

WHEN GOD SAYS “NO”

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Prayer is a wonderful blessing for the Christian. We are taught to “pray without ceasing” and that the “prayer of a righteous man avails much” (1 Thessalonians 5:17; James 5:16). God hears the prayers of the righteous, but that does not mean that He will grant every request brought before Him. God can answer a supplication with either a “Yes” or a “No.” That is why Jesus taught us to pray to the Father in heaven, “Your will be done” (Matthew 6:10). If what we request is not realized as we desire, it may not be because God did not hear our prayer, but that His will is different than ours. Consider some great Bible characters who were told “No” by God:

MOSES

When Moses and Aaron made a serious error before the children of Israel, God said, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (Numbers 20:12). Moses later told the people of Israel that he pleaded with the Lord, “I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon,” but the Lord answered him, “Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter” (Deuteronomy 3:23-26). Moses was allowed to see the land, but not to cross over Jordan (v. 27). He was as close to God as a man could be (see Numbers 12:6-8), yet when his sincere pleading was against God’s will, God told him “No”! His request would not be granted by God. God can say “No” to even His most faithful servants. (Lest we feel too sorry for Moses, he died a faithful servant of God who will enjoy a more wonderful, promised land in heaven!)

JESUS

In the midst of the greatest suffering ever endured by one on this earth, Jesus, the Son of God, prayed to His Father, “Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus faced unspeakable suffering that was most undesirable, yet He did as He taught His disciples and prayed that the Father’s will be done. We are told that His “cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death” was heard, yet Jesus had to suffer for our sins (Hebrews 5:7-8). His request was denied for our sakes, and Jesus humbled Himself to become obedient to the point of death on the cross (Philippians 2:8).

PAUL

Paul was afflicted with a “thorn in the flesh” which he describes as “a messenger of Satan” given “to buffet [beat] him” (2 Corinthians 12:7). He pleaded with the Lord *three times* that it might depart, but the Lord answered, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9). In other words, “No, Paul, I will not remove it, but you can endure it with My help.” Did Paul – or Moses, or Jesus – get upset and rebel against God? NO! Paul boasted in this his infirmities for Christ’s sake (vv. 9-10). Moses and Jesus obeyed the will of God.

When God says “No” and our desires are not realized, we must understand that God’s understanding is greater than ours. It may be to our advantage and spiritual growth to go a different direction, endure suffering and difficulties, or learn important lessons. Above all, we must humble ourselves, accept God’s will, and keep praying to our loving Father.