

REFLECTION ON “UNANSWERED PRAYERS”:



How can I pray to God when I am so disappointed in him? I am often angry at God because it feels like nothing I do ever works out. It feels hypocritical to then just go and tell God that everything is OK. Things aren't OK in my life!



“First, amazing question. I am certain that your question arises from a heart that has been broken in some way. Please know of my prayers for you and for anyone reading this column who is suffering defeat at this moment. You are not alone. You have brothers and sisters in Christ, and you have a God who is on your side.

Your question zeroes in on the most important issue we must face: Can we really trust God? The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard believed this question was so vital that he put it forth in words like these: “It is not so important to know whether God exists or not; what is important is to know whether He is love or not.” As a Catholic, you know that God is love. Because you are in Christ, you know the story; you know that God has made his decision. He is on your side. And yet, what do we do when things crash around us? Do you know that you can take your tears to God? Do you know that he actually wants us to bring our broken hearts and broken dreams to him? We can get it out of our heads that God only wants us to tell him our good news. Our spiritual parents, the Jewish people, have given us an entire spiritual genre called Lamentation. This is the raw and honest cry of a people who cried out to God: “We thought you were on our side! Why have you forgotten your promises? Why have you abandoned us?” This book is in the Bible. That means that the Holy Spirit inspired these words of complaint. This means that it is clear that God does not merely want our praise; he wants our pain as well. These same prayers (as well as those found in the book of Psalms) show us how we can bring these complaints to God. First, they are honest. The authors of Sacred Scripture did not sugarcoat their pain or frustration. (“How long, O Lord? Will you forget your people forever?”) Rather, they trusted God enough to tell him the truth. You can begin by bringing God into your situation as it is. Second, while the Jews were strikingly aware of their present condition, they never forgot that God had blessed them in the past. In their prayer, they specifically praised God and thanked him for the good things they had received from him. In my experience, it is very easy to think that all that God has done in my life is instantly canceled* out when I am in distress. The Bible reminds us that we must not forget that the God who has guided and cared for us in the past will continue guiding and caring for us today. In your prayer, be just as specific with your praise as you are with your pain. In this way, the “God, I’m so lonely” is eventually followed by “Thank you for giving me the friendship of my brother when I felt all alone last year.” Third, make an act of trust in God. It is important to remember that the act of trust is not in yourself or in fate or in the healing effect of time. Sometimes my prayer for the future centers* around those three things. I say to myself: “I know if I just try harder, it’ll be better,” or “Things will start looking up. They’ve just got to. I’m a good person,” or “Someday this pain won’t sting as much. I’ll just wait until that day.” Remember, God is on your side. He is faithful even when we are not faithful. Because of this, we place our trust in him, not in ourselves or anything else. A great example of this is Psalm 3, a psalm of David. David was the king of Israel. He was the one chosen by God. And yet, he endured tremendous pain and betrayal. Psalm 3 is entitled (in my Bible) “Threatened but Trusting.” And the subscript that describes the occasion when David wrote this psalm is: “When David fled for his life from his son Absalom.” Here is a man who was trying to do God’s will (imperfectly), and his own son was chasing him down with thousands of troops. The Bible was not authored by individuals sitting in ivory towers, untouched by anguish, but by people who experienced the worst that life has to offer and still turned to God. You are chosen by God as well. You can do the same.”

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[AMERICAN SPELLING AS THE AUTHOR, FR MICHEAL SCHMITZ IS AMERICAN)