

'If God Promises to Meet All of Our Needs, Why are Some Hungry?'

Dear Tommy,

This is not your real name. But I do know your real name. It starts with an A.

Your father told me your name. And I know you are 11 years old. And I believe your parents want to be missionaries.

After I preached in South Carolina recently, your father came up to me and handed me a note with his email address and your name on it. He asked me to write to you. He was very serious and said you had a serious question. The question was something like this: *"If God promises to meet all our needs, why are we hungry?"*

I had just preached a message about the complete authority of Jesus over everything. I didn't get a chance to talk to your father very long, but I think he agreed with what I said. He wondered how I would answer your question.

It sounds like your family has been going through some hard times. I am sorry about this. It makes me sad. The Bible says that you and I are like parts of the same body. You are like an arm, and I am like a leg. That means that when you are having a hard time, I feel it, because the Bible says, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

The Bible also says that God's love makes us want to help people in need: "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" (1 John 3:17). So if I can help you with something you need, please let me know.

But what your father asked for was not money. He asked for an answer to your question. This means your father loves you very much. He wants you to have truth in your heart as well as food in your stomach. He knows that there are some situations when truth in the heart is more important than food in the stomach. I'll tell you about one of those situations in a few minutes.

Tommy, let me tell you a few things that I said to your father and all those people who were at that meeting in South Carolina. These are the things that make your question really important.

God Governs the Smallest Things

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18). I said this means that Jesus is the absolute ruler over the world and everything in it, including how much food is in your refrigerator, what kind of car your family drives, what kind of house you rent and how many toys you can have.

Do you know what a sparrow is? You've probably seen lots of them where you live. Jesus knew all about little birds like this. They were everywhere. So many of them you couldn't count them. One day Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father" (Matt. 10:29).

This is amazing! There are so many of them—millions all over the world. And God has so much knowledge of each of them, and so much power over them, that not one of them dies and falls to the ground apart from God's plan.

What was Jesus trying to teach us when he said this? Wasn't he trying to help us see that even the smallest things in our lives are under God's control? Things like billions of breezes all over the world, and countless waves on the ocean. He guides them all.

Jesus Can Do All Things

The Bible says he does. Jesus made the winds stop and the waves die down. And so his followers said, “He commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” (Luke 8:25). They were right. Wind and waves obey Jesus. They do what they are told. He still commands them today. Because the Bible says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

This is why your question is so important. What does it mean if your family goes through a really hard time? What if you want to be missionaries and the money doesn’t come in the way you prayed it would? What if there’s hardly enough money to pay the rent and buy food?

Does it mean Jesus has lost some of his power? Does it mean he doesn’t care for you? Does it mean the family has sinned and is being punished?

Tommy, it does not mean any of those things.

You Are Not Being Punished

Jesus cannot lose his power. He is God! (John 1:1-2). And “with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).

He never stops caring for his people. “You are more valuable than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:31), and if he watches over them, how much more you! So the Bible says with total truthfulness: “He (God) cares for you.” (1 Pet. 5:7). He really does—right down to the details of food, clothing and shelter.

And you are not being punished because of your sins either. How do I know that? Because you and your parents are Christians. You trust Jesus. And you know what that means! It means Jesus died for you! And you know what that means, don’t you? It means “He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the

tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). And if he bore your sins, Tommy, you can't bear them. Your family can't bear them. There is no more punishment for them, because Jesus already took that punishment for you: "Whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins through His name" (Acts 10:43).

So when you go through hard times—and there's not enough food, and you are hungry—it does not mean that Jesus lost his power, stopped caring for you or started punishing you. No. No. No. That is not what it means.

Nothing Can Separate Us from Christ

What it means is that he is loving you with tough love. Here's how you can know this. The apostle Paul asked, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35). Paul knows that Christ loves his people. He loves you, Tommy, and your family. So Paul asks: Can anything separate you from that love?

He even mentions not having enough food! Can that separate you from Jesus' love? He says, "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword (separate us from the love of Christ)?" (Rom. 8:35). You know what a famine is, don't you? That's when lots of people don't have enough food. Some may even die. That happens to Christians sometimes. Can that separate us from the love of Jesus?

Paul answers, "No!" Then he even goes farther and says, "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). Notice the word "in." In all these things—while they are happening—we are conquerors. In famine—when we don't have enough food—we are more than conquerors. In the famine, Jesus is loving us! When there is not enough food to eat, Jesus is loving us.

Tough Love

I understand, Tommy, if you say, "It doesn't feel like love." No, it doesn't. But think about this with me. When a doctor puts stitches in your chin, because you cut it open, it hurts. But he's loving you. When a shepherd pulls a sheep out of a thorn bush, it hurts the sheep. But the shepherd is caring for the sheep. When a fireman tosses you from a burning window to the fireman's arms below, the fall hurts you. But they are saving you. And if your Daddy ever spansks you, you can be sure he does it only because he loves you and wants you to be strong and good and happy forever.

I call this tough love. It hurts. Why does Jesus sometimes love us this way? Why does he let us go hungry? The Bible tells us some of the reasons he loves with this kind of tough love.

For example, it says that he wants us to love him more than we love food—or anything else, even more than we love our mother and father. Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10:37). Jesus wants us to trust him, love him and want him, more than we want food or parents or clothing or even life.

Sometimes he takes away what we want in order to test us and to help us trust in him more than anything. One time Paul was suffering so much he thought he was going to die. But he knew God's purpose was good. God was loving Paul with tough love. Paul said, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9). God's good purpose in Paul's pain was to help him trust in God, rather than health and life.

God Knows What We Need

Another reason we may not have enough money, food or clothing is that God is equipping us to live in the right way. He's helping us become holy and righteous. So the Bible says, "Now no discipline seems to be joyful at the time, but grievous.

Yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness in those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11). Our pain is like the pain of the runner who is pushing himself beyond his limit. Later that painful training will help him win the race.

Jesus is always loving you, Tommy, even when he loves you with tough love. He wants you to trust him more and learn to live for what really matters. Food is important. But it is not most important.

You may ask, "But what about the promise?" Didn't Jesus say that if we seek his kingdom first, "all these things shall be given to you" (Matt. 6:33)? And didn't Paul say, "My God shall supply your every need" (Phil. 4:19)? Yes. They did say that. And it is true.

But the promise to meet every "need" is not the same as the promise to meet every "want," or even everything we think we need. Do you remember when you were little and wanted candy, and your mother said, "No. It's too near supper." Or maybe you saw a sharp knife and wanted to play with it, but your father said, "No. You might cut yourself." At that moment, you felt like the candy and the knife were "needs." Maybe you even cried when you didn't get them. But your parents knew what was good for you.

That's the way it is with an all-wise God. He knows what we need most in order to become the kind of people he wants us to be. And sometimes what we need is tough love, not tender love. Sometimes he withholds good things from us, because he has better plans. He bends our faith like a branch—almost to the breaking point. His purpose is not to break it, but to make it stronger.

A Preparation for Something Great

So, Tommy, here's my answer for why your family has gone through some hard times. He has great plans for you. He intends to use you and your family in some great work. But

this work will be hard. It may be dangerous. He is getting your family ready for that. You are in training for a long, hard race. You are being conditioned.

Do you remember what I said a few minutes ago? I said, "God knows that there are some situations when truth in the heart is more important than food in the stomach." I said I would tell you about one of those situations.

Once there was a group of brave Christians who were put in prison for telling people about Jesus. Jesus came to them through the apostle John and encouraged them with a promise. He said, "You will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

In other words, he didn't promise to get them out of prison. He promised to reward their faithfulness with a crown of life in heaven. Think about this: Which was more important for them, food in the stomach or truth in the heart?

They were going to die for Jesus. He told them so. Food would do them no good at all. What did they need more than anything? They needed faith. "Be faithful unto death." Where does faith come from? It comes from truth in the heart. That truth delivers God's promises—that he will take care of you. Even if you die, he will take care of you. You are safe.

So when your father asked me to write you a letter about the truth of God's love, even when you are hungry, he is loving you. He knows that truth in your heart is more important than food in your stomach.

He knows God is getting you—and your family—ready for some great work. You are being tested, trained and prepared. I will be excited to see what God does.

Be strong in the truth of Jesus, Tommy. {eoa}

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