

## PART SIX - WHY PRAY IF GOD ALREADY KNOWS WHAT WILL HAPPEN!

Previously we dealt with the difficult question of where was God during the pandemic? Was God sheltering in place during the worst of Covid? It's possible many of us did not get overly hung up on this fair question. As Christians we have dealt with it many times: *My spouse received a horrible diagnosis, where was God? Why was she not healed? Why didn't God get involved? She was a good person so why do bad things happen to good people?*

Most of us have struggled with this at different levels and, over time, we either came to some sort of resolution, or we gave up asking altogether. I'm big on the struggle to land on some level of answer, preferably the most correct resolution possible, so I was surprised when I read these words: We ask, "why do bad things happen to good people?" This is a good and fair question but why do we consider ourselves good people?" And taking it to a new level, what is the criteria for being "good?"

I find it difficult to assign myself to the state of goodness. I sin, sin isn't good, therefore I'm not good...but I am redeemed, and that's the most likely answer. I still dabble with bouts of "non-goodness," but I'm saved from my non-goodness. Is this the reason "the rain falls on the just and unjust," or restated, "why do bad things happen to both unredeemed and redeemed people?" That answer is the proverbial *long and winding road*, and it's not our primary focus for today, although today's and last week's lessons are sisters.

Why pray if God knows the way life will turnout. He knows the future, so why pray for something if the future has been decided? Making this point, "if I get Covid, or a bad medical diagnosis, will diligent prayer do the trick? Will I be healed? I am a redeemed follower of Jesus after all." It would be great if being redeemed was the magic bullet that made us impervious to pain and bulletproof to all evil...but it isn't. That whole "rain falling on the just and unjust alike" is true.

We all suffer through “thin days,” as T.D. Burnette describes the quite bad days/seasons of life. No one is exempt from thin days, which explains why being redeemed doesn’t come with a cloak of invincibility. Our souls are protected but not the natural/physical aspects of our lives. We still get Covid, experience heart attacks and remain susceptible to cancer...as do the masses of unredeemed people out there. Life becomes equal opportunity. Our only edge is having the perk of life-altering prayer and the ability to hearing God in response.

Shifting to the non-faith masses, how many became very open to a relationship with God during the pandemic? How many tried prayer but did not experience any discernable change in their lives. They prayed all kinds of prayers but did not see any fruit, and now they are again doubting God. Sounds like Dr. Debbie Downer wrote this dour expose on Covid spirituality, but these are words we need to hear. Why should we not see the unredeemed masses, who represent a majority of the population, be our post-pandemic focus. Maybe the Good News will never have a better and more responsive audience. Maybe the Good News will be just that, *Good News*. Sure, many non-faith persons have totally written off God, but the majority are open targets for the Gospel.

This is especially true of the wealthy who thought they were controlling life through their education, financial clout and position. And, there was amazing power to live this way; Need something, buy it, possibly two. Get sick, fly to see the world’s most qualified physicians. Get hungry? Forget it. How many in Johns Creek face consistent food shortages? Not many. We can load up a grocery cart so full it becomes hard to push. Wait, push one’s own grocery cart...when you can hire a surrogate grocery buyer? Get it? Around our region we could make God look unnecessary and many people live out that reality. Then came a worldwide pandemic that hit rich and poor alike, didn’t discriminate between believers and unbelievers, and reeked widespread panic and destruction. Who needs God? We do, as well all the people “out there” who haven’t yet found Him. The need for God in 2020 was profound.

It is our job to take the life-saving reality of Jesus to the non-faith masses, who by the way, may be the most open to the Gospel ever. So, let’s get started, right?

Chill those eager jets and let's first check all the necessary boxes. We must first make sure our practical theology is sound.

Why should we pray each day even though our prayers likely won't be answered in the ways we hope for, especially the large-scale prayers for healing and deliverance? Once we figure that one out, we will be ready to take our witness to the masses. What is the purpose of Christian prayer? A main reason is to be in intimate communion with the Creator God. Another reason is to bring Divinity and holiness into being in our lives. We also need to mix our prayers up.

**Truthfully** answer this question: Do we pray with equal portions of praise and petition? Self-reported studies suggest we spend a lot of time on petitionary praying and little time on praise prayers. A couple of days each week it's O.K. to go all self-focused on God, this "me" first, self-absorbed approach. Too much of that approach will not produce intimacy and true relationship. Think of it this way: you only speak to your spouse when you want something. Will that work? Actually, how long will the greatly one-sided relationship last? Prayer may seem ineffectual and the root cause just might be our self-absorbed, gimme-gimme intent.

Here's the deal: we exist in a broken, tainted with evil, corrupt and worse, world. God pulled off creation for the purpose of living in communion with his creation. But he gave creative humanity free will and the ability to make choices. Whether Genesis is to be taken hyper-literally or in story form for wandering Israel's theological understanding of creation, the takeaway should be the same: God wants to live in harmony with us but sin, snowballing sin, created a permanent barrier. We now live East of Eden, the land of decay and personified evil. Our only hope is to be in right relationship with God, and to seek daily intimacy in that relationship. Prayer and listening are the foundation of this intimate relationship with the Creator God. And, this is what we must share with the lost, damaged people out there who experienced the same pandemic we experienced...but they faced it without a relationship with God; they did it without knowing their creative purpose; they did it without having Christian community and connection.

It's on us to take the reality of Jesus and God's love to them. It's our job to teach them how to pray toward intimacy. It's up to us that they never walk alone. Let's discuss further the element of prayer.