

Why Do Bad Things Happen To Godly People?

When Christians go through awful trials, they often ask questions like: “Why? Why did this happen when I prayed so much? How could the Lord let this happen? Why does the Lord let this situation go on and on? Can’t He see our suffering? Doesn’t He care any more?” There is nothing wrong with asking why. Wanting to know an answer to a question is not wrong or sinful. Often people get to a point where they don’t want to know ‘why’ any more, they just want the pain to stop. The scriptural answer to why God allows so much suffering is hard for us mortal humans to grasp, and because it is so hard to comprehend, most people dismiss it out of hand and then they go on asking ‘why’. It is hard for people to understand that God thinks differently to us; He does things differently to the way we do things; so differently in fact that we become confused, angry and some actually walk away from Him. It’s hard to comprehend that it is God’s will for people to suffer. It is nearly impossible to take in, that suffering is part of His plan for mankind while we are on earth. Before you scream, “That’s not what I’ve been taught,” let’s have a look at the scriptures to back that statement up. But first, we will look at why there are times when God does not answer our prayers in the way we expect Him to.

Why do bad things happen even when we pray? Why should we keep on praying when life gets tough? We need to pray for two good reasons: (1) We need to connect to God and (2) Jesus prayed. If Jesus needed to pray – and He is God’s Son, then how much more do we need to pray? The need to connect to God through prayer is probably one of the most important aspects of our Christian walk. Prayer keeps us humble because we need to humble ourselves to pray and seek God*. Prayer helps us turn away from wickedness*; it brings forgiveness from sin*; it brings healing* and helps build our relationship with God*. It doesn’t mean we bring a ‘shopping’ list to Him every day; it means we talk to Him because He is our Father. We can discuss events with Him that affect us. We can pray without asking for anything, in the same way that we can talk to our earthly father without always asking for something. We need to pray every day and we also need to understand that the Lord does not always give us what we ask for – which will be explained later – but we know He always hears us when we speak to Him*.

Read 2 Chronicles 7:14 & 15; “If My people, who are called by My name, shall humble* themselves and pray*, and seek My face*, and turn from their wicked ways*, then will I hear from heaven, forgive their sin* and heal their land*. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive* to prayer offered in this place.” And 1 Peter 3:12 says; ‘The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears open to their prayer’.

The Lord promises to hear us every time we pray, however, sometimes sin in our lives can stop the answer to prayer. Sin like praying and asking with the wrong motive or attitude, or if we whinge and complain, God will not give us what we want. In 1 Peter 3:7, Peter said that if a man mistreats his wife, his prayers will be hindered. Psalm 37:4 says if we delight ourselves in the Lord, then He will give us the desires of our hearts. If however, those desires are carnal, then you will not receive them. Romans 13:14; ‘Make no provision for the flesh’; then in James 4:3; ‘Do you ask and fail to receive? Because you ask with the wrong motive; your intention is to use it for your pleasures’. Lamentations 3:8 & 44, tells us that ‘even when we cry and shout for help, God sometimes shuts out our prayers. He covers Himself with a cloud so that no prayer can get through’. Only sin brings these particular negative results, but we have the promise in 1 John 1:9; ‘If we freely admit that we have sinned and confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness’.

Sometimes, although God hears us when we initially pray, He makes us wait for years before He grants our petition like He did with Sarah, Rachel, Hannah and Elisabeth, making them all wait until they were desperate before allowing them to have a child. Read about Sarah in Genesis 21:1 to 3; Rachel: Genesis 29:31 & 30:22; Hannah: 1 Samuel 1:5 to 22 and Elisabeth: Luke 1:5 to 80. God allowed Jacob to grieve for many years for his son Joseph, before Jacob found out he was alive in Egypt; see Genesis, chapter 37 to chapter 45. Certainly Joseph’s ten older brothers could have told Jacob, but they were so guilty of what they did to Joseph, they never said a word. Jacob had a close

relationship with the Lord at one time, so the Lord could have told Jacob that Joseph was okay, but He never said a word either.

There are many other examples written in the scriptures when God made people wait. We have already seen examples of the Lord making people wait for an answer, but sometimes we need to wait to see what God says on a matter (Numbers 9:8). Sometimes He made His people ask repeatedly (1 Kings 18:44); or there was something holding up the answer (Daniel 10:12 & 13); or He made them do something before the answer would come (2 Kings 5:1 to 14). These examples show us we are to wait for God's timing before we receive answers to our prayers. The answer is just delayed.

Another hindrance to having prayers answered is doubt. James 1:6 & 7 says; 'It must be in faith that he asks with no wavering. For the one who wavers is like the billowing surge out at sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. For truly, let not such a person imagine that he will receive anything from the Lord'. When we pray, we need to be specific and consistent and not keep changing our minds. For example; if you have a large family and need a larger vehicle, tell the Lord exactly what you want. It might be that you need a 12 seater people mover, automatic, with air conditioning and you prefer white as a safer colour than dark grey. Tell the Lord exactly what you want and watch Him work it out.

Sometimes the answer to our prayers, is simply a resounding "No." There are times when the Lord does not give us what we ask for, for no other reason than our request may not be His will for our lives. God is sovereign and it is His will we must obey, whether we like it or not. Jesus prayed three times for God to 'take the cup' from Him, but God did not take it from Him (Luke 22:42). Jesus had the attitude "Not My will but Yours be done." As hard as it can be, that is the attitude we also need to have. When Paul was ill with the condition he called the 'thorn in his flesh', he asked God three times to remove it but God just said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you." See 2 Corinthians 12:8 & 9. Those two answers were a resounding "No."

At these times, we can pray as fervently as we want, but if God says "No" then He means "No." We need to know God's perfect will – not only for our own lives, but also in general. If we pray wholly in God's will [that is in perfect agreement with His own plan] all the time, then we are assured our prayers will always be answered (1 John 5:14). But we first need to bring our will in line with God's will. How do we know if what we are asking for, is His will or not? If we walk closely with God, then we can pray and ask what God's will is, the Holy Spirit will reveal it and give us peace. If our request is too vague to be found in the Bible and we are still unsure, then we need to be certain our request does not contradict the Bible nor is out of the character of God. What we do, needs to glorify God. For example; if we are not sure which of two career paths to take, then we need His guidance because that request probably won't be found in the Bible.

However, there are times when God just doesn't make sense to us when He refuses our requests, but He is the Lord of the whole universe, and He owns everything - including us - and He does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:3). He is God and He does not have to answer to us. We all know of situations or the sense of frustration when we cry out to God, but He does not respond in the way we want Him to. There are examples, such as when a child dies after much prayer for healing; or when a fit and healthy young person prays and asks God to help him find work, yet is rejected from more than 1,000 job applications, for no apparent reason; or when a person who loves the Lord with all their heart, is suffering incessant pain or a crippling disease; or worse, develops a serious, baffling mental illness; or when a woman who has waited years for a Christian husband, is left a widow after just a couple of years of marriage, with a baby on the way; or a Christian, completely innocent of any wrong doing, is arrested, convicted and imprisoned. Just recently, a born-again, God loving, healthy, athletic woman died, leaving a shattered husband and three very young children to live all their lives without their delightfully loving mother. These are just a few examples, but there are many more scenarios we could add here.

Sometimes inexplicable trials like these can cause the Christian to turn away from God, but that is not the answer either. We are not to be anxious and need to trust God no matter what happens, as did the early Christians when they suffered terrible losses. They trusted God because they held on to the

promise of the rewards we will all receive in the Kingdom of God. We need to see that life is not about what happens on earth – it is about eternity. Hebrews 10:34 to 36 says; ‘For you did suffer along with those who were imprisoned, and you bore cheerfully the plundering of your belongings and the confiscation of your property, in the knowledge that you, yourselves had a better and lasting possession. Do not, therefore, fling away your fearless confidence, for it carries a great and glorious compensation of reward. For you have need of steadfast patience, so that you may perform and fully accomplish the will of God, and thus receive what is promised’.

What was promised? Compensation of reward; eternal life with all the rewards that go with being faithful to God in the face of terrible suffering. Read Philippians 4:6 & 7; ‘Do not fret or be anxious about anything, but in every circumstance, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God, and God’s peace which transcends all understanding shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus’. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 we are told ‘to thank God in every circumstance, for this is the will of God for you who are in Christ Jesus’. So no matter what you are suffering, thank God. We all need to have the correct attitude and not grumble about our lot. There may be something God wants to deal with, and the only way that can be achieved is by ‘breaking’ us. Jesus makes no apologies for that. Read Luke 20:18; “Everyone who falls on that Stone (Jesus) will be broken in pieces; but upon whomever It falls, It will crush him (scatter him as dust).”

So why do bad things happen to God’s people, and why does God sometimes not respond in the way we want Him to? The answer lies in 1 Peter 4:12 and in Hebrews, chapters 11 and 12. God scourges, corrects and disciplines whom He loves. We are all born with an evil sin nature and God purges that sin out of our lives. Peter says; “Beloved, do not be amazed at the fiery trial which taking place to test your quality, as though something strange were befalling you. But insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, rejoice, so that when His glory is revealed, you may rejoice with triumph.” James 1:2 to 4, then verse 12 says; ‘Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in trials of any sort. Be assured that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance, steadfastness and patience. But let endurance, steadfastness and patience have a full play and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfectly and fully developed, with no defects, lacking in nothing. Blessed is the man who is patient under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the victor’s crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him’. We need to hang on to the truth of what we will receive, after we go home to be with the Lord, no matter what trials we face here on earth. Paul said in Romans 8:16 to 18; “The Spirit Himself, testifies together with our own spirit, that we are children of God, and if we are His children, then we are His heirs with Christ; only we must share His suffering if we are to share His glory. But what of that? For I consider that the suffering of this life, are not worth being compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Surprising as it may seem to some people, it is not written once in the New Testament, that we will be happy with life, but the scriptures do speak of our sufferings more than 50 times. God says we are to rejoice in the Lord always, (Philippians 4:4); we are to be content with what we have, (Philippians 4:11); and we are to have joy, (Romans 15:13 is one scripture regarding joy, but there is about 190 more). Jesus said in John 10:10, we could have an abundant life. Abundant doesn’t mean happy as some people teach, it means to have a full and busy life.

We need to know that in our suffering, the Lord never says, “Ohh. You poor Dear.” No matter what you’re suffering, God may feel empathy but He does not feel sorry for you; quite the opposite in fact. Read Hebrews 12:12; ‘So then brace up your drooping hands and strengthen your feeble knees’. Remember Paul’s ‘thorn in his flesh’ when he asked God three times to remove it but God just said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

When Job went through his terrible trials; all his children died; all his livestock died and therefore his livelihood; all his ‘great body’ of servants died which would be today’s equivalent of the death of all the employees in one workplace; Job came down with a horrible illness that was so bad he had to sit on the rubbish dump, and because he was so repulsive he couldn’t go into town, and then his friends betrayed and criticised him, and after all that, when he cried out to God, the answer God gave him was, “Gird up your loins like a man and I will demand of you, and you will answer Me.” See Job 38:3

and 40:7; then God proceeded to tell Job off for complaining. Job's suffering was not because of sin for he was an innocent, righteous man, as it says in the book of Job more than 30 times, but he still had that sin nature we are all born with because of Adam. What was Job's attitude to all his suffering? Read Job 1:20; 'Job fell to the ground and worshipped God'. Job 1:22; 'Job did not sin nor did he charge God foolishly'. Job 13:15; 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him and behold, I will maintain my ways before Him'. Job 23:10; 'But He knows the way that I take. When He has tried me, I shall come forth as refined gold'. What an incredible man Job was!

The children of Israel suffered many devastating hardships, but when they complained about their hardships and murmured against God, He sometimes gave them what they wanted and sometimes God became so angry He killed some of them. The Hebrews certainly did suffer, of that there is no doubt, but they had the wrong attitude. They ran out of water a couple of times (Exodus 15:22 to 27; Exodus 17:1 to 6), they ran out of meat (Exodus 16:3 & 13; Numbers 11:31 & 32), they had to fight wars (Exodus 17:8 to 16, Numbers chapter 21; Judges 3:1), they had to get up and pack all their belongings and move on, every time the fire or the cloud of protection moved – even in the middle of the night (Numbers 9:16 to 23) – and they never knew when they would have to move nor where they were going. Their lives must have been incredibly hard, yet when they cried because of their hardships, God became angry with them. In His anger at their complaining against Him and their disobedience, sometimes hundreds or even thousands of them died in a single day by way of bushfire (Numbers 11:1) food poisoning (Numbers 11:33) earthquake and lightening (Numbers 16:35) epidemic or 'plague' (Numbers 16:49; Numbers 25:9) and snake bites (Numbers 21:6). No matter what your difficulties, complaining does not achieve anything except to make the Lord very angry, and rather than receiving your requests, life may even become worse.

Jesus willingly went through a horrible, painful, dreadful ordeal for us, but He did not complain once, even when He knew God the Father would not remove the 'cup' from Him. To top it off, He was perfect and sinless, yet He still had to die a horrible death in order to save us. Jesus went through extreme agony for us, so in return, we also need to suffer for Him. Read the explanation again as to why, in James 1:4. Unfortunately for us, because of our inborn sin, God cleanses us and that process can be very painful indeed, just as it was for Job. The Apostles also went through terrible trials, but they recognised it as God dealing with their sin and/or purifying them, even though they were all righteous men. Suffering is God's will for us and we are to rejoice and not be amazed by it. Read again 1 Peter 4:12 then see 1 Peter 4:19; 'Therefore, those who suffer in accordance with God's will, must do right and commit their souls to the One Who created them'. That means we need to trust Him in our suffering. Isaiah 48:10 says, 'Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you and chosen you in the furnace of affliction'.

People, who are taught that we will be happy Christians all our lives, are in for a terrible shock when God does begin to deal with sin. They can become disillusioned and confused, and will have no consolation and may collapse at a time of stress and pain. It is an incorrect view of scripture to say that we will always understand what God is doing in our lives. We can't comprehend how suffering and disappointment can fit into His plan, but it does. If we are not made aware of this, then sooner or later we will come to a point of bewilderment or dismay. Jesus said when not if the storms come. Storms mean suffering or trials. Jesus said people who are not prepared are foolish and stupid; but those who are prepared are called wise. Read the parable in Matthew 7:24 to 27. And often, just as we think we can't take any more, does God release us from the pressure? No, He just makes us stronger and more able to endure. Read Isaiah 41:10 & 13; 'Fear not. There is nothing to fear for I am with you. Do not look around you in terror and be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you to difficulties, yes, I will help you; yes I will hold you up with My right hand of justice'. 'For I the Lord your God holds your right hand; I am the Lord, Who says to you, "Fear not; I will help you".'

Further on in Isaiah 43:1 to 4a, we're told; 'But now, thus says the Lord, He Who created you, and He Who formed you; fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned nor will the flame kindle upon you. For I am

the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. Because you are precious in My sight and honoured, and because I love you, I will give men (a Man) in return for your life’.

So we are to be prepared to suffer, but ... the Lord says He will help us, and will be with us, and will hold on to us, and we are not to fear. He says He will never leave us (1 Kings 8:57 and Hebrews 13:5). ‘Many evils (or afflictions) confront of the righteous, but the Lord delivers them out of them all’ see Psalm 34:19. God usually delivers us out of painful or difficult situations eventually, but not always. Usually, the Lord will leave us in the difficult situation until we develop the right attitude and the sin He is targeting has been identified, confessed and forgiven. Once that has taken place, then deliverance from the situation will usually come. Some people though, will suffer all their lives and are only released from their plight at their death. We all need to be prepared to endure trials and difficulties. Being a committed Christian is the hardest life on earth. It takes a lot of character and complete trust in and submission to God, to be able to accept difficulties as being good for us. Sometimes those difficulties are unbearable, but our lives are not for this earth – our lives are for eternity with God. We need to always focus on our lives after this one, and not on the cares of this world. Understanding that our suffering is God’s will and plan for mankind while we are on earth, is too much for some people. They refuse to accept it and go on asking ‘why’. They flip flop around, feeling angry and betrayed, become bitter and resentful and some could end up turning away from God instead of embracing His discipline as being good for us. Some people can’t accept that God chastises those whom He loves. If we can accept that He loves us, then we need to accept that He will chastise us. We need to accept that the word says it is God’s will for us to suffer just as Christ suffered. Remember Romans 8:17? We must share His suffering if we are to share His glory. If He suffered, so must we, and a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master; Matthew 10:24.

Summing up; Romans 9:14 to 33; ‘What shall we conclude then? Is there injustice on God’s part? Certainly not! For God says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion or pity on whom I will have compassion. Verse 18; So then He has mercy on whomever He wills and He hardens whomever He wills. You will say to me, “Why then does He still find fault and blame us for sin? For who can resist and withstand His will?” But who are you, a mere man, to criticise and contradict and answer back to God? Will what is formed say to Him who formed it, “Why have you made me thus?” Has the potter no right over the clay? ... etc.’

Other relevant scriptures are Exodus 33:19; Isaiah 29:16 and Isaiah 45:9. So why do bad things happen to Godly people? Bad things – in other words suffering – purges us from sin and refines us like gold so we will have no defects. Our goal is to be like Jesus, and when we see Him we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him just as He is, and everyone who has this hope on Him, cleanses and purifies himself, just as Jesus is pure (see 1 John 3:2 & 3). As long as we are on earth, we will have tests and trials and difficulties, all unique to us personally and there is nothing we can do about it but endure the trials; knowing at the end, we will have eternal life and the suffering will be over forever. Through all our trials, sufferings and good times, we need to have a strong, steadfast prayer life with plenty of praise and worship; see James 5:13 and 1 Peter 4:13. We need to have enough trust in God to see that He is doing good for us in the long term. Suffering is always grievous, but our heavenly rewards are great. Acts 14:22 tells us that it is through many hardships and tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God. One scripture we can hold on to even in the deepest trial is Romans 8:28; ‘We are assured that all things work together for good, for those who love God and are called according to His purpose’.

Amen and God bless you.

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