

Praying in Difficult Circumstances

And He told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

~ Luke 18:1 (ESV) ~

Some circumstances are not only difficult but seem at first almost impossible. I once asked a hospital chaplain what he prayed when there was no hope of viable life for the patient he was with. He replied that he had noticed in John's Gospel, chapter 12, that Jesus, having looked at the grim destiny that awaited Him seemed to have a moment of crisis: 'Now is my soul troubled – what shall I say?' In the end, however, He steadied himself by simply saying, 'Father, glorify Thy name.'

'That made sense,' said the chaplain, 'so whenever I find myself at the bedside of someone who is alive but beyond apparent recovery, I simply pray: "Father, glorify Your name – in this person's life."'

That chaplain was right. When things are dark, we may not know what to say or do, but God does, so we acknowledge that and hand it to Him.

That 'handing over' takes us to our second point.

Scripture tells us that Jesus took authority over whatever stood opposed to God's good will for us. He then handed that authority over to us. This means that when we are in a dark place and feel assailed by trial and trouble, we should not feel intimidated from taking command of the situation in His name.

We start with an affirmation, such as, 'Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world.' In Jesus' name we bind whatever bad force is thwarting God's benign will for us; then we order it to be gone, and finally we hand the situation over to God. Since we know He will take all

of it on His shoulders, that means if thereafter we still have the stress of it, then we still haven't given it all to Him.

That brings us to a third point, which is to do with care in the language we use in prayer at difficult times. When Jesus spoke to situations, He did not use 'if' or 'maybe', but – as in the raising of Lazarus – 'Thank You Father, that You have heard me.' Clearly, our prayers are going to be more effective when made from within an atmosphere of positive, trust-filled language. Since we walk by faith and not by sight, we take care to speak words of life over even the most crushing and hopeless of circumstances. What's more, we keep on doing so.

As Churchill famously said in a speech in 1941, 'Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never.' Fourth, when a hard situation is troubling us and we turn to our prayers, there's something we perhaps need to think about first, and that is that God rarely does anything for us to keep us as we are. If all we want is for something to go back to what it was, then we are forgetting that in everything He is God the Creator, and His engagements with us are almost always to move us on. If we pray and feel He is not hearing us, it may be because He knows that we are not ready to accept His involvement as a means of going on.

So a good starting point is always to affirm that whatever happens, we are prepared to accept His lead on the matter. If that is a step too far, then we pray for Him to work on our feelings, saying, 'I am willing to be willing!'

Fifth, remember that the word of God is alive and active. So keep a Bible verse up your sleeve for the tough times. This means that if things are so bad that you just can't

manage to pray, then you still have something to hold onto and repeat to yourself.

Useful verses are 'Stand firm and see the victory of the Lord' (2 Chronicles 20:17) or 'my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4:19) or 'He has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of His dear Son' (Colossians 1:13).

Lastly, if even a Bible verse is beyond you, remember if nothing else, you are precious, you are loved and you are known. Life may batter and cut you, but you are not lost, you are God's and you do not walk alone.

Written by LAURENCEWHITLEY