

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday August 8, 2021. "Dear God: Honest Prayers to a God Who Listens. Dealing with the difficulties of life and people."

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're over halfway through 2021 and fully committed to gathering in person. A growing group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's, youth areas and coffee spot have been fully open also and we're seeing a good response. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Recap.

We're in our second Sunday of the series following the spiritual journey of an influencer and author Bunmi Laditan, (watch the message online to see how to pronounce her name), in her book; ***"Dear God: Honest Prayers to a God Who Listens."*** Last week on this spiritual search, we discovered the first step towards God begins with honesty about where we are spiritually and our understanding of, and relationship with, God. If we cannot be totally honest where we're struggling, then there is little chance in making headway in our search for him. We have to be comfortable that our faith and understanding of God will come in spurts and slides, and we give ourselves grace on that journey.

III Sunday.

After giving ourselves permission to have ups and downs in our spiritual journey, we tackled the topic of dealing with the difficulties of life. We all face moments in life, and just difficult people, that challenge our faith in our search for God. And these hard things, and difficult people, will push us to question some of our more simplistic answers we've acquired over the years to explain the world.

Think of a time, situation, moment, or even a person who challenged some of your assumptions about your faith or God. How did you handle it?

How do you see or believe differently because of that event?

Two passages were read from Sunday, and we'll hit and unpack each separately. The first passage was Paul writing about his struggle with a very specific difficulty in his life. It challenged what he had understood about God, and how he changed his viewpoint to deal with this new understanding. Read **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**. And we'll look for some truths in it.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What did it say to you about our response to dealing with difficulties in our life?

This is a tough passage, because Paul is sharing how his understanding of the nature and work of God is not always to remove those difficulties from our life. There are times we are to grow something in the middle of those struggles rather than have them removed. And this is one of the most unsettling, and honestly, painful aspects of life. M. Scott Peck begins his multi-million copy selling book *“The Road Less Traveled”* with the words; *“Life is difficult”*. And this moment of vulnerability by Paul calls us to accept this hard truth and to reevaluate some truths we may hold.

1. We need to reframe our theology about difficulties.

How do we understand, (explain), the difficulties in our life? Life is hard, there are things, we have no idea where they came from, that will not go away. It's not because we're being punished by God for things we've done. Have to be careful in reading into our difficulties as God is trying to teach us something. There are consequences to our choices and behaviors, but also random difficulties and people that are simply part of being a human and are living on this planet. And are not a capricious God just slinging lightning bolts. We see two different responses to difficulties. Bunmi loses her faith, everything collapses, and she has to crawl back and assemble a new faith structure. Paul simply deepens an already deep faith, both require a maturing understanding of who God is, (theology).

2. We need to reframe our prayers about difficulties.

This is NOT, stop praying for God to deal with difficult situations in our life. And it is also NOT, stop praying for God to address the specific difficulties you're having to deal with. This is **forming a prayer life in which we are open to God revealing new truths about the difficulties we do face**. Not being snatched from the hard things is not ignoring or abandoning us. If we are open to growth, then our prayers become about **understanding the heart of God** rather than just praying through our Christmas list. Paul reframed a new, different understanding of God into his already existing prayers. Bunmi had to grow this new understanding of prayer and relationship with God.

3. We need to reframe our relationship with difficulties.

This might be the key take away. God's answer may be, **let me help you grow some toughness**. This is not some angry coach yelling at you to suck it up. This is finding ways and tools to cope rather than asking God to remove those things. Life is difficult, and I want to encourage all of us to be kind and compassionate to people whose faith is crumbling because the faith they once had was too simplistic and honestly needed to grow. We show those who are struggling an abundance of grace. Then we help walk with them to grow this mature, real faith that can take on the most difficult of situations and people. Both Bunmi and Paul show this maturing and deepening of their faith, in reframing God's grace in the middle of the hard things.

IV Challenge.

The final scripture and thought is how we hold these difficulties that life hands us, through Paul's evolving understanding of it. Read **2 Corinthians 4:7-10, 16-18**. There is this understanding and hope that holds us, and we hold onto as we go through these difficulties. **So, what truths, understandings, reframing would help you handle all of the difficulties that come your way?**