

How to Cooperate With God in Your Faith-Filled Next Steps

The right first step in every situation is to pray, “God, help me! Jesus, come!” Inviting Him to be with you always makes a difference. But there’s almost always a second critical step to that two-part prayer that’s just as important; “What step do You need me to take next?”

It’s important to get the sequence right. Some people tend to rush ahead trying to fix things, and then almost as an afterthought pray, “God, please bless this.” Other people keep praying for God to fix things but never take action on their own.

Frederick Douglas, former slave turned abolitionist, said “I prayed for 20 years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs.”

God works. And we work. (See Phil. 2:12-13). It’s cooperating *with* God.

So how do you do that? What does “taking the next step” look like?

1. Pray first.

Again, get the sequence right. God is the initiator, the Creator, the one who sees the end from the beginning. He knows which goal He is taking you toward. You’ve got to get the blueprint from Him before you know what to do next. “Except the Lord build the house, those who build labor in vain; except the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Ps. 127:1).

On the cosmic eternal scale, we know God’s design for you is for you to become like Jesus and to be part of His eternal

kingdom (see Rom. 8:29, 1 Pet. 2:9). He is the healer, provider, righteous judge, Good Shepherd and loving King. But we can easily insert our own intermediate plans and then wonder why God doesn't seem to bless them.

Invest time in listening to God well enough to hear what He is asking you to do next.

2. Take a step forward.

This is praying with your legs. When God created humankind, He gave us a measure of dominion, or agency (see Gen. 1:28). God is the overall ruler. But you and I are made in His image. We have a domain over which He has given us ownership. While the enemy stole that from humankind, in Christ, we can take that back by exercising that dominion. It's taking the direction we hear from our King and executing it in our sphere of influence.

You have agency, for example, over your thoughts and feelings, over what happens in your house, and over how you spend your time, energy and money. You have a choice about choosing forgiveness, healing or spiritual growth. Your actions also affect others in your household, your community and the world.

Your agency is not absolute. Others have choices also, and we live in a world that is still in the middle of the war between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. But God calls you to action as His created sons and daughters. And your actions will affect the outcomes.

Examples of Next Steps

In working together with God, in praying with your legs, in exercising the dominion God has entrusted you with, you will be energized and spiritually strengthened. Mental-health experts have demonstrated over and over again that your emotional and mental well-being will increase as you focus on the areas in which you *do* have a measure of control.

Here are some examples of what that might look like.

Physical Health

You're struggling with illness, fatigue, pain, obesity, substance abuse and so on. Your role will include optimizing your lifestyle and cooperating with experts. Find out about healthy eating and do the hard work of changing your eating habits. Move your body more today than you did yesterday. Develop a healthy rhythm of activity and rest. Optimize your sleep environment. Drink lots of water. Find healthier substitutes for sweetened beverages or unhealthy snacks.

And get some help. Become an informed involved consumer of health care services. Ask your doctor questions and take action when he or she makes recommendations. Take full advantage of whatever medical care is available to you.

Emotional/Mental Wellness

You're struggling with depression, fear, anxiety, addiction and more. Beyond optimizing your physical lifestyle (above), your role will include intentionally caring for your mind. Learn what it means to forgive in a healthy way. Develop the mental muscles to decide where your mind will go instead of chasing after it. Choose high-quality mental and emotional nourishment every day to stay filled up. Stretch your mind in learning new things.

When you've been wounded, actively choose healing. Be relentless about finding and taking into your being things that bring healing. Put yourself with other people who can help you heal, even if it's excruciating to do so.

Material Things

You're struggling with a miserable job, lack of income, debt and other financial issues. Your role is to follow God's ways about money and bring your skills to the world. Learn what God says about money. Study how money works. Differentiate between

needs and wants. Cut unnecessary expenses even when it's painful to do so. Combine wisdom with generosity. Learn how God has built you and study how to bring yourself to the world in the most effective and financially sustainable way. Look to God first as the source for your needs instead of others, government and so on. Get smart about how you find or create income.

Healthy Relationships

You're unhappily single, miserably married or concerned over children or friends and other relationships. Your role is to become the kind of spouse, parent or friend that God needs you to be in this season. Deal with the prickly or needy parts of yourself (see above). Study about communication, setting boundaries, forgiveness, parenting, intimacy and so on. When you learn something, do the hard work to put it into practice. Evaluate the impact of your efforts on the relationship in question, adjust and try again.

If married, become the husband or wife God needs you to be to your spouse right now. If a parent, step up and be involved where your child needs you to be. And if you want to be married, become the kind of person your potential spouse would value. For the world beyond your family, get over yourself, step out there, and make a difference.

Spiritual Growth

You're wrestling with stubborn sins, addiction, unhealthy habits or alienation from God. Your role is to keep on inviting God to intervene. And then your role includes getting deeply involved with other growing believers to experience God's grace and healing (see James 5:16). Invest in finding out what the Jesus kind of life looks like, and actually do what Jesus said to do (see Matt. 7:24-27). Keep putting yourself in the presence of God over and over again. Study how others have followed Jesus and copy them as they follow Jesus (see 1 Cor. 11:1).

Wherever you need help, invest in finding out what God has to say about the situation: self-esteem, rejection, relationships, healing, growth, ministry and so on. Study and learn His ways. Allow His Holy Spirit to keep changing you.

Is That All?

Wow. Does that seem overwhelming? Remember that this is *not* about trying harder. It's absolutely vital to begin by seeking God's intervention and guidance. Throwing yourself into endless activity will not work. This only illustrates the almost infinite number of steps you *could* take. You need to hear Him first in order to know what step will be what you need next.

And then walk. Take a step. Pray with your legs.

That's what cooperating with God looks like.

Your Turn: *Where are you struggling right now? Is there a "next step" you sense God directing you to take next? Leave a comment below.* {eoa}

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