

Disappointed in Prayer?

Question: I feel disappointed, my marriage of 20 years is over even though I prayed everyday about it. He had an affair with another church member, they just married this weekend and I don't understand, they were both adulterers, they stole from the church and are still telling lies. I never was unfaithful in my marriage or when we were separated and I feel as God ignored my cries for help. What do I do?

Answer:

I clearly understand how your situation has brought heavy disappointment to you as you reflect back on what has happened. Believe me, many other devoted spouses have felt the same painful sting of such a loss after years of marriage. You did well to pray for your marriage. I would hope that other married couples would pray for their homes and relationships as well. Many times we pray and become disappointed with the results. It's always a boost to our faith to see how and when God answers our petitions by giving us what we ask for. But there are times when we pray and do not see such positive results. For instance, we have prayed for a sick loved one, only to witness their condition deteriorate. Godly parents have prayed for their wayward children, only to see them remain in their rebellion, and in some cases even die without ever returning to the way of righteousness. Christian employers have prayed to keep their business from going under, only to see it fail. Employees have prayed to keep their jobs, only to be given a pink slip.

Even the best of Christians are not exempt from disappointing circumstances. But when we face them, there are fundamental Biblical principles we must bear in mind. The first is this: **Sometimes God denies us what we think is good in order to give us what is best.** Even Jesus prayed, "*Let this cup pass from me.*" As you know, God did not answer this by doing what Christ

asked. This is because He had a higher purpose in view, namely, our salvation. Think about it: If Christ had some of His most urgent prayers declined by a loving God, should we be surprised when God does not answer some of our prayers the way we want Him to. In such cases, we should accept His answer in faith and say, *"Not my will, but Yours be done."* We need to trust that our all-wise heavenly Father knows how to best answer our prayers and that He has a plan and purpose when He declines our request. We must remember that God is an all-knowing and all-loving parent, and will sometimes decline to give us what we ask for in order to accomplish a higher purpose for our lives.

Your reference to your spouse's infidelity despite your prayers leads me to state a second principle we should recognize regarding prayer, and that is: **though God loves us, He will not override a sinner's freedom to make his own choices.** He will not prevent those bent on living a sinful lifestyle from making sinful choices. He desires the salvation of all, He invites all to repent, and even pleads through Scripture and providence. But in no case will God deprive someone of their God-given ability to decide for themselves, right or wrong. Though we pray for our spouse, or our children, or other loved ones, God is patient and loving. Some are moved by God's goodness to repent of their sins (Romans 2:4); others choose to refuse His overtures of grace and love. Prayer sometimes changes our circumstances, and sometimes changes people, but in no case, does prayer force sinful people to live the way we want, or even the way God wants them to. In Romans 9:1-4, Paul says that his constant prayer was for his Jewish countrymen to accept Christ. Some did turn to Christ, but some continued to refuse Him. Yet Paul persisted in his prayers. We should do the same as well.

The third principle we should remember is this: **In His time, God will ultimately right all wrongs.** So often in this life it appears that wrongdoers "get away" with doing evil. Scripture says, *"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do*

evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). When we have been betrayed by an unfaithful spouse, we may feel that they are really "living it up" while wallowing in sin, but the Bible says **"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."** (Hebrews 13:5). It is easy to think that we have been dealt a worse hand, while they've "got it made." But the Bible teaches that sin's pleasures are short-lived, and that the righteous should let God deal with evil in His own time. Psalm 37 says, **"Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who bring wicked schemes to pass (V.1-7).** In the meantime we can rely upon God's promise to reward faith and punish all sin. **"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14).**

God has not ignored your prayers. You were right to pray for your marriage. But even though someone else may choose to reject God's will, God is not finished with you. What you think may be the end of the road may simply be a bend in the road, a new direction for your life. If you remain faithful to Him, He will honor your faith and reward you in His time. For those who turn to sin's fleeting pleasures, God will repay them according to their sins, unless they repent. C. S. Lewis called suffering and pain, "God's megaphone." Here is what he said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pain." In our deepest suffering, we must ask God to protect us from a defeating spirit of bitterness and seek to know what God is

wanting to teach us in our sorrow, and pursue the new direction He wants for our lives, as difficult as it may seem for the moment.

Finally, remember this: No one knows the pain of rejection any better than Christ Jesus Himself. He prayed for His cup of suffering to pass. It did not. Yet He trusted in His Father's good and perfect will. And consequently we have been blessed by His obedience. He too was despised and rejected by men, and even said to His Heavenly Father, "Why have You forsaken Me;" yet He went the distance to finish the work God had given Him to do. He is our sympathetic High Priest who is touched by our sorrows. He understands and He is there to help you.

So, what should you do when you are disappointed with the outcome of your prayers? Keep praying and keep looking up to Jesus through your tear-filled eyes. He is faithful who has promised that He will ultimately reward and honor your faith when you have walked with Him in the valley.

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