

Walking With God in a Pandemic

What to Pray in Times of Trouble

Rough Transcript

Brett Clemmer

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Hi, guys, it's great to see you. Thanks for joining us again for the Man in the Mirror Bible study. We're in our series called **Walking with God in a Pandemic**. I thought I would just quickly review the first four weeks of this series so far. So, in the first week, we talked about when it seems like Jesus shows up too late. And the story of Jesus coming to see Mary and Martha just after Lazarus has died, and how he walked into that chaos and brought peace. They were accusing him of not being there when they needed him, and he just, he brought peace, and then he brought the resurrection and the life to Lazarus and really, even to Mary and Martha, as he explained to them what it meant for him to be the resurrection and the life, that it wasn't something way off in the future, but it was right now. And he was about to display the power that he had over the resurrection and the life.

And then, the next week, Pat talked about worry and anxiety and how do you overcome worry? Well, you remember that God loves you, that if he takes care of the sparrows, he's going to take care of you like he says in Matthew 6. So, because God worries about us, God is concerned for us. God gives us everything we need. We don't have to worry. We don't have to have anxiety.

Then, the next week, Pat talked about, how do you have courage in a pandemic? And just reminding us from the story of Joshua in Joshua chapter 1 of how God said to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous." Why? "Because I will never forsake you. I will always be with you." And that's the same promise for us, that God will always be with us. So, we can be strong and courageous as well.

Then last week, Khayree talked about having trust in the midst of turmoil and how the widow had to trust God when Elijah came and how sometimes, you have to shut the door on things that are undermining your trust in God.

And so, that leads us to this week. So, we talked... So, peace and hope and overcoming worry, having courage, having trust. How do you get there? Right? How do you get there? So, one great tool for us to think about during this time is really, the tool of prayer, the practice of prayer. And so, what I want to do today is look at Jesus as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. So, if you have a Bible, turn to Luke chapter 22, Luke chapter 22 and we're going to start at verse 39. And we're going to see how Jesus spoke to the disciples and how he prayed in the garden and what that teaches us about prayer during a pandemic. I'm going to give you three prayers for a pandemic for men, three prayers that we can pray as men during a pandemic. So, let me read this passage and you can follow along.

Luke chapter 22, verse 39. "And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.' And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.' And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.'"

So, one of the fascinating things to me about this passage is that it starts and ends with Jesus telling the disciples to pray that you may not enter into temptation. Isn't that an interesting thing to talk to them about while he's in the midst of his own struggle of his own, just not wanting to go through what he's about to go through, that he knows he's about to go through? But this passage is bookended with him telling the disciples, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And I think for us, that's the first prayer that we need to pray as men during a pandemic. "Lord, don't let me enter into temptation."

So, what temptation might we face? Well, the first thing is the temptation of bad habits, either coming back or getting worse. So, what am I talking about? Well, we know that with isolation comes a lack of accountability. We know that with isolation, just in the last month or so, we see that alcohol use is up. Alcohol sales are certainly up. Substance abuse issues are up. Domestic violence is up, pornography use is up. And so, these are temptations. The temptation to self-medicate, to violence, the temptation to really self-comfort, or with pornography, all the issues that come with that, the sexual temptation and lust. These are all temptations that we can fall into during a pandemic because our routines have been disrupted and most of us have maybe less accountability than we normally have. We may not be gathering at church. We may not gathering in our men's groups. And so, Lord, don't let me enter into temptation. That's my prayer.

I think another temptation though that we can pray against is the temptation to feel like we have to take care of number one. And so, what is the... "I've got to make sure I have enough food. I've got to make sure I have enough toilet paper. I've got to make sure I have enough money." And so, generosity goes out the window, trust in God kind of goes out the window, and we hoard things. We focus inward, instead of outward, and it's very tempting during a time like this just to hunker down and take care of yourself and your family. And you should take care of yourself and your family. Of course we should. But we don't want to ignore the needs of our neighbor. We don't want to lose our commitment to neighbor love, as the Bible talks about. We don't want to enter into the temptation of feeling like we have to take care of ourselves, because what that really shows is some bad theology, about whether or not we trust God to take care of us.

So, those are two temptations I think that we can pray against. Maybe you have other temptations that you need to pray against, and you can talk about that in your discussion times. So, in that first circle, the first prayer that you can write is, "Lord, do not let me enter into temptation." And prayer's a great way to remind ourselves and to bring the power of God to bear in our lives. So, think about Jesus in the garden. He is, after he prays, after he tells the disciples to pray this, then he is in anguish, the Bible says. His tears became almost like drops of blood. He was so in anguish. And fighting against despair really. So, he prays to God, and he says to God, "Lord, not my will but your will be done."

And so, I think that's the second prayer that we can pray as men during a pandemic. "Lord, not my will, but your will be done." A lot of times, we have our own expectations. We have our own desires for how we want things to go. We have a plan.

I remember back in February, before the pandemic really hit, before we knew that there were going to be problems, I was looking at 2020 and I had just had this picture of what it was going to be like. I had a picture of what it was going to be like financially. I had a picture of what it was going to be like professionally at work, with Man in the Mirror. We had some events planned. I was really looking forward to having, I was looking forward to doing some leadership training, and I was looking forward to speaking and maybe getting a chance to speak in a few men's events and local churches and travel around a little bit, travel around, visit our area directors around the country, and see what those guys are doing. And I had visions about what my life was going to be like in my family, going and visiting my wife's family in Connecticut and my family in Michigan, and all of that, that those are the things that I wanted to do, and by the end of March, none of that was going to happen, for quite a while.

And that's hard. Even now, just talking about it, it's still very difficult for me to think about all the expectations I had this year, of what my life was going to look like. But I'm not going to get to do those things. And that's nothing compared to Jesus going to the cross. But it's something. It's something to have expectations and plans and desires, and just have them taken away from you. So, that's when it's important that we pray, "Lord, not just lead me, don't let me enter into temptation, but Lord, not my will, but your will be done. Lord, not my will, but your will be done." And if you look at the power of prayer, you see that Jesus's prayer protects him from the despair. His saying, "Lord, not my will, but your will be done," and the angel comes and strengthens him, and he rises up from those moments. And he goes and he takes care of the disciples again. So, prayer strengthens him.

And that kind of brings us to what I would say is our Big Idea for this passage is **that prayer is like a fireproof suit against the flames of temptation and despair**. In a time of pandemic and a time of isolation and of plans being changed, then prayer is like a fireproof suit against the flames of temptation and despair. Two big issues when we're in this time of a pandemic, giving into temptation and giving in to despair. So, prayer helps to protect us from that. And when you're thinking about despair, when you're thinking about, "Lord, not my will, but your will be done," what you're really talking about is letting go of your plans, letting go of your expectations, and really putting your faith in God's will.

I've been reading this book by Richard Foster called Prayer. It's a classic book on prayer. In one chapter, in chapter five, he talks about, what he calls the prayer of relinquishment. And the prayer of relinquishment is what Jesus is praying here. He's relinquishing his will. He's giving up his own desire, his own best thinking for how things should go, as humanly speaking. And he's saying, "Not my will, Father, but your will be done." So, that's a prayer of relinquishment, and Foster actually gives you some steps to go through as you're thinking about really relinquishing your will to God. And I love the last step that he says. He says, "Learn the prayer of resurrection."

"Lord," you may pray, "bring back to life what will please you and advance your kingdom. Let it come in whatever form you desire. Let it be in your time, in your way. Thank you, Lord, for resurrection." Some things will remain dead, and it is better for you that they do, Foster says. Others will burst forth into new life in such a way that you will hardly recognize them. In either case, rest in the confidence that God is better than you are at resurrection. As we think about the plans that we don't get to follow through on, the activities that we wanted to do, the life that we wanted to live this year, though some of those things are going to die, but there is also a sense that as we come through this pandemic, there's going to be a resurrection. There's going to be a new way of living that could come out of this that could be better for you.

I know, I have many friends that have told me that the restriction of working at home has actually resulted in them having more time to spend in the mornings, in their quiet time and their devotional time. In my... And that's been true for me too. I've had more time to spend in God's word. I've had more time to communicate, in a weird way, with my workmates. Because we are so intentional about it now because it's all on video conference and phone calls, and it's so much more intentional. I'm communicating more with our guys around the country now at Man in the Mirror. I don't... I'm praying that that doesn't go away, that God's sort of resurrecting some of these relationships and he's bringing new life into the way that I live, into the way that I work, and I don't want those things to change. I want those new ways to become the new routines. And I think that's what happens when you trust in God's will, when you say, "Lord, not my will, but your will be done." And his will will be better than my will. I'm so confident of that.

And so, prayer, again, the Big Idea, right, is that prayer then becomes a fireproof suit against the flames of temptation and despair. I cannot live in despair when I trust in God's will being better than my will, when I trust in his power of resurrection of a new life coming from this difficulty than I trust in my own

power to bring that about. And so, Lord, don't let me enter into temptation and Lord, not my will, but your will be done.

And then the third prayer then is this, and I think this is sort of foundational to how you do those first two and that's this. "Lord, help me trust in your goodness. Lord, help me trust in your goodness." If you turn to Psalm chapter 34, it's a beautiful chapter of David writing of the love that he feels from God, the goodness of God. So, let me just read. I'm going to read verses 4 through 8, and then I'm going to read verse 18. "I sought the Lord and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all of his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. And then, verse 18. The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit."

Man, this could be like the pandemic chapter right now. This goodness of God being illustrated and David talking about who God is and what he does to him in a time of difficulty. And so, what does this passage teach us about the goodness of God? Well, it says that God hears us, right? I sought the Lord and he answered me. He answers prayers. God removes shame, right? He said, "Those who look on him are radiant and their faces shall never be ashamed." God saves the poor. He protects the weak. He says the poor man cried and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fears and then delivers them. He protects the weak. He keeps you safe. And then "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge." He is a protective God. He takes care of us in his goodness. And then, God is close to the broken-hearted and save the crushed in spirit. That's what verse 18 says.

So, Lord, help me trust in your goodness. Help me to meditate on these attributes that you have, like these ones that are in Psalms. And guys, I would just really encourage you to take some time in your devotional time or in your reading time, and read through the Psalms. The Psalms are just full of poetry, that's written by a man in despair, who then experiences the goodness of God, of a man who has sinned and experiences the lamentation that's necessary for him to come to a place of repentance, and recommitment of his life to God so that he can once again experience God's goodness.

You can't be too far from him to come back. That's the message of the Psalms. And so, I want to encourage you with that today. So, our three prayers then in a pandemic, one, "Lord, don't let me enter into temptation." Two, "Lord, not my will, but your will be done." And three, "Lord, help me to trust in your goodness." I hope that those are prayers that bring you peace and comfort. I hope that those prayers are a fireproof suit against the flames of temptation and despair that you might be facing right now. And that you will know in your heart of hearts that God is good and that he loves you and that he cares for you, and that nothing is going to happen to you in the days, weeks, and months ahead, whether it's physically, or relationally or economically, nothing is going to happen that is not his will. His will is better than our will. And remember, he is better at resurrection than we are.

So, my prayer is that out of this time, God will bring a new life into your life, a new understanding of his grace and his goodness, and a new longing for fellowship with your brothers so that you can do this together. You can lock arms and do this together. So, let me pray for us now, and then there's questions that you have on the handout that you can use to have a discussion in a small group. If you've not got a group of guys to discuss this with, man, I really just encourage you to email the link to this video out to a few friends. Ask them to watch it. And then you can get the handout on the website and you can go through these questions together. All right? Well, let me pray for us now.

Father, thank you so much for the ability to continue to look at your word together as men of God. All around the country, all around the world, Lord, men are gathering to look at your word, to study what it means to be a man of God, and to figure out how to live our lives in a way that brings you glory and brings you honor. Lord, would you draw us to yourself? Lord, would you help me, Lord. Lord, don't let

me enter into temptation. Deliver me, Father, from the sins that may be pernicious in my life. Deliver me from fear and from a selfishness, Lord, that prevents me from caring for others the way that I should, especially in a time where your church has an opportunity to rise up and be such a light in such a dark time.

Lord, I pray that your will would be done. Not my will, Lord, but your will. Lord, help me with the strength that I need to walk through the difficulty, but Lord, the trust that I can have that you have a better plan than the one that I had. And then finally, Lord, will you help me to trust in your goodness? Will you remind me every day that you save the weak, that you bless the poor, that you take shame away, Lord? Would you draw me closer? Would you draw each man watching this now, Lord, closer to you, that we would know your goodness in a new way, Lord? And Father, would you draw us to you? Would you help us to pray, often, regularly? Lord, would you help us to listen to your voice, so that we can follow the path that you've set for us, Lord, so that we can understand your will, Lord, and that so we can not enter into temptation? In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Thanks, guys.