

Pain and Suffering; When It Seems God Isn't Answering Our Prayers

Psalm 145: 14-21 “The Lord upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His works. The Lord is near to all who call on Him, and all who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desire of all who fear Him; He also hears their cry and saves them. The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless His Holy Name forever and ever.”

Matthew 7: 7-11 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 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!

As we read, these next four passages, I want you to ask yourself if you truly believe and trust these inspired words; no matter what trial you're going through; no matter how severely you or a loved one are suffering. Do we **truly trust these words?

Psalm 34: 15, 17-19 , Phil 4: 6-7, James 5: 16, 1 John 5: 13-15

God cannot lie: **Numb 23:19** and **Titus 1:2**

Factors that may hinder our prayers. We each need to examine our-selves and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2: 12-13). For now, lets ask yourself these questions:

- Am I cherishing sin in my heart? (Psalm 66:18)
- Do I have an unforgiving heart? (Mark 11:25)
- Do I pray while doubting God? (James 1:5-8)
- Am I seeking first the Kingdom of God & His righteousness? (Mat 6:33)
- Do I pray without ceasing? (1 Thess 5:17)
- Do I give thanks to God in all circumstances? (1 Thess 5:18)

Prayer requests granted by God:

- Abraham prayed and God answered by healing King Abimelech's wife and female slaves and opening their wombs; as God had previously closed their wombs for the sake of Sarah, Abraham's wife (Gen 20:1-18)
- Samson's final plea to God for strength to kill the Philistines, even though it would cause his own death as well (Judges 16: 28 - 30)
- Hannah, who was barren, prayed earnestly for a son and God granted her petition (1 Sam 1: 9-17)
- King Hezekiah prayed, after receiving the news that he was to die, and God granted him fifteen more years of life (2 Kings 19 and 20)
- Cornelius was not yet a christian when God heard his prayer as Cornelius was a devout man who feared God and prayed continually (Acts 10: 1-4). And as we know, God sent Peter to Cornelius, to preach words to him by which he could be saved.

Prayer requests denied: There are many examples of where God denied prayer requests; we'll look at just two for now:

1. David, when his child through his sinful relationship with Bathsheba (the wife of Uriah the Hittite) was on his death bed (2 Samuel 12: 13-23): God had told David through Nathan, the prophet, that his son would die as a result of his sin. God forgave David his sin but refused David's request to heal his son.

2. Paul, with his "thorn in the flesh" **2 Cor 12: 7-10**. We can learn much from Paul's attitude when he did not receive his request from God.

a) God gave His answer directly to Paul. We do not have that luxury today so in a sense, we need to have more faith and trust in God, as Jesus said in **John 20:29** "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe".

b) He continued to trust in the strength of Christ. We see his trusting attitude when he later wrote to the Philippians in **Phil 4: 12-13** if we set our mind on things above and not on things of the earth **Col 3:1-4**.

Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Did God grant His request?

What was Jesus' attitude? **Hebrews chap 12:1-2**

Trust in God: **Isaiah 55: 8-9, Phil 4: 6-7**

The main objective for this lesson is to look at our attitude toward God when we do not receive our requests of Him.

- I. Draw strength and courage from the examples of suffering in the Bible.
 - a. Look at Job. I think Job is one of the greatest examples of suffering. I imagine we're all familiar with the story of Job and how he was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil and yet God allowed Satan to wreak havoc in Job's life. **Job 1: 20-22 , Job 42:12**
 - b. What about all of the saints who were persecuted, being beaten, imprisoned, even put to death? Look at Stephen, in Acts chapters 6 & 7, a man full of grace and power who was doing great wonders and signs among the people; he was stoned to death. The apostle Paul later was also stoned to the point that he almost died.
 - c. What about John, the baptist; the one sent to prepare the way for Christ? He was beheaded! (Matt 14:1-12)

Jesus wants us to be courageous **John 16:33** and **Rev 2:10**

- II. Why do bad things happen to good people and the unfaithful flourish?
Matt 5:45b
- III. What about when another brother or sister in Christ receive their request of God and are healed, when at the same time, we are suffering; we may become envious, if we're not careful. In this case it is good to remember what Paul tells us in **Romans 12:14** "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep."
- IV. Let the trials of life make us stronger.
James 1: 2 - 4, Romans 5: 2 - 5, 1 Peter 1: 3-9, 1 Thess 5: 23-2
- V. Is God still working?
 - Bible has been preserved through out the ages. Still the best selling book of all time!
 - Rainbow / God keeps His promises

- **Gen 8:22** “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

God set these things in motion and He allows nature to take it’s course in many ways, but I hope we all know, that He also has the power to manipulate nature to suit His will. But again, whether He grants our requests or not, it is our job to trust Him. Let’s choose to go ALL IN, each day, with a purpose greater than ourselves. **Rom 8:18** reads “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Our God is still at work. He loves us and cares for us; let us put our trust in Him, completely! Let us praise His Holy name in all circumstances. Let us remember all He has done for us and be grateful.

I will close with two scriptures that will encourage us to keep our lives here on earth in perspective and keep our focus on the big picture:

1 Peter 1: 3-9 and **1 Thes 5: 23-24**

Anonymous poem:

“God did not promise days without pain, laughter without sorrow, nor sun without rain. But He has promised strength for the day, comfort for the tears, and light for the way”.