

Powerful Prayers

“God, Bring Good Out of this Bad Situation”

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This morning we conclude our series of messages entitled Powerful Prayers. These are prayers that God promises to answer:

- “God, I can’t take it anymore. Get me through this suffering” God may not remove our suffering, but he promises to see us through. God answers yes by giving us hope.
- “God, give me peace.” Even in the midst of the storms of life, we can experience inner peace when we trust God.
- Today we look at the prayer: “God, bring good out of this bad situation.”

The Apostle Paul gives us God’s promise to answer this prayer.

Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

“God bring good out of this bad situation.” It is perhaps one of the toughest prayers to pray.

When we are in the midst of suffering or one of the storms of life, it is hard to see anything but the pain or loss or misery in our lives. At first we ask for God to get us through the suffering. Later we begin to pray for peace in the midst of the suffering. And finally we begin to ask, “God, what good can you bring out of this situation?”

When we look in the rearview mirror of our lives we often see how God brought something good out of the struggles, trials and tragedies in our lives. But in the midst of those situations it is hard to see how any good can come out of it. How we emerge from those bad situations depends upon this prayer. If we allow them to, the bad things that happen can make us cynical and depressed. We may withdraw from life and people. We end up bitter, alone and miserable. Self-help gurus would say it does not have to be that way. They espouse that we have the ability within ourselves to turn things around if we choose to.

But these gurus miss one all important point: overcoming adversity is not a just a question of willpower. It is not just “thinking positive.” Ultimately, it is God alone who has the power to bring good out of bad. When we pray this prayer, “God, bring good out of this bad situation” we release God to go to work in our lives.

In the sermon entitled, “God, I Can’t Take It Anymore” I emphasized that God does not cause bad things to happen. They are the result of living in a fallen world that has separated itself from God and rebelled against his plan. God grieves with us when we suffer and he promises to see us through. And God also demonstrates that his power is great enough to bring good out of everything that happens to us. “God works all things together for good, for those who love him and are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) It does not say that “some” things will turn out to be good in the end. It says all things.

How can that be true? How can losing your job ever lead to good? How can having financial problems ever lead to good? How can being handicapped ever lead to good? How can battling cancer ever lead to good? How can the death of a child ever lead to good? While we are suffering the agony of those situations it is impossible to see any good coming from them. They threaten to choke the very life out of us.

If God is a sovereign, all powerful God then he is able to turn evil into good. And he has demonstrated this throughout history. What would you say is the greatest evil in the history of the world? Was it the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden? Was it the Great Plague that killed millions of people? Was the Holocaust when the Nazis killed over six million Jews? Was it the

famine that swept across Africa leaving millions of men, women and children dead? Is it the AIDS epidemic?

There have been tremendous experiences of evil in our world, but none of those is the greatest evil in the history of the world. The greatest evil ever committed was the execution of the innocent Son of God. When Jesus Christ was killed upon a cross, God himself—in his human form—was put to death. God became flesh to let us know how much God loves us. The Creator of all the universe came to deliver us from our suffering and we killed him. It is impossible to imagine anything worse than that.

And yet what did God do with the greatest evil ever done in human history? Did he decide to punish us and wipe us out? Did he give up and abandon us? No, God chose to demonstrate his power by taking the worst that we could do and turning it into something good—in fact, he turned it into the best thing that ever happened in history. God took the death of Jesus and used it as the means to provide for our forgiveness. He declared the death of the Perfect Son of God to be the substitute for our death. He allowed Jesus to die in our place so that our sins could be forgiven. Then on Easter Sunday morning he raised Jesus from the dead never to die again. He used the death of Jesus to defeat the enemy of death once and for all. “Even though you die, yet shall you live.” God himself experienced death and overcame it. In the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God demonstrates his mighty power to work the greatest evil into the greatest good that ever happened. If he can do that, then he can take whatever happens in our lives and work it for good.

We have a hard time grasping that when we are struggling to pay our bills, or crying over a broken relationship or lying in a hospital bed with our body smashed from an accident with a

drunk driver. When we are in the midst of suffering and sorrow it is easier to be angry with God than to ask him to bring good out of this. The way to finally get through our suffering is to recognize that only God's power can work this for good. We invite him to do his work in us.

In what ways will God bring good out of bad situations? We like the stories about the person who gets fired and then after struggling for several months lands a job that he truly enjoys making twice the money. We like the stories about the person who is jilted by a lover and is severely depressed then meets someone who is even more amazing. Now I wish all suffering produced results like that.

But sometimes those are not the results. The person who loses his job uses up all of her savings and finally takes a job for less pay that is far less enjoyable. The jilted lover never finds anyone and goes through life alone. What good comes out of these situations?

Sometimes the good that happens is not in our circumstances. Sometimes the good that happens is inside of us. Suffering can make a person stronger, tougher and more resilient. God is more interested in our character than in our comfort. The good that he brings may not even be visible to the world. We want God to bless us with better things than those that we lost. Typically that means we expect a better job, a better companion, more money. We want him to vindicate us in the eyes of the world and emerge looking more successful. But success in the Kingdom of God is not about money, prestige or the perfect spouse. Success in the Kingdom of God is becoming like Jesus. God promises to use every experience in our lives to mould and shape us into the image of Christ. If we emerge from suffering more loving, more filled with grace and compassion toward others, more forgiving and understanding, then something good has come out of our suffering. Several doctors in our church have recently

been in the hospital for extended periods of times due to complications in their treatment. All of them have expressed to me that their experiences of waiting for test results, of experiencing pain and even fear will make them better doctors when they return to their practice. They will have much more empathy and understanding for their patients. They will know what it is like to lie in a hospital bed. They know what it is like to suffer pain. They will be more like the Great Physician. God is using a bad situation for good.

Sometimes God uses our suffering as a way to help others. A significant movement was launched as the result a tragic loss in the life of its founder. Candice Lightner says grieving is the beginning, middle and rest of her life. "My daughter Carrie was 13 when she was killed by a hit and run drunk driver--a multiple repeat offender. And that started the whole movement. I was so angry."

That anger motivated the 34-year-old divorced mother of three to take a stand. She quit her job as a real estate agent and immersed herself into organizing a fight to save lives. In 1980, the year Carrie was killed by a drunk driver, 27,000 people died in alcohol-related crashes. Lightner called her new group Mothers Against Drunk Driving, also known by its acronym, MADD. Her organization is responsible for raising the legal drinking age to 21 and for passing legislation making drunk driving a criminal offence.

In the 30 years since MADD was founded, alcohol traffic fatalities in the United States have been cut by 40 percent. The organization, now with 600 chapters across the country, estimates that over the past quarter century, it has saved more than 300,000 lives. When she resigned from MADD, she helped several other persons who had experienced tragedies of

various kinds to start organizations to help others. God did not give her back her daughter and she experienced great struggles with her family, but God used her for good to impact a nation.

God may not restore or improve our situation, but he will use every experience in our lives to make us more like Jesus. Pianist Doug Smith was driving his car late one night and fell asleep at the wheel while driving home to Petersburg. His vehicle flipped upside down and he was pinned there all night until someone found him the next morning. He suffered a spinal injury that left him paralyzed from the neck down.

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want you to listen to his story as told to the Texas Country Reporter. The first part of the video is an interview with Doug before his accident and then it will show the struggle Doug experienced following his accident. Let's listen to Doug's story:

VIDEO: TEXAS COUNTRY REPORTER, DOUG SMITH

Doug would be the first to tell you that he did not immediately see the accident as a blessing. It took him several years before he could accept the good that God offered. Six months after the accident, Doug told another reporter these words: "I was on morphine and I could not move my hands. I sat at the keyboard and couldn't play. I could see the notes, but I couldn't play them. And such a black, ugly feeling came over me. I became scared that I couldn't support my family." It took time, but five years after the accident Doug was able to say: "How can I begrudge something that has made me better?" Doug still struggles daily, but God is

bringing good out of a terrible thing that happened. He is making Doug a little more like Jesus every day.

Where in your life do you need to release God's power to bring good?