

When God

When God Says No
2 Corinthians 12:7-10

April 14, 2024

HDBC

Life is full of ups and downs. Most of us have come to accept that. Some days are better than others. But what happens when **the better days seem to disappear**? What happens when the downs out-number the ups, by a long shot.

What happens when you go through a season of life when it seems that God is not paying attention? You are pleading with God, but nothing happens? **After a while you begin to wonder** if there really is a God. If there is a God, what's wrong with me? You're not asking too much, just a little help. But **God remains unmoved by your circumstance** and you think maybe God just doesn't care about me. If He really cared, He would respond to my need and fix my issue.

There are some problems with that line of thinking, even though it is common.

It assumes that what you think is the answer to your problem is the only answer or the best answer. This may not be the case. We are limited in our perspectives. God is unlimited. He sees much better than we. He has power that is beyond us.

It assumes a direct correlation between what God does for you and how He feels about you. If He loves you, He will always say yes. If He says no, He must not love you. Think about how that idea in all the other relationships of our lives. A parent's love for a child does not lead them to always say yes to their requests.

It assumes God is required to always say yes. The assumption is that God exists to serve us, to give us everything we ask for. This is a reversal of reality. In that case we would be God and He would be there for us. The reality is that He is God and we are here for His pleasure and glory. He is God and we are not.

Sometimes God says **no**. **Sometimes He explains why**. Sometimes, He doesn't.

There was a man in the New Testament who was more effective in serving God than any other man mentioned. He was **faithful, courageous, intentional, evangelistic, and missional**. Planted churches all over Asia Minor and would have gone further had his life not be cut short through martyrdom. He wrote half the New Testament and served God regardless of the opposition. He is the poster-person for what it means to follow Jesus.

He spent 20 years of his adult life traveling around in very hostile environments taking the gospel to people who had never heard. He was **shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, whipped, snake-bitten, put in prison**. And it is clear that God loved him. When he (Paul) got saved he was all in. If there ever was a person who was a fully devoted, holding-nothing-back-follower-of-Christ, it was Paul.

Yet, there was a time when he asked God for **one favor, one thing**. And the God whom he had served faithfully, said **no!** That must have been devastating. In fact, he asked the Lord three times. Each time God said **No!**

1. The Challenge (7)

At some point after he became a Christ-follower something physical happened to Paul. Some kind of disease, injury, handicap, or limitation happened to him. He calls it a ***thorn in the flesh***. In fact, he provides some information about when and why it came to him.

He had been invited to visit ***Paradise***. Either in spirit form or even physically, Paul was invited to come to Heaven. While there he saw things and heard things that could not be expressed. It must have been the second most impressive and important event in his life, after his salvation.

Because of the temptation to boast about that experience, Paul was given this ***thorn in the flesh*** to prevent him from exalting himself. It was a God-given problem that was designed to help keep Paul humble. Yet, interestingly, though it was given by God, Paul refers to it as a ***messenger of Satan to torment him***. What an interesting thing. It was given by God, yet was used by Satan.

We don't know what it was. There is all kind of speculation, but no one really knows. Some of speculated that it was a severe **eye problem**. We

know that he did have a problem with his eyes. Others think maybe it was some kind of **leg or hip** issue. Maybe it was a lingering **allergy** problem. Some suggest it was some form of **epilepsy**. Bouts with **malaria**. Whatever it was, Paul said it was like a **messenger from Satan** sent to torment him.

Remember that he was called of God to do the most important thing in his generation. He was called to lead the expansion of the gospel into pioneer areas. He did this **enthusiastically**. **He didn't whine and complain** about God's call on his life. He embraced it. And he was very successful at it. But there was this thing that just seemed to get in the way. It was a hindrance.

Whatever it was, it was a burden to Paul. And he felt that it was a hindrance to his work and ministry. He believed he could do so much more if he could just shake it, get over it, be healed of it.

2. The Prayer (8)

So, he did what we all would do, he asked God to remove it. Nothing wrong with that. Paul knew that God was a God who hears and answers prayer. God is not inattentive. He is not uncaring.

In fact, he has asks us to pray. He wants us to share our heart with Him. He wants us to ask him. There is nothing wrong with asking. In fact, Paul prayed no less than **three times**, specifically that God would remove it from him. This is probably not simply three prayers, but more likely three seasons of praying. It is possible that he had this malady for twenty years. At three different times during those years, he specifically begged the Lord to take it away and heal him.

Keep in mind that he has seen God do for others exactly what he is asking God to do for him. He's not asking for a **bunch of money, for star status or for a comfortable retirement**. He was simply asking to be healed. And his motive was so he could do a better job of fulfilling his calling.

The Bible says *you have not because you ask not . . .*

The Bible says *ask and it will be given to you . . .*

It's ok to pray . . .

When you are sick . . .

When you need a job . . .

When your marriage is in trouble . . .

When your friends have betrayed you . . .

When you are struggling with that class . . .

When you don't have enough money to pay the bills.

Sounds simple. Sounds easy. And it would be, if we could be assured that the answer from God would always be a **yes**. Who wouldn't pray, about everything if that was the case. But notice the answer of God.

3. **The Answer** (9a)

My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.

Let me paraphrase God's answer . . . **No! . . . No! . . . No!**

God said, the answer is **No**. I don't care how many times you ask. I don't care if you fast. I don't care if you plead. The answer this time, Paul, is **No**.

I love you; I called you; I appreciate you; I know your name.

You are going to become **famous**.

People are going to **name their kids after you**.

You are going to **write half the books** of the N. T.

But the answer is **No . . . No . . . No**.

If we stopped the message right here that should be incredibly encouraging to many of you. You aren't sure that God even knows your name. God says **No** to you because you are just not all that important. One of the men whom God used more than anyone else in the first century was Paul. And he tells him **NO**.

But notice this. He did not simply tell him **No**. **He offered a promise.** Paul wanted a yes. Instead, he got a **No, but . . .** followed by a promise. Now, this promise is important. **In fact, it whenever God responds with a No . . . but . . . it is always better than a Yes.**

My grace is sufficient for you.

I'm not going to give you what you are asking for, but my grace is sufficient.

Grace is the ability to put one foot in front of the other.

Grace is the ability to **get up and face one more day.**

Grace is the ability to go to work another day even if it is difficult.

Grace is the ability to **keep on living and serving in your God-given place** regardless of the difficulties.

So, God says to Paul, **whom He loved dearly, *I'm not going to remove this malady, but I am going to give you the strength to keep moving forward. I am going to enable you to be more successful with this hindrance than without it.*** How and why? ***Power is perfected in weakness.***

None of us would sign up for that. We're all about giving God the glory, but we want to do it after the victories, after the wins. We want to do it when we have allowed Him to use **our** talents, **our** strengths, **our** abilities for Him.

We want to leverage our victories for God's glory.

God wants to leverage our weaknesses for His glory.

God says . . . *I'm going to get glory from*
Your inability . . . Your lack of opportunity
Your weaknesses . . . Your failure

I'm going to get glory from you, but on the stage of your weakness, not your strength.

4. The Acceptance (9b-10)

Therefore, Paul says, ***I will boast in my weakness.*** Keep in mind that Paul had experienced some incredible successes. He had won some great victories. But through this situation he came to realize that those were not all that important in glorifying God. **So, he decides to embrace his weaknesses** so that God might get all the glory that He deserves.

Wow, have you ever met anyone like that? If you have you have to admit they are the kind of person you want to be like.

Henrietta Mears, who was used mightily to strengthen through her writing and discipleship suffered from childhood on with extreme myopia and general

eye weakness and irritation. Like Paul, she cried out many times for healing. Like Paul, God said **no**. In her later years she often remarked, *I believe my greatest spiritual asset throughout my entire life has been my failing sight, for it has kept me absolutely dependent upon God.* She helped set the standard for Sunday Schools in America. She founded Gospel Light and wrote the million-seller, ***What the Bible is All About***. She influenced the ministries of Billy Graham, Bill Bright (founder of Campus Crusade for Christ) and many others.

The paradox of power in Christ is this. ***When I am weak, then I am strong.***

Takeaways

1. You have permission to ask God to remove your thorns.

2. God has permission to say yes or no.

3. God may choose to show His power through your weakness

In other words, things may never change. This is not a reflection of his lack of love or compassion for you. It is His choice to showcase his glory and power through your weakness.

4. You can't experience His grace while resisting his will

God provides his grace which will enable us to endure our circumstances.

However, you will not experience that grace unless you yield to His will.

So, as long as you kick against your circumstance, whine about it, fuss at God about it, you will **never experience his sustaining grace.**

However, when you come to realize that He wants to bring glory to His name through your weakness and embrace that as His will, you will begin to experience His sustaining grace.

Sustaining Grace begins with, *not my will, but your will be done.*