

1 Secret Weapon

2 Scripture

- When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted God's word,
 - they sent Peter and John to them. (Acts 8:14)
- When they arrived,
 - they prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15)
 - because it had not yet come upon them;
- They had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 8:16)

3 Scripture

- Then Peter and John placed their hands on them,
 - and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17)
- When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money (Acts 8:18) and said,
 - "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:19)

4 Scripture

- Peter answered:
 - "May your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! (Acts 8:20)
 - You have no part or share in this ministry because your heart is not right before God. (Acts 8:21)
 - Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. (Acts 8:22a)
 - Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. (Acts 8:22b)

- For I see you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." (Acts 8:23)

5 Introduction

- Back in 2015, after tennis great Serena Williams won at Wimbledon, she exclaimed,
 - "I want to thank Jehovah God."
- As many of you know, it's not uncommon for ...
 - professional athletes to express gratitude to the Creator
 - for a successful play or championship in their field of competition.

6 Introduction

- In Williams' situation,
 - someone either got confused or
 - deliberately exaggerated the intent of Serena's remarks.
- The headline read,
 - "Wimbledon winner Serena Williams' secret weapon: 'Jehovah God!'"

7 Introduction

- As is often the case in journalism, the headline is crafted by an editor, not by the reporter who authored the article.
- While the article explains Williams' connection to her faith in God,
 - it never depicts God as "a weapon" in a sort of arsenal to which the tennis star has access.
- Whoever wrote the headline, however, sacrificed accuracy for a catchy attention grabber.

8 Introduction

- So, if you read the article, will you find that Williams regards God as her "secret weapon"?
- Well, not directly.
- However, she does express gratitude to God for the victory.
- Therefore, since she thanks God, doesn't that imply she indirectly credits Him for her success?

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11 List Goes On!

- Kirk Cameron - An actor known for his role in "Growing Pains," Cameron has become an advocate for Christian values, mainly through his work in Christian films.
- Tim Tebow - A former NFL quarterback and current baseball player, Tebow is well-known for his public expressions of faith, including his famous "Tebowing" pose.
- Chris Pratt - The actor has frequently spoken about his faith in Jesus Christ, notably during award acceptance speeches and interviews.
- Candace Cameron Bure - Known for "Full House," she often shares her faith through social media, books, and work with Christian organizations.

12 List Goes On!

- Patricia Heaton - The actress from "Everybody Loves Raymond" and "The Middle" has been vocal about her Christian beliefs and has spoken at various Christian events.
- Tyler Perry - The filmmaker, actor, and playwright often incorporates Christian themes and has spoken publicly about his faith journey.
- Mel Gibson - Known for directing "The Passion of the Christ," Gibson has been open about his Catholic faith despite personal controversies.

- Carrie Underwood - The country singer has released Christian-themed songs and often talks about how her faith influences her life and music.
- TobyMac - A prominent figure in Christian music, Toby McKeehan (TobyMac) has a significant influence in promoting Christian values through his music.

13 Locked in with the Lord

- Again, C.J. Stroud made his intentions clear:
 - To succeed in 2025, he would first "Lock in with the Lord."
- So I decided to travel to the Middle East,
 - ascend Mount Sinai like Elijah, and
 - wait for the Lord.

14 Locked in with the Lord

- When God appeared in his glory, I looked up and said,
 - "God, what does a million years mean to you?"
 - God replied, "A minute."
- Then, I ask God another question,
 - "And what does a million dollars mean to you?"
 - "God said, "A penny."
- Then I asked God, "Can I have a penny?" God said, "In a minute."

15 Bargaining with God

- You might be surprised to learn that some people
 - go to church,
 - pray regularly,
 - try to live an upright life, and so on, and
 - expect things to go reasonably well.
- However, when things don't go well, we often blame God, not our assumptions or understanding of God's will or ways.
- Neither do we question our motives, attitudes, or actions.

16 Bargaining with God

- The first time I ever prayed by myself was in the Seventh Grade.
- In the privacy of my bedroom, I sincerely prayed that somehow my grades would magically turn into all A's.
- For some reason, God chose not to answer that prayer that day.
- Fortunately, we serve a merciful God, and my Dad mercifully spared my life that day.
- That was the last time I prayed until February 1983, when I asked God to forgive me for ignoring him.
- The story's moral is that we should never blame God when we pray amiss.

17 The Question

- So here are my questions for everyone tonight.
 - How much does our motive matter to God when we pray?
 - Should we expect God to answer our prayers simply because we publicly acknowledge him or say some magic words?

- In other words, is there something else he expects?
- And last but not least, how much faith does Gene King need to become ...
 - an elite NFL quarterback and play for the Green Bay Packers?

18 Introduction

- According to the Book of Acts, Simon the Sorcerer was a very popular magician, famous throughout the land, both high and low.
- He boasted that he was someone great, and many people agreed, saying,
 - "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." (Acts 8:10 NIV)
- But when he heard the preaching of the Gospel through Philip, he believed and was baptized.

19 Introduction

- However, when Simon saw how God used Peter to work supernatural wonders, his ego got the best of him.
- Instead of wanting to be more like Jesus, Simon wanted more worldly power and success.
- Having his own issues with wanting to be somebody, Peter saw the true motivation behind Simon's request.

20 Introduction

- So profound was this error that Peter didn't hold back his rebuke. He said,
 - "You have no part or share in this ministry because your heart is not right before God.
 - Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord.
 - Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.
 - For I see you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." (Acts 8:21-23)

21 Simon's Heart Issue

- The big problem with Simon was that he had a significant heart issue;
 - as the Bible says, he was full of bitterness.
- Perhaps the status of a servant in Christ meant little to him, and out of jealousy and envy, he wanted the praises of men rather than God.
- In other words, the temptation to drink from the cocktail of fame and power was too much for Simon, and he lusted for apostolic power and position.
- This sin has a name, Simony, which is the act of selling church offices and roles or sacred things.
- It was a real problem during the Middle Ages.

22 Israel

- One of the reasons why God wanted his people to be separate and keep their distance from their pagan neighbors was so they wouldn't learn their ways.
- Yahweh was different from those pagan deities.
- While the Mosaic Law included various mandatory sacrifices and ceremonial obligations, these weren't the essence of God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.
- In other words, if we want God's favor, we must first submit to His will and ways—finding out what meets the conditions of his promises.

23 False Assumptions

- One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to develop "false assumptions."
- That is expecting something will turn out in one particular way, and then it doesn't.
- It can lead to many disappointments, and some people have a crisis of faith.

- They expect God to do something, and then he doesn't.
- This is why we read our Bibles: to ensure our faith is based on truth and not corrupted by worldly expectations.

24 The Lord's Will

- According to the Apostle Paul,
 - For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. (Eph 5:8–10 NIV)
 - Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, (Eph 5:15 NIV)
 - Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (Eph 5:17 NIV)

25 God Watches Over His Word

- According to Jeremiah, the prophet, God watches over His word to perform it. [See Jeremiah 1:12]
- It doesn't mean God watches over our assumptions, hopes, or dreams.
- This is why we need to read and sincerely study God's word: to live in submission to His will and be blessed.
- In other words, faith is believing that God rewards those who follow His word.
- When we live to meet the conditions of those promises, our actions show that we believe, and when we believe, we receive.

26 Follow God's Word

- God's word can be trusted.
 - The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. (Psa 19:9 NIV)
 - They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. (Psa 19:10 NIV)

- By them is your servant warned; in keeping them, there is great reward. (Psa 19:11 NIV) [See also, Acts 4:32ff.]

27 Right Sacrifices

- Not all sacrifices or forms of worship are acceptable to the Lord.
- Just because we worship the right God makes no difference.
- The expression of faith has to line up with His will.
- This is why revelation is so important and why we should read our Bibles and listen to those who teach what the Bible says.
- As it says in Psalms,
 - Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord. (Psa 4:5 NIV)
- And according to the Apostle Paul,
 - Run in such a way as to get the prize. (1 Cor 9:24a)

28 Right Sacrifices

- Again, the point of this lesson tonight is that God watches over His word to perform it.
- So, if we want to be blessed in this New Year, 2025, we must find out what pleases the Lord and set our hearts on it, even if it cramps our style.
- As the author of Hebrew says,
 - Let us throw off everything that hinders and run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (Hebrews 12:1)
- The world goes in training for a crown that perishes, we for one that will never perish and last forever. [See 1st Cor. 9:25b]