

Prayer (Matthew 25:36-46)
Seven Rhythms • February 25, 2024 • www.isonrise.com

Have you ever been disappointed by how others have attempted to care for you while you were suffering? I have experienced disappointment in this area myself and seen others experience it as well. Some of the words that were thought to be helpful were actually hurtful. Speaking of the good that may come from suffering is helpful when shared at the right time. When I share the pain I'm feeling and someone responds by showing me all the good that has come or will come out of that experience, I don't feel cared for. That makes me feel alone and unseen. In those moments, I almost immediately regret sharing my experience with that person. It's not that I disagree with what they said, but I am disappointed with what they didn't hear. They didn't hear my hurt and seek to understand my sorrow first. I have encountered leaders in the church who have displayed a sense of impatience with those who are grieving. They have wanted to hurry the grieving process and push the one grieving to the next stage too soon. This sort of impatience is insensitive and uncaring, even though it may have been well-intended.

Have you ever been disappointed by how you have attempted to care for others while they are suffering? Maybe you feel like you don't know what to say when others are suffering. You want to provide comfort but you just don't know how. Not knowing what to do or say may have caused you to retreat from those grieving or avoid asking questions about their pain. If you have done either of these things, I am sure you have seen how your lack of action has hurt that relationship. Saying the wrong thing can hurt and saying nothing can hurt. So, how can we comfort those around us in pain without falling victim to either of these errors?

Jesus' prayer on the night he was betrayed teaches us a valuable lesson on how we can help those who are hurting. Jesus will show us what a sufferer wants first from us and how we should pray with them in their suffering. If we put these principles into practice, I believe that those who are suffering around us will seek us out to find comfort.

Big Idea: Misery loves company before comfort and correction. The order of these words is important. We need to comfort those in pain and gently correct the harmful thoughts and behaviors that are hurting them. The Bible encourages us to do these things. It also instructs us to be wise in how and when we do these things. We will see from Jesus' own example that "company" should come before words of comfort or correction. When we are in pain, we want companionship before encouragement. We want someone to listen before they teach us a lesson.

Matthew 26:36-38, ³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray."³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."

Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him as he sought to pray through his sorrow and agony concerning his coming death on the cross. These three had just recently expressed their

readiness to suffer for Jesus. It is not surprising that Jesus therefore chose these three to share in his moment of sorrow. The words Jesus used to express his sorrow are extremely intense. Most interpreters feel that the English words that have been chosen in most modern translations are inadequate in expressing the severity of Jesus' emotional state. It is helpful for us to note that severe and intense emotional states are not inherently sinful. Jesus is not sinning in his sorrow. We all experience emotional valleys and mountaintops. Jesus did as well. We can fall into temptation in these valleys and on these mountaintops, but these places are not in themselves sinful.

Many have faced their inevitable death much calmer than Jesus did here. He, on the other hand, was facing something that no one had before or would ever. He was going to face the wrath of God for sinners. It wasn't his coming death that scared him, but the kind of death he was about to face that brought on such a state of misery. Only in Matthew 27:46, the cry from the cross, do we see such a graphic portrayal of Jesus' emotional anguish again. What did Jesus want from his disciples while he was in that state of despair? Jesus wasn't simply informing Peter, James, and John of his emotional turmoil, he was giving them this information to enlist their support.

Matthew 26:38, ⁵⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."

Notice what Jesus didn't ask for. Jesus didn't ask to be reminded of his purpose in this life, which was to suffer for the sins of the world. Jesus had just shared with them that his blood would be "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). He didn't ask them to reassure him of God the Father's love for him, which these disciples heard the Father express from heaven in an audible voice at his baptism and transfiguration. He didn't ask for comfort or correction. He didn't ask them to share their words. He asked them to "watch with" him. He wanted their presence and their support, not their wisdom and advice. In this passage, we learn something from Jesus' words to his disciples and his words to God the Father. Both of these lessons will help us to minister to those in misery. We will learn the importance of companionship and how to pray with those who are suffering.

Matthew 26:39, ⁵⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."

It is interesting that Jesus asked these three disciples to come with him and then he took a few steps away from them. This again reinforces that Jesus wasn't looking for their words but desired their supportive presence. Jesus wanted to pray to his heavenly Father in private, but he wanted these men to be close to him. He didn't even ask them to pray with him. He simply wanted their presence as he was working through this pain. The son of God didn't want to be alone in his sorrow. **Misery loves company before comfort and correction.**

Jesus' prayer is instructive in showing us how to pray when we are suffering and when we are with those who are suffering. The "cup" that Jesus was referring to is the wrath of God. In the Old Testament, the imagery of a cup being poured out or drunk was used to describe

experiencing the wrath of God. Jesus wasn't attempting to avoid or revolt against the will of the Father. If Jesus was trying to avoid the cross, he would not have chosen to pray in this garden. Judas knew of this place since he had frequently visited it with Jesus and the other disciples according to John 18:2. Jesus could have gone to another place if he wanted to avoid Judas' betrayal, which led to his arrest, trial, and execution. Also, Jesus had just referred to his coming betrayal (v. 24), and crucifixion (v. 31) as happening as it was "written." He knew the plan of God. The cross was not new to him, but he, in his humanity, was coming to grips with the emotional and physical weight of this gruesome future. He was not defying God, but asking if the cross was a necessary part of the plan. Jesus' use of the title "Father" and his submission to his "will" shows that Jesus practiced the prayer method he taught to his disciples in Matthew 6. Jesus' prayer teaches us that we can ask for suffering to "pass" us and if that passing is not in the plan of God we must learn to submit to his plan.

The rest of our passage reinforces the importance of companionship in suffering and honest submissive prayers when we are suffering. I must admit that I have read this passage several times and have missed the emphasis on Jesus' desire for companionship from his disciples. I have often focused on Jesus' words of prayer to his Father more than any other details. It is appropriate to learn from Jesus' prayer, but we shouldn't miss his request of these disciples. Matthew records more of Jesus' words to his disciples than to God the Father in the garden of Gethsemane.

Matthew 26:40-41, "40 And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour?" 41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Jesus was clearly disappointed that Peter, James, and John could not stay awake and support him while he agonized over his coming crucifixion. His question of Peter shows the expectations he had of the group. He adds more to his request of them this time by specifically asking them to pray. Jesus acknowledged that the disciples were "willing" to do what he asked of them. They needed to ask God to help them have the physical energy to meet his request. "Flesh" here refers to their physical body and should not be understood as their sinful nature, which is how Paul used this terminology in his New Testament letters. Jesus was not excusing their behavior but was also not berating them for it. The "temptation" that Jesus was immediately referring to was them falling asleep and not supporting him. This temptation was a small taste of what Peter and the others would experience very soon. Sadly their failure at this moment foreshadowed their coming failure to be faithful to Christ during his arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

Matthew 26:42, "42 Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."

This request is slightly different and reveals that Jesus had come to believe that it was not within God's will that he avoid the cross. The will of the Father was not imposed on the Son but is rather voluntarily taken on by him. Jesus repeated his request and his commitment to

submission. This should encourage us to persist in our prayers to have our sufferings pass from us and progressively affirm the strength of our commitment to submit to the plan of the Father.

Matthew 26:43-44, “⁴³ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.”⁴⁴ So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.”

At this point, I would imagine that Jesus was really disappointed with his followers. He made his request known to them. He expressed the pain he was feeling in graphic terms. He patiently tried to help them by encouraging them to pray for God to give them the power to stay awake. He doesn't even attempt to wake them up. He just moves on. Ouch! He must have felt extremely alone at this point. Jesus knows how it feels to be disappointed by the lack of empathy and support from friends.

Matthew 26:45-46, “⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.”⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

At this point, the patience of Jesus appears to have ceased. He ironically commands his disciples to “sleep.” It is clear that this was not a serious command because he immediately instructed them to “take their rest later.” This is similar to when you are frustrated with your spouse or kids and you say “fine, do whatever you want.” You are not seriously permitting them to throw off all restraints. You are communicating frustration and disappointment. Jesus was hurt by their lack of support.

Misery loves company before comfort and correction. If the Son of God expressed a desire for companionship while in misery, we should not be surprised when others express the same desire. It is much easier to toss advice from a distance, it is painful to join someone in agony. Most of us here can recall a time when we felt alone in our suffering. We know how deep that hurt feels. Let's not inflict that wound on others. Let's give the companionship we long for when we are in pain.

You may have caught yourself thinking “I don't know what to say” when your friend or family member is suffering. That feeling of incompetence may be a blessing in disguise. It's okay to not know what to say because you don't need to heal them before you hear them. There will be a time for comforting words and even gentle correction, but you must give them your company first. Listen to their pain. Validate their feelings. And then pray with them and ask the Lord to let this suffering pass them and if he doesn't that he would give them the power to endure it. Imagine, if we gave misery company before comfort and correction. I believe people in pain would seek us out. I believe the hurting, broken, and sorrowful would invite us to join them in their pain.

Maybe you are here today and you wouldn't yet call yourself a Christian. You would say that you are curious, but not yet committed. I want to make a commitment to you. Wherever you are, we want to be there with you. If you are in a painful season, we want to be there with you. If you are in agony and misery, we want to be there with you. If you are hurting because of

the actions of someone else or because of your own choices, we want to be there with you. One of the reasons I fell in love with the church was because I met people, who didn't look past my pain or leave me alone in my agony. They met me in my suffering and offered me companionship before I even became a Christian. Please let us join you. We are committed to being great listeners.

Life Level Application

- 1) **Head:** Read Hebrews 5:7-10. What prayer of Jesus do you believe the writer of Hebrews is referring to? How does Jesus' "learning obedience" relate to his praying for the Father's will to be done? What were the results of Jesus' submission or obedience to the Father's plan? How does this give you hope in thinking of God's response to your obedience?

- 2) **Heart:** Read Matthew 6:9-15. Why do you think God's will is mentioned before the requests for our needs to be met are offered? How do Jesus' prayers in Matthew 26:36-46 reflect the model he taught his disciples in Matthew 6:9-15? If we always add "your (God's) will be done" to our prayers, then are our prayers always answered?

- 3) **Hands:** Read Romans 12:15. Describe a moment in your life when you felt that someone helped you mourn and grieve well. Describe a time when you helped someone else through suffering.

- 4) **Habits:** Who around you do you believe may feel unseen or alone in their pain? How can you ask questions to help them see that you want to be with them in their pain? Is there anyone around you that you feel you need to invite into your pain? How can you invite them?