



Two Women Seek a Stable Faith in a World of Trauma

The Wired Word for the Week of June 21, 2026

In the News

Last month, Tara W. Bulger's 21-year-old daughter texted her a troubling question. She had been following news about the kidnapping and murder of a 7-year-old girl, and wanted to know why God would allow such evil like that to happen.

"If God is all-powerful, why wouldn't he prevent things like this from happening?" she asked.

Bulger confessed that she wrestled with that question as well, just as others have done for millennia. Why wouldn't a loving God remove every possible source of pain and suffering from the cosmos?

"God does not want evil to happen," Bulger told her daughter, adding that for some reason, "God allows it." She thinks it has something to do with free will, she said. Would we really be able to understand what love is, if we were not free to choose whether or not to love?

Her faith taught her that "God will not allow evil to have the last word, but [has] assured the ultimate victory of the good," she said, but that acknowledged that doesn't minimize the horror of atrocities like the one her daughter bemoaned.

Bulger took some comfort in the assurance that "Jesus, who suffered himself, is always very near to those who suffer. ... The Bible tells us over and over again that Jesus is near the needy and the suffering."

When her daughter said she was "mad at God for allowing stuff like this to happen," Bulger suggested that she "take that anger to God in prayer," and not let her anger separate her from God.

Whatever she needed to say to God, Bulger said, "God can handle it."

"I am grateful [to C.S.] Lewis for having the courage to yell, to doubt, to kick at God with angry violence. This is a part of healthy grief not often encouraged," wrote author Madeleine L'Engle. Bulger noted that the psalmists expressed every emotion imaginable in their conversations with God, which weren't all sweetness and light.

"In these difficult prayers," Bulger concluded, "God can meet us and guide us back to the peace that comes from the knowledge that God abhors suffering and evil, too, and that God is with us in our grief and anger."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Prayer and the Problem of Evil. *The Presbyterian Outlook*](#)

[We Gather to Pray: Prayers for Times of Trouble or Sadness. *Catechist*](#)

[10 Prayers for Comfort: Finding Solace in Times of Need. *Pray*](#)

[7 Easy Prayers for When You're Feeling Overwhelmed. *Guideposts*](#)

[How to Pray When Trouble Comes. *Desiring God*](#)

Applying the News Story

According to the Rev. Joseph Yoo, "most of us think prayer is how we change our situation, but Jesus shows us prayer is how God changes us. We

tend to treat prayer like a vending machine: insert good behavior, select blessing, wait for results. But ... prayer isn't a transaction. It's not, 'God, fix it.' It's 'God, sit with me in this.' It's not about results, it's about relationships. And I get it. We still want the fix. We still want the healing, the clarity, the breakthrough. ... You don't pray to change God's mind. You pray so that God can change yours."

Use the news to consider how to talk with God in the context of unfathomable evil and seemingly unending trauma.

The Big Questions

1. To whose prayers does God listen? What makes a prayer acceptable to God?
2. What is the role of prayer when tragedy defies explanation?
3. Why do we pray? What is the purpose of prayer, both in times of crisis or trauma and in the more mundane or ordinary times of life?
4. What keeps prayer meaningful instead of rote, mindless recitation? What prayer practices does your church teach and/or offer? Which ones do you find fruitful?
5. How might the way we pray reflect the health of our relationship with God? How could healthy, honest communication with God deepen our friendship with God?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Psalm 88:9, 13-14

[My] eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call on you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you. ... But I, O LORD, cry out to you; in the

morning my prayer comes before you. O LORD, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your face from me? (For context, read [Psalm 88:1-18](#).)

As the world faced the Coronavirus pandemic, the website of the Nordic, Baltic & Ukraine Area of the United Methodist Church wrote in its blog, ["Prayers in Times of Distress"](#): "The Psalms are faith and life without filter. There are other Psalms, where King David or others are crying out to God in pain and despair, pleading that God would set them free. Why is this happening to me, and by the way, why are the wicked doing so well? Why don't you hear my cry God, why don't you see my deep need? At times, it even goes quite a bit further, punish my enemies, and punish the evil doers. -- It sounds very human doesn't it?"

In this text, perhaps suffering from insomnia or horrible nightmares, denied even the blessing of restorative sleep (vv. 1-2, 13), the psalmist can't bring himself to affirm God's goodness. All he can do is rage and beg God to hear his desperate cry. He feels helpless, friendless, frightened, forsaken, forgotten, cast away and completely alone, like "a dead man walking," drowning in waves of God's incomprehensible wrath. He might be able to accept suffering if the terrors and assaults didn't seem to come directly from God (vv. 3-9, 14-18).

He asks, pitifully, how the dead can praise God or declare God's steadfast love from the grave (vv. 10-12).

Questions: Why keep talking to God when it seems as though your desperate cries are falling on deaf ears? When you can't get an explanation for your questions, "Why? And how long, O Lord?"

Genesis 18:12-14

So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I be fruitful?" The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did

Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." (For context, read [Genesis 18:1-15](#).)

God called Abram (later renamed Abraham) and Sarai (later renamed Sarah), into covenantal relationship when they were already up in years (he was 75 and she was 65). When Abram told God about his disappointment that he had no offspring, God promised him descendants as innumerable as the stars in heaven ([Genesis 15:1-6](#)).

After waiting 12 years for a baby, they might be forgiven for thinking that maybe God needed a little help in the fertility department. So Sarai turned her maidservant Hagar over to Abram, to bear a child on her behalf. Hagar's son Ishmael wasn't the child God had promised, however. Abram's heir was to come from Sarai as well as from Abram ([Genesis 17:15-22](#)). They would wait another 12 years for the birth of Isaac, who was born when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 ([Genesis 21:1-7](#))!

We can't always comprehend God's timing. We may pray, "God, give me patience, and give it to me NOW!" But Sarah's question, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I be fruitful?" is important here. Just as it takes time for fruit to develop, God wants to grow character traits in us that would never mature if we got everything we wanted the instant we pray. In God's economy, delay is not denial. We should never put a period where God has put a comma. "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up," Paul wrote ([Galatians 6:9](#)).

Questions: What does the text suggest God wanted Abraham and Sarah to learn as they waited for an answer to their heart's desire? What have you learned when you have had to wait in God's waiting room?

Mark 14:34-36, 39

And he said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me, yet not what I want but what you want." ... And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. (For context, read [Mark 14:32-42](#).)

In the hours before Jesus' arrest, Jesus went with his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he asked his closest associates, Peter, James and John, to stay awake and watch with him while he prayed. But they fell asleep when he needed them most. Facing the greatest wickedness the world has ever known, without the support even of his closest friends, Jesus turns his grief over to God. Tara Bulger writes, "He models for us the faithful response of prayer when the suffering and evil of the world grieve us."

TWW Team Member Mark Rouleau noted: "Prayer is relational. It is meant to bring our desires into conformation with the will of God. The act of praying, if done earnestly, brings us into proper alignment with God."

Catholic philosopher and bioethicist Dr. Michael Wee writes in "[Prayers and War and Who God Listens To](#)": "Prayer is not ... mere petition to God but a dialogue with God, and indeed an openness and docility to the Holy Spirit, who seeks to change and purify us continually through prayer. ... that is the aim of prayer -- a heart purified from sinful attachments and attitudes. ... A clean heart moves us away from asking for the things we want (which may be wrong), to asking for the things that please God."

While we may pray for changed circumstances, we would do well to also pray for God to transform us, to remake us in God's image, to align our wills with God's will. That is the prayer, according to Father Tim Kavanaugh of the Jan Karon novels, that God always answers.

Questions: How does Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane connect with the way he taught his disciples to pray "May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," in what is commonly known as "The Lord's Prayer" ([Matthew 6:10](#))?

Many of us know that prayer by heart, yet how often do we ask that "MY will be done"? How can we leave space in prayer for God's will to be done, to be sincerely open to whatever happens as the best outcome -- even or especially when we want a different outcome? What is required of us to pray for God's will to be done, and to mean what we say in that request? How can we pray the prayer that God will always answer?

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (For context, read [Philippians 4:4-14](#).)

Often described as the Epistle of Joy, Paul's letter to the Philippians was written from prison, probably in Rome. Yet in spite of his troubles, Paul expresses calm, joy and contentment, strengthened by the knowledge that Jesus is with him, whatever his situation (vv. 12-13). That assurance meant he could face even death itself with an inexplicable peace.

Elsewhere, Paul wrote that his request to be relieved of a thorn in the flesh was not granted, but instead God was giving his all-sufficient grace so that the power of Christ would come alive in him ([2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)). He interpreted that to mean that God doesn't always give us what we ask for in prayer, but he will always give us what we need, if we are willing to receive it.

Questions: Why does Paul think it is important to remind the Philippians that the Lord is near? How does awareness of the Lord's nearness contribute to a disciple's ability to rejoice? To be gentle with others? To let go of anxiety?

For Further Discussion

1. Comment on this, from TWW Team Member Frank Ramirez: "Even though Jesus said, 'Ask, and you shall receive,' I'm not sure prayer is transactional. Do such and such and get the desired result. It's relational. Just as we need to take time with friends to strengthen and maintain friendships, constant communication with God can keep us in touch during tough times. Maybe that's why Job was able to say both 'The Lord gives and the Lord takes away,' etc., as well as 'I can't get a fair hearing before the Throne.'"

2. At the height of the Vietnam War, one man stood alone holding a candle in front of the White House every night. He stayed until the candle burned down. One night a reporter approached him and asked, "What is it you are trying to accomplish here? Do you think that you and your candle are going to stop this war or change this administration?"

"Oh," the man replied, "I don't come here each night to change them. I come here each night so that they don't change me."

How might prayer during stressful times be like standing in the midst of trauma holding a candle in the night, alone, if need be? How can prayer be a tool to strengthen our ability to persevere in faith?

3. Check out the prayers in the following articles. What emotions do they express? Would you ever speak with God this way? Why or why not? How do you think God would react to prayers such as these?

[Prayers for a Violent World. W. David O. Taylor](#)

[War Prayers. Social Justice Resource Center](#)

[5 Prayers to Use in Times of Turmoil. Concordia Publishing House](#)

4. Discuss this, from TWW team member Mark Rouleau: "On the issue of pain/suffering/evil in the world, it is important to note all the ways that the incarnate Creator of the universe went through betrayal, pain and suffering. He prayed, if there be any other way, let this cup pass from my lips, nevertheless let Thy will be done.

"There was NO OTHER WAY (God is not a cosmic child abuser). (1) No one can be righteous on their own; and (2) pain and suffering was/is necessary for salvation. One of our shared confessions of faith states: 'I believe ... in Jesus Christ ... who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, descended into hell ...'

"We have a God who, although being completely blameless ([1 Peter 1:19](#)), suffered all these things. There was no escape for him.

"We are told to take up our cross ([Matthew 16:24](#)).

"Perhaps suffering is just part of being in communion with him."

Responding to the News

1. Create a prayer as a group, each person adding a phrase or sentence that might be voiced by an individual or community or nation experiencing trauma or tragedy. Then pray your prayer together. Finish with a time of silence, listening to what the Spirit might say to you.

2. Sing together or listen to [In His Time \(Video 4:21\)](#) or listen to a different song on the same theme, [In His Time \(English-Hebrew Worship Song\) \(Video 9:28\)](#). As an alternative, listen to Phil Keaggy's song,

[Disappointment, His Appointment \(Video 2:40\)](#), reflecting on how God is working even when that may not be obvious to us.

Prayer

Divine Teacher, open our eyes of faith to trust that you are at work for your glory and our good, even when we can't see material evidence. Give us patience to wait for the ripening of the fruit of the Spirit you are developing in us, through ordinary days and times of trauma. Amen.

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