

Powerful Prayers

“God, I Can’t Take It Anymore”

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This morning we begin a series of messages entitled Powerful Prayers. During the coming weeks we will look at these prayers: “God, I can’t take it anymore.” “God, give me peace.” And “God, bring good out of this bad situation.” These are all prayers that God has promised to answer.

It is comforting when we read the Bible to discover that we are not the only ones who have prayed this prayer: “God, I can’t take it anymore.” Listen to this prayer of David when he felt overwhelmed.

Psalm 69:1-3

Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.

²I sink in the miry depths,
where there is no foothold.
I have come into the deep waters;
the floods engulf me.

³I am worn out calling for help;
my throat is parched.
My eyes fail,
looking for my God.

You’ve lost your job. You’ve searched for months, maybe years. You’ve sent out hundreds of resumes; no response. Your savings and your retirement funds are gone. You are not sure how much longer you can make it without a job. You have prayed and prayed. Like David, “your throat is parched; your eyes fail, looking for God.” And still nothing. “God, I can’t take it anymore.”

You suffer from chronic pain. You have every medical test possible. You have been poked and prodded relentlessly. You’ve had enough blood drained to fill a swimming pool. The medical bills pile up. Insurance is declining coverage. No relief. At times the pain is unbearable. “God, I can’t take it anymore.”

You’ve been abandoned by a spouse for someone else. You feel deeply wounded and betrayed. You feel unloved and even unlovable. Not a dime of child support has come. The

kids cry themselves to sleep every night. You feel all alone. How will you make it? “God, I can’t take it anymore.”

In his book, Is God to Blame?, pastor Gregory Boyd tells about a conversation with one of his parishioners named Melanie:

“Melanie approached me after I delivered a sermon on living with passion. She said: ‘I have lost my passion for God and my joy in life. I used to be a fired-up Christian who poured herself into her faith, but now I feel nothing toward God. Church used to seem so exciting, but now it bores me to death. I just feel dead.’

“After some conversation I learned that Melanie’s downward spiral began about four years earlier when she lost a baby in childbirth. She did not marry until her mid-thirties, so to beat the biological clock she and her husband immediately began trying to have a baby. After three years with no success they discovered that because of a medical condition, it would be unlikely they would ever have a child. Melanie had always wanted to be a mom, so she was extremely discouraged. But against all odds she became pregnant. ‘We thought it was a miracle.’

“Her pregnancy was totally normal. But at delivery the umbilical cord was wrapped around her baby’s neck, choking him to death. Their miracle turned into a nightmare, and their life turned into one tormenting ‘Why?’ question. Why would God miraculously give them a child only to take it away? Why did this happen to them? Even more tormenting, why was God preventing them from conceiving again?

They asked a Christian counselor about their questions. ‘God has a reason for everything. There are no accidents in God’s providence. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. You have to trust that God knows and always does what is best.’ Melanie asked why God would not allow her to get pregnant again. The counselor responded, ‘There is a lesson God is teaching you. When you’ve learned what God wants to teach you, perhaps then God

will bless you with another child. Or perhaps it's simply not his will for you to have children.'

Melanie was still trying to figure out the lesson God was teaching her. Maybe this would enable her to have a baby and get her life back.

"I told Melanie, 'Given your picture of God, I'm not surprised that you find it hard to have loving relationship with him. What the counselor told you about God sounds like a sick game. God takes your miracle child and refuses you another one until you learn a lesson that he withholds from you for four years. This does not sound like a very loving God.

"Melanie asked, 'Are you saying God did not do this to me?' I responded, 'The one thing I know about God is that he is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. When we see Jesus, we see the heart of God. Everything I know about Jesus leads me to believe that God grieves over your situation even more profoundly than you do. When things went wrong in people's lives, Jesus did not explain to them the lesson God was trying to teach them. Instead, he had compassion on suffering people and treated them like casualties of war. He expressed God's heart by bringing relief to people's suffering. Melanie, I know the Lord deeply loves you. It was not his will for your baby to die. He wants to heal you your hurt.'

"Melanie began to cry and wail. Between sobs she asked over and over, 'God did not do this to me?'"

Boyd points out in his book, that Jesus Christ came into the world to overcome suffering and evil. Suffering was not part of his plan for us. To see his plan we look at the beginning of the Bible in the first chapters of Genesis. God's plan for us is that we would live in a paradise called Eden. Every need would be supplied. There would be no sickness or pain or death. We would live in a loving relationship with God. Adam and Eve walked with God through the garden in the evening. What went wrong with the picture?

God gave to Adam and Eve and all human beings an awesome power called free will. They could choose to love God and let him guide their lives. Or they could choose to be their

own god and follow their own desires. God placed an option in the garden called “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Only the Creator knows what is good and what is evil. That which aligns with his purposes is good. That which goes against his purposes is evil. Adam and Eve chose to decide for themselves what is good and evil. As finite human beings they did not have the ability to do this. They chose to be their own god and separated themselves from the source of life. Adam and Eve are not the only ones who made this choice. This choice to be our own god is the core of sin. According to the Bible “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” We have all made the same decision to live life the way we want to.

As a result we have unleashed in the world sickness and suffering and death. We cannot blame God. That was not his plan. What we learn from the Bible is that even though we rebelled against him, God still loves us. He went to work immediately after the fall to set in motion a plan to overcome suffering and evil. The plan climaxed when God became a man in Jesus Christ and came to live among us. Jesus showed us that sickness and pain and death are the enemies of God’s plan. Yet how could he redeem us from this enemy without taking away our free will? He could not just issue a royal edict and say: “There will be no more suffering or pain.” That very act would negate our free will.

Instead, God chose to enter into the suffering of our world. Jesus Christ suffered as we do. He was hungry, tired and discouraged at times. And ultimately he experienced some of the greatest pain known to man—a crucifixion. He was placed on a cross. Nails were driven into his hands and feet. He was stripped naked and left to die a tortuous death by suffocation. As the old hymn says, “the old rugged cross is the emblem of suffering and shame.” On the cross he felt abandoned by the Father and the Holy Spirit. He cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus entered into our suffering and experienced excruciating pain in the way he died. He was buried in a tomb. But on the third day, he demonstrated his victory over suffering and

death by rising from the dead never to die again. Jesus revealed God's plan: to redeem and restore his creation and overcome suffering and death by the power of his resurrection. Suffering, pain and death are not God's plan for your life. They are the enemy of God's plan. Jesus Christ came to overcome them and to restore the paradise that was lost. When he returns the kingdom will be restored in its fullness.

When Melanie lost her baby, it was a tragedy that happens in a world that has separated itself from God. God grieved deeply with her that day. We know that God understands our suffering because he has become one of us and suffered with us and for us. Her inability to get pregnant was another consequence of living in a world that had separated itself from God. We hear God's will in his words to Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and multiply." God was not withholding a child to teach her some lesson. His heart was broken along with her because of the evil and suffering she experienced in this world. God is working to overcome it.

When we pray, "God, I can't take it anymore," he hears our cry for help and he always answers that prayer. He brings help and comfort. He does not promise to stop the suffering or prevent it in the future. To do so, he would have to negate our free will. But he promises to walk through the suffering with us. We never walk alone. We may feel like we are alone sometimes. Jesus felt it when he cried out, "My God, why have you forsaken me." Jesus knows how we feel. He is with us and will never, ever leave us. We might not feel his presence at the time, but he is there with us.

Ultimately, the difference between believers and atheists is not that believers suffer any less—they don't—it's that they suffer and grieve with hope. Hope that their pain will end someday. Hope that when they lose a loved one, they will see them again because our Lord was raised from the dead. Atheists go through suffering with no hope. They go through pain alone. They face death as the end with no hope of seeing their loved ones again.

If you are overwhelmed today by life; if you are at the point where you can't take it anymore; pray this prayer: "God, get me through this suffering. I can't do it alone. Walk with me." And thank him for being with you even if you can't feel him right now.

Maybe you are at a place where you can't even pray; you are so overwhelmed. At those times it is good to let someone pray for you. At the conclusion of our worship time, our healing prayer team will be at the altar to pray with you and for you.

The healing begins with the honest prayer: "God, I can't take it any more. Get me through this suffering."

As we sing our song of invitation, I invite those of you who are feeling overwhelmed with life right now to come for healing prayer. I also invite you to come if you want to pray for someone you know who is feeling overwhelmed right now—a friend, a family member, a coworker. It is your prayers for them that might restore their hope. I invite you to come to the God who loves you. Come to the God who wants the best for you. Come to the God who has power to overcome and to see you through.