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THAT GUY?!?

What have been examples of maladies in your life that you prayed God would remove but He did something else?

How do you reinterpret what it means for God to answer prayer when He does not do what you expect?

How can you expand your view of life to see your weakness such that you depend upon God's power and showcase His salvation?

2 Corinthians 12:8-9 – ⁸Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

1) Harsh Reality...

All of us face a harsh reality sometimes. Not just uncomfortable, but unbearable. We bring some of these on ourselves as the natural consequence of bad behavior. Not all of them. Some horrible situations are unfair, unjust. We pray over these, that God would do something. Our just and loving God must be willing to right the wrong for us. When He doesn't, it can lead to a crisis of faith and confrontation with Satan. He is quick to curse God for His silence and invite us to do the same. It is moments like these in which the point of view we adopt can make the critical difference. Do we look at the world to see how it can serve us, or how it reveals God?

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♦**Difficult prayers:** Prayer is mysterious and multidimensional. It can move mountains and tame lions. We believe it directs divine power but sometimes we pray over and over, day after day, with seemingly nothing to show for it. These difficult prayers are the threshold to greater intimacy with God if we are brave enough to look upon Him. “Three times I appealed to the Lord about this (2 Corinthians 12:8),” but nothing happened. Is God silent or saying what we refuse to hear?

♦**Narrow perspective:** Our deafness is understandable. Some problems have singular solutions. The only thing we will accept is the specific miracle for which we have asked. There is nothing else. We graft our narrow perspective of justice onto Jesus’ promise that prayer in His name is always answered. We pray that the hardship “would leave me (v8).” Yet this approach diminishes God into a jinni. As much as in that moment we are desperate for a specific response, none of us wants such a small god.

II) Presents The Revelation...

No, we want to walk beside a true God, One Who breaths life and humbles kings. We wish we had the courage to turn and look Him full in the face and see God in all His glory. For many of us, that would be enough. If we could only see the truth directly, that righteousness and love are perfected in Him and will snap into place in the end. We can’t wait until life presents the revelation that is God Himself. This is the only antidote to the pain we each experience from time to time.

♦**Better things:** Throughout history, God has desired to do better things for us than we imagine. He has been working to restore heaven on earth while we have been hoping things get a little less bad. That’s still true. His silence in response to a precise request is often a sign He is waiting for us to expand our imagination. Removing obstacles denies growth. His answer, “My grace is sufficient for you (v9),” is an invitation to thrive in power, not suffer in anguish. His grace is more than forgiveness, it is His inexplicable choice to adopt us, infuse us with His power, and present Himself in us.

♦**Higher purpose:** Our myths betray our misunderstanding of what it means to be in His image. Achilles does not need a god—he is a god. A mortal one, brought down by an improbable act. Our higher purpose is to be seen as the blade of grass we are, small and vulnerable, threatened by superior beasts, so that our feats of bravery and impossible victories are undeniably divine. “Power is made perfect in weakness (v9),” because through it God can be seen.

III) Of A Tender Heart...

This is the spiritual struggle. Our instincts and all the world’s wisdom have trained us to prioritize personal peace and prosperity. The world values this above all else. The more extreme the situation, the greater the inner pressure to do anything to alleviate our suffering or capture the prize. But the desire of a tender heart is mercy, justice, and compassion. Our best selves share other’s burdens even when we have nothing but ourselves to give. Our hearts know Jesus could have walked away.

♦**Acknowledge the truth:** The hard times are the narrow path. The only path into heaven. The path that proves who we are, either hardy companions of Jesus or casual onlookers. Who we are impacts our world. Casual onlookers, spiritual tourists if you will, leave the world a mess for others to clean up. Hardy companions inspire the next generation of God’s chosen. If THAT GUY can do it, so can we! When we acknowledge the truth and “boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses (v9),” while relentlessly promoting the best in others, we are reconstructing heaven here and now.

♦**The rest of the story:** The thing you wish you could escape, the physical infirmity, weakening of the mind, grief of the heart, threaten to break you. They would break you but for the rest of the story. These exist “so that the power of Christ may dwell in me (v9).” Think this denies you the power of Christ because life is too pleasant? Look around. We are surrounded by a harsh reality that we can’t fix. As people who share each other’s burdens, the need for Jesus’ power is constant. Have courage, adopt God’s perspective, and let His power reign in your life.

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