

The Prayer Class

Purpose: *To encourage greater participation and joy in prayer*

The Prayer Class meets in God's Throne Room 24/7

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence Ephesians 3:12.

Teacher: Abe Funk

Date: May 9, 2024

Lesson: *Three Times I prayed About It*

Welcome to The Prayer Class:

Loving Father, help us to not only accept your "No" to a prayer, but to be content and trust you to give us something better and something you want to use for your glory. Amen!

Bible Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know--God knows. And I know that this man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows--was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Key Verse: *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me 8.*

Background and Lesson:

What do you find hardest about being a Christian? Most likely it's an unanswered prayer in a time of suffering and need. Paul shows us how it's possible to live joyfully and victoriously with unanswered prayer, accept and live with suffering, and let God use it for his glory.

The following article is from *The Christian History Project*.

"The seriousness with which he [Paul] approached spiritual matters was not changed on the Damascus Road. But the transformation he underwent forever energised his ministry. The former arrogant, mechanistic, hairsplitting Pharisee who measured spirituality by legal degrees became an apostle of faith, a minister humbled by the power of grace, love, and the Holy Spirit, a missionary who lived only to share a divine gift that was available to everyone who would willingly embrace it. This ultimately made him a polarizing force. He attracted and retained converts in droves, but his enthusiasm, intensity, and exuberant conviction could also make people uncomfortable and spark opposition and even hatred.

Some time about A.D. 42 or 43, Paul was further inspired by a mysterious "ecstatic" revelation, which he recounts in his second letter to the Corinthians. What happened, he could not describe. "Whether in the body or out of the body," he writes, he was transported to "paradise" or "the third

heaven.” There he heard things impermissible to put into words. Though it elated him, the experience left him with a humiliating physical disability. He termed it “a splinter in the flesh.” He prayed three times that it would go away. Instead, Christ told him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Thus the experience deepened his sense of “life in the Spirit” as a life of committed action. It also affirmed the notion that it was good, even desirable, to endure suffering in the name of Christ. Thus Paul could write, “I will all the more gladly boast about my weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities; for when I am weak, I am strong.” -end of quote.

Paul humbly tells his own story in third person, “I know a man...,” then opens up in verse 6 and tells his story. Many have speculated what Paul’s *thorn in my flesh* was. Early church fathers listed 16 possibilities, and modern students and thinkers have added to the list. Paul didn’t tell us, and for some good reason, and I for one am glad he didn’t. We too have unexplained illnesses and hardships that we may wish we had an easy explanation for or a healing from.

A friend who was born blind in a Muslim family bargained with God when he considered becoming a Christian. *God, if you give me sight, I will believe in you and serve you.* The Lord told him clearly, *No, I want to use it.* And God is—very effectively using him. He leads an amazing welcome ministry for newcomers, and many are coming to faith Christ.

God did answer Paul’s prayer, but not what he asked, to remove the *thorn*. Did God give him something better? Maybe not for him personally, but certainly made him a far more effective missionary, and that was fine with Paul, because he was content with God’s will, and struggled with his handicap for the rest of his life, weak in himself, but stronger in Christ. *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong* 10.

What personal issue have you prayed about, that you wish God would answer favorably, but has not done that. Then what is God trying to say to you? Paul was content with Christ’s answer. My friend accepted his blindness. God used Paul and uses my friend very effectively. He can do the same for you!

Quote: *My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will* --Jesus

Think About This:

Think about one of your lingering trials and evaluate it in the light of Paul’s experience.

A Prayer for You:

By faith, *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him* Romans 8:28.

My Notes and what To Pray for:

Add your prayer requests here: yourself, family, church family, missionaries, & leaders in government

Note: All Scriptures are from the NIV Bible unless otherwise indicated

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful Colossians 4:2

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