

# DWELLING IN GOD'S WORD

## PRAYER IN TOUGH TIMES

When the answer isn't what we want – a model for enduring hardship



by Pastor Stephen Abraham

As someone who experiences suffering daily in the form of chronic pain, I'm fascinated by what Jesus does and how he prays as he faces the cross.

What does the account of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane tell us about how we can prayerfully face our own suffering?

**Read Mark 14:32,33; Luke 22:39; Matthew 26:36,37.**

Does Jesus face this challenge alone?

What do you think? In some ways, 'yes'; in other ways, 'no'. Significantly, Jesus takes his closest friends with him. There are lots of reasons why Jesus might have taken Peter, James and John. The most human reason would be that Jesus is suffering and asks for the support of his closest friends.

**Read Matthew 26:37,38.**

What was Jesus' emotional state?

How would you describe Jesus' emotions? The Greek words used to describe Jesus' state are quite potent: *perilupos* is 'profoundly sorrowful'; and *ademoneo* is 'to be troubled, in great distress or anguish, depressed'. Jesus verbally lays his soul bare: 'Guys, I'm overwhelmed. I'm a mess. I'm struggling.'

Some of us find it really difficult to admit to our friends and family that we are struggling, to verbally admit, 'To be honest, I'm not okay!' I find it comforting that my Lord and Saviour knows what it's like to be an emotional wreck – to have that dark cloud consuming his thoughts and to admit that even he needed support the support of close friends.

What does Jesus ask of his friends? Does Jesus say: 'Give me your anecdotes of when your uncle had a hard time'? Or, 'Give me your advice'? Or, 'Give me some solutions'?

**Read Matthew 26:37,38.**

What does Jesus ask?

**Read Job 2:11,12.**

Much like Peter, James and John, Job's friends also sit with him. They just sit and don't say anything for seven days. What are they to 'keep watch' over? Another phrase would be to 'keep vigil'. It's an old phrase that we don't use much

anymore. Perhaps today we would say, 'Just be with me while I go through this'.

**Read Matthew 26:37 and Luke 22:42.**

What does Jesus ask of God?

Let's look at this, one phrase at a time.

'My Father ...' (This is an intimate personal address to God the Father.)

'.. if it be possible take this cup from me' ('This cup' is a metaphor for suffering – a suffering that seems too great to endure.)

'... yet not as I will, but as you will'. (Or, as Luke records, 'yet not my will, but yours be done'.)

Jesus submits to God's will. It's not always God's will for you to win the lottery. It's not always God's will for your severed finger to miraculously grow back. It's not always God's will for your hardship to be magically resolved. If prayer worked like that, Jesus wouldn't have gone to the cross. God would have said, 'Okay, sure thing, you don't have to suffer'. In his suffering, Jesus submits to his Father's will.

I live with permanent disablement – a spinal injury with nerve damage and severe chronic pain that often leaves me bedridden. I've had many people pray for me: 'miracle workers', pastors and elders, my family and members of my church. And yet, no physical healing, for 15 years.

Spiritual healing, the healing of my heart? You bet! I'm forgiven and whole. Other miracles in my life? Every day!

But not healing of my body. Like Job and like Jesus, sometimes the cup of suffering we want taken away is not part of the bigger plan. For me, healing might be tomorrow ... and maybe I have to wait until heaven when all is made right.

Does it hurt? Yes, every single moment of every single day! But I take heart in Jesus' prayer. It has become my prayer as I suffer. If you are experiencing hardship, maybe it can become your prayer, too.

You can hear Stephen's musical meditation on Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane. In YouTube search for 'Prayer of Gethsemane Stephen Abraham'. If you find it helpful, 'like' and subscribe – or maybe you can pray this for someone you know who is suffering, or share the video with them.