

## Ye Can Do Nothing

Can our prayers become too generic? It is easy to just blanket cover things we are praying; asking the Lord to help us serve him better, that he will bless the missionaries and the leaders of our nations and such the like. Perhaps they even grow a little lifeless and boring, and we drift through them without really thinking about what we are saying; part of our daily routine that needs to be checked off so we can go on to something else. We may even fall asleep in our prayers. I hope this is not the way it is in your life, but prayers can become so habitual that they lose their fervency, at least that is the way I find it. Maybe it would help our fervency if we were more specific and less generic in our prayers. Instead of just asking the Lord for his help during the day, name what we are struggling with and ask him for courage, strength, and deliverance. If there is a particular temptation you are dealing with, or a health issue, or a conflict with someone, ask him to help you in that particular area. This should help us actually visualize what our needs are and make our prayers more fervent and effective. By being more specific, we may find more grace in these areas as we go through the day.

It is not uncommon, during my prayers that thoughts come to me which I have never thought of before. One morning as I was praying, asking God to help me live for him, the thought entered my mind; here I am asking God for help like I have some strength on my own, and just need a boost from him! I was startled! I know that God is my only strength, and he is the key to my living for him. The verse then came to me which says, *"for without me ye can do nothing." John 15:5b.* I pondered, "Without me ye can do nothing." We are nothing without him: our works are not enough, we cannot pray enough, we cannot read the Bible enough, even the strength to live for him comes from him. The only thing we can do is offer up our heart and life to him who is our strength.

The struggle of surrendering our will is at times difficult, which may cause us to think that strength and power comes from the struggle. We may even get the idea that our struggle has some merit in the eyes of God and is a part of the works which save us. Whereas we cannot get to God or tap into his power without the struggle of surrendering ourselves, it is not the struggle that saves us. Our struggles are the surrendering of our will to the will of God. Our saving power comes only from God, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In him alone is our saving power and strength. That being said, one should not assume that if we live close enough to God, we will not struggle. In reality, quite the opposite is often true. Satan does not try those who are already under his control. To become a follower of Christ is to enter the conflict for our souls. The struggle of good and evil, with our flesh wanting to align itself with the momentary pleasure Satan offers, while our spirit longs for the security, love, and peace of the Father. Satan hates God and wants nothing more than to steal the peace he gives to his children. Satan knows that the rewards of serving God far outweigh anything he can offer and will do everything in his power to see to it that we forget about God.

God is not oblivious to our inner struggles. Although the word, "struggle" is not used in the Bible in the context of the battle of Christian life, there are many verses related to the trial of our faith, and suffering. Although our trials and suffering do not pay for sin, neither does it go unnoticed by God.

*Isaiah 53:11 KJV He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

*1 Peter 5:10 KJV But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

*2 Timothy 2:12 KJV If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:*

By these verses and others, we can see that God is aware of our needs and places value in our suffering. Not that suffering and travail saves us, but through it our hearts become soft and turned towards God. Suffering is

one of the marks of the follower of Christ. It may be difficult for us to divide between struggles, the trials of our faith, and suffering.

There is much suffering in the history of the world. Some is the result of tragedy, poor health, choices, and sin, while others may be at the hands of wicked men. Often this kind of suffering, causes people to reach out to God. Not all suffering is for the sake of Christ. Suffering for Christ and the sake of the gospel, is what results from a heart and life dedicated to serving God. It is not feeling sorry for myself, or thinking how much I am giving up for God. To go around thinking how much we are suffering for Christ, may be an attitude of self-pity and will steal the joy from Christian life. Every Christian will find denying one's self and choosing God's way, brings about some suffering. Yet, no matter how great the suffering, it will seem as nothing in eternity. To suffer for the sake of the gospel, is to become partaker of Christ's suffering, in which he laid down his will to do the will of his father.

*1 Peter 4:13 KJV But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*

*Philippians 3:10 KJV That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*

Struggles, disappointment, loss, and death are all a part of living. Many of the difficult times we face are simply a part of life, not to be counted as a message of God's displeasure. God uses them as opportunities to draw us closer to him. We do not understand God with our earthly thinking; therefore, we may not be able to separate the trials he allows, from the troubles which are just a part of living on this earth. But we can be assured, that with God's grace and presence, we are not left alone to fight.

In this experience I had, I do not believe it was wrong for me to ask God for help to serve him. I believe he wanted to use it to get my attention and teach me more about him. After all, he can see into our hearts without us speaking to him. God delights in giving us those things we ask for which are in accordance with his will. He may not give us everything the way we think he should, but he always gives us the comfort of his presence despite the pain of this earthly life. We can come to him and ask him to help us surrender our will, to help us to humble ourselves, and that his strength would help us flee temptation. Most of all, we can tell him we are needy and without him we are powerless to live in accordance with his will.

*Hebrews 4:14-16 KJV Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

The thought that God always gives us his comfort, may seem a bit illusive to some. They may feel like they have prayed and prayed and God has not answered or delivered them. Eventually they may become a little cynical. Because God knows our needs so much better than we do, our prayers may not always be answered just the way we would like. Sometimes he tests our faith to see if we are sincere, rather than immediately giving his comfort as soon as we ask. This may seem frustrating to those who feel like they so desperately need him. However, this should not detour us from asking him to help us. Faith is a key element in seeking God which takes patience and courage.

There are times in emotional struggles where we may lose our ability to feel the comfort of God. This can make us feel like God does not really care about us. In those times, having a loving, Godly friend to share with may be just what we need. By becoming vulnerable, and asking for prayer, it unleashes the power of intercessory prayer, which may be just what it takes to help break the bondage of fear and Satan. There are also times to just hold still with our faith in God, until the storm of life passes over.

I am thinking of the writing about the footprints in the sand. The author says that looking back over their life, they noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, the Lord's, and theirs. However, when they went through the difficult things in life, there was only one set, and they wondered why. The Lord then told them that during the difficult times in life, he was carrying them.<sup>1</sup>

We must never give up praying and seeking God. Consider the words of Jesus in these verses.

*Luke 18:1-8 KJV And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; 2 Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: 3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. 4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; 5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. 6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. 7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? 8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

Sometimes the struggles we face bring us emotional pain and suffering. Satan would like us to think that God has forsaken us, or to cause us to become hurt and offended. This is most likely not the case. The Lord allows us to face struggles, not because he does not love and care about us, but so that we can become more like him. Read this verse: *John 15:2 KJV Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.* If we desire our lives to be more fruitful, or to live more victoriously, it will take the trials of life to bring that about. Growth in our Christian experience can only come about by exercising our faith through the tests and trials of life. Through them we become less of ourselves, and more dependent on God.

Though we may be tempted to blame God for not looking after us, quite the opposite is true. He is interested in us becoming more useful and dependent on him, and the only path to get there is through tests and trials. So, the next time you are in a struggle, do not listen to the lies that Satan wants you to believe that God has turned away from you. Have faith and remember that God is love and does not forsake his own. He is silently watching to see that you are not overcome. I know it is hard to see it that way while in the struggle, but hold still just the same, and keep your eyes on the Lord; he will hear you and your faith will be rewarded.

*1Peter 1:6-9 KJV 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*

*The Unlikely Writer - Jeff Goertzen*

2/23/2024

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<sup>1</sup> Footprints in the Sand  
by: Mary Stevenson