Father who loves you. Ask him for those things—and watch him demonstrate his extravagant love to you before an awestruck world. He’ll bless you beyond anything you can imagine!

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