

## WHEN GOD SAYS NO 4/26/15

**Perhaps you have heard of the teenager who had her first experience of driving.** Or, you have heard a similar story. The father of this young girl took her to the high school parking lot for driving lessons. For this particular lesson, her three-year-old sister rode along in the backseat. While trying to negotiate a turn, she hit the curb. From the backseat she heard a small voice say, “God is great, God is good, let us thank him for our food.” Barbara slammed on the brakes, turned around to the backseat and yelled, “What are you talking about?” Her little sister replied, “Your driving is scaring me, and that’s the only prayer I know.”

There are times when we start to pray, and we have no idea what to pray for. There are times when we just don’t know what to say to God. But, we can rest assured that God understands us, and understands what we need. We can be sure that He is going to answer our prayers. I believe that there are too many people out there who believe that there are times when God doesn’t answer their prayers. We need to realize that there’s no such thing as “unanswered prayers.” We all can see very clearly when a prayer is answered “yes” by God. But, there are also times when God replies by saying “wait,” because we need to wait for the answer. And, there are times when God says “no.” This morning, I want us to look at what happens when

God says no. Does that mean that God doesn’t care for us? Does it mean that He’s being cruel? Let’s take a look at some examples in scripture when God said no to his children’s prayers.

### **I. Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh**

**A. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10** God very clearly said no to Paul. It seems that this thorn in the flesh, which has been speculated to be numerous different things, stayed with him possibly until his death. Now, why would God want someone to suffer from some ailment? Why would God intentionally allow someone to endure pain the way Paul was? “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” I think there are a couple things that we can learn from the Lord in this statement.

B. First of all, God says “**my grace is sufficient for you.**” Now what if you called KC P&L because your power had gone out, and got an answer like that. Would you be confused? What is that supposed to mean? **God is telling Paul that he doesn’t need to worry about this thorn in the flesh, because God’s grace has freed his soul.** God reminds Paul that while there are going to be things on this earth that will cause us a great deal of physical pain, we can still know that God has given us His Son to take away our spiritual punishment.

God says, “**No, I’m not going to remove this physical ailment, because life isn’t supposed to be free of pain. But, you can rely on me to relieve your spiritual pain.**”

C. Secondly, God says “**power is perfected in weakness.**” Now, I’m not a very physically strong person. That should be pretty obvious just by looking at me. So, is God saying that I have more power than Arnold Schwarzenegger? Not exactly. What kind of power are we to suppose God is concerned with here? He has just reminded Paul that he should be more concerned with his spiritual health than his physical well-being. So, clearly we can see that God is focused on spiritual power. So, **how is spiritual power perfected in weakness?** Think about it for a moment. When do we pray the most? Do we pray a lot more when we’re happy, and things are going our way, and the sun is shining, and we’ve got no worries? We don’t, do we? We pray more when we’re suffering; when we’ve got major problems; when we don’t know what to do. God is telling Paul, and us today, that when we are weakened by this life, that’s when we are our strongest, because that’s when we begin to rely more on the Lord. That’s when we begin to pray earnestly to Him. How many stories have you heard people tell of a time in their life when things were going great, and they just decided to start praying more, and everything just got even better? I don’t think I’ve ever heard a story like

that. But, I have heard countless stories of people whose lives were in shambles, and they decided to turn to the Lord, and when they did, everything changed. It doesn’t mean that they were miraculously healed, or completely freed of their circumstances, but they knew that God was in control, and they began to rely on Him.

D. Ben Patterson wrote a story about a time when he was in pain. It was the spring of 1980, and he had been diagnosed with two herniated discs in his back. All he could do was lie on the floor. He couldn’t get up to preach, or to visit people, or anything. There was absolutely nothing for him to do - except pray. Not that he came to this conclusion in the best of manners. It was actually out of boredom and frustration that he decided to just pick up his church directory and start praying for every member of the church. This led to a commitment to prayer that he had never experienced before in his life, even after his back had healed. Even in our weakest moments, we can find a great deal of strength in the Lord. Sometimes the Lord says no, because He knows that we need to be reminded of this.

## II. Jesus in Gethsemane

A. Our second example this morning comes from [Luke 22:39-44](#) -We all know that God said no to this prayer. Jesus, as would anyone who knew what was about to happen to Him, prayed that He wouldn't have to go through so much suffering. But, God said no. There are two important things for us to notice about this interaction here.

**B. First of all, we need to look at how this prayer was prayed.** How often, when we are praying, do we actually say words like, “**not my will, but yours be done.**” Usually, it's more like, “**Lord, I need this, and I need it now.**” We have a tendency to see God not as someone we bring our requests to, but rather like we see a restaurant where we go up to the counter and order what we want, and if we don't get it we get agitated. Is that the way prayer works? Of course not! We shouldn't expect God to be at our beckon call. God isn't there just to fix whatever we have a problem with in our lives. God is the creator of this world, and He is going to allow things to progress as He sees fit, not as I demand.

**C. Secondly, let's look closely at God's answer to this prayer.** Yes, God says no to Jesus. Jesus wants to be freed from the inevitable suffering he was going to have to face, but God said no. The important lesson for us from this is that we need to realize how much more

God knows than us. I think a lot of times we come to God thinking I know what's best for me. But, we will learn fairly quickly that the Lord knows best. What might have happened if the Lord had granted Jesus' request? Well, for starters, we certainly wouldn't be here at church this morning. There would have been no sacrifice of the Lamb of God that would bring about forgiveness of sins. There would have been no Day of Pentecost, because nothing would have changed from the Jewish system. Without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, we all would be lost, as Gentiles in this world.

**D. Maybe we should be a little less demanding when it comes to our prayer life.** We all could use a little more humility in our prayers, and we should become well acquainted with the phrase “not my will, but yours be done.”

## III. God's Answer to Job

A. Lastly, this morning, let's take a moment to look at [Job 40:10-14](#). Job hasn't been practicing his attitude of “not my will but yours be done.” Job has been demanding an answer for why he has suffered so much. He feels that God owes him an explanation. Have you ever felt this way? Have you ever entered prayer as though you were raising your fists in anger toward God? Is it any wonder that with an attitude like that, that God would say no?

B. God says to Job, **“If you are so great of a being that you can question me, then you will be able to make the proud humble. You will be able to bring down judgment on all the wicked.”** When I was growing up, there were times when I wanted certain things to be done, or I wanted to go certain places, or I wanted particular things to be bought for me. On the rare occasion that I mustered up the nerve to actually demand that I get my way, what do you think happened? Well, as I limped back to my bedroom, I had the time to think about who was really in charge. That’s what God is saying to Job here. He’s saying, “Don’t you realize that you’re not the one in control here?”

C. God also points out something very important for us to remember. In **verse 14, God says that if Job can do all of these things he has listed, then He will admit that Job can save himself.** This, of course, is ludicrous. We know that Job couldn’t save himself. None of us can save ourselves. We must rely on the grace and forgiveness of our Lord.

**So why do we pray as though we are the ones in control?** Why do we pray as though we are the ones who make the decisions? We need to remember to approach God’s throne with fear and respect for who He is, and what He can do for us.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

A. When it became known among the friends of a certain gentleman that he was going to go abroad, they came in great numbers to see him, each one with a commission for him to execute. A lady wanted him to buy her **a real Paris bonnet**; a scientific friend wanted **a microscope**, and so on with all who came to see him. When they had gone away, he looked over the list and found, to his dismay, that if he made all these purchases he would have no money with which to meet the expense of the trip. Of all the number, only one had brought the money with which to purchase what he wanted.

When the man returned, his friends gathered around him eager to see what he had brought back. To their surprise, they found that he had made but one of the purchases he had been asked to make.

"One day, as I sat upon the deck, looking over your lists, a breeze came and blew them all away except this one," he explained.

"But how could that be?" someone questioned.

"Ah!" was the reply, "his order was weighted down. It had coins wrapped up in it."

Do you see the point? Real, prevailing prayer must have your very best offering of self and substance wrapped up in it. When you pray for the relief of the poor, is your prayer anything more than words? When you somewhat emphatically instruct the Lord to convert

the heathen, **are there any coins wrapped up in your prayer?**

**B. When we pray, is there any substance to it? Or do we expect God to do everything for us?**

Sometimes, we may think God has said no to our requests, when in actuality, he's said, "**here's your opportunity to take care of it**" and we let it slip by. Let's make sure, first of all, that we are coming to God with the right attitudes when we pray.

**C. God is going to deny our requests from time to time.** But, we have to realize that there is a reason behind it. Whether it's because it will make us stronger, or because He knows of better options that we can't foresee. If we will come to God humbly, and with some substance to our prayers, then we are much more likely to have a successful prayer life. But, we need to remember the saying, "**Prayer doesn't get man's will done in heaven, but God's will done on earth.**"

**D. This morning, we also need to remember that while God may answer some prayers with a no, he will never answer a person's turning to Him with a no.** No matter what you've done, no matter what kind of life you have lived, God will never say no to you coming to Him. God will forgive. God is always willing to welcome you into His kingdom, if only you will be willing

to come to come to Him on His terms, not yours!

**INVITATION**