

How to Pray in a Dark, Difficult Time

A few weeks ago, my younger sister went through a major health challenge. She walked through a lot of darkness and difficulty. Yet, in the midst of her struggle, she said to me, "I would not have chosen to miss going through every bit of this struggle because of all God did in and through me."

Knowing how much she had suffered physically, mentally and financially through an intensely dark time, this gift of grace to her was supernaturally significant! We had been praying together (along with many others), that God would receive honor and glory in her victory, and indeed He has! She was able to lead two people to the Lord, including a Jewish woman and helped another person with a personal struggle of his own. Focusing upon the needs of others had pulled her from her anxiety over her own condition toward the kingdom purpose of God—which was to redeem her situation for His own glory.

I share this to say that prayer isn't always about the end result but also about the journey. It is, as the apostle Paul says, being able to be content in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in (Phil. 4:11). My friend, Jon Graf, who is on our staff, calls this "praying the process."

If we focus on the end result—the ultimate goal of our prayer, we often miss the blessings, lessons and growth that come from the process of walking through the situation. It is often the process of going through trouble or adversity that strengthens us for kingdom work. As Paul said in Romans 5:3-5: "Not only so, but we also boast in tribulation, knowing that tribulation produces patience, patience produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

God loves us enough to allow trials in our lives for His purposes. As we “pray the process” we can ask God to work in and through us rather than bemoaning our circumstances. God is a redeemer and will not let anything we walk through be wasted. And, in the midst of our situations, we are always to be thankful: “Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus” (1 Thess. 5:18). This is harder than it sounds!

How can we be thankful for illness, tragedy and so on? Go back to Romans 5—when we run into the tough things of life, God has a purpose to use it for His glory, even if we can’t comprehend, imagine or see it. This is where the true prayer of faith takes place. When we begin to pray through the journey (process) of our situations, God is there, walking with us. He hurts alongside of us, sees and feels our pain and knows our frustrations. None of it is a surprise to Him.

Sometimes we have no idea what or how to pray in the midst of a difficult circumstance. But Paul gives us this amazing encouragement in Romans 8:26: “Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

So in a nutshell, here are some guidelines about how to pray through the dark, uncertain times in life:

- Pray the process. Don’t just ask God for the end result you want. Trust God’s heart even when you don’t see Him at work in, through or around you. Know that He is able to overcome and redeem whatever you go through.
- Focus on praying for or with others who are going through trials as you are. God will use your circumstances to uniquely encourage or strengthen someone else.
- Ask God to give you the spiritual eyes to see His kingdom through your situation.

- Rejoice and give thanks in the midst of trials, knowing that He has a purpose for them that will be for His ultimate glory.
- Pray for greater faith to know that God's hand is at work to develop endurance, strong character and the hope of salvation within you.
- Ask God to help you to be content in the midst of whatever situation or circumstance you find yourself.
- Ultimately, when you don't know what else to do or pray, ask the Holy Spirit to share your heart with the Father.

May God bring your prayer life sharply into focus in the midst of trials so that God is glorified as His will for His kingdom is fulfilled in and through you.

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