

When You Haven't Got a Prayer, Series
Borrow a Prayer for Frustration from Jeremiah
Jeremiah 20:7-9 The Message Bible
July 17, 2011

Frustration with God is Inevitable

Have you ever been genuinely frustrated with God? We can often think our struggle is to have faith or to keep from losing faith in God? But sometimes our spiritual battle is not that we don't believe in God; our struggle is we don't agree with God. It happens when the news of this week broke about the abduction and murder of an 8-10 year old boy in New York. He was walking home from day-camp. He asked the wrong man for directions. He was murdered and his body dismembered. Yet we think about people this past weekend, drinking and drugging, getting behind the wheel of a car yet making it home safe; but that little boy just five blocks from his home gets murdered.

God can be frustrating. We take a step to be obedient; but discover what God has led us into is more than we bargained for or expected. Frustration with God is inevitable because scripture like Romans 1:17 teaches us that the "just or the righteous live by faith.." Which means on our own, we don't have the capabilities to always have the concrete facts for the steps we need to take. The Bible also states in places like Isaiah 55:7-8, that "God's ways are not our ways." There is mystery involved as we attempt to correctly interpret God's will.

So there are bound to be moments and even seasons in this life when we will experience frustration and apprehension whether God will come through as we expect. After our church festival is all said and done next Sunday, we may have some frustration. We'll have activities for kids, scrap booking workshop, hunting workshop. Food and a gospel concert. Our hope is the hospitality

we offer we'll touch people to see God's presence reaching out to them through what we do. But we don't know how this will work out.

So today for those times when we could really be frustrated with God because something hasn't work out like we thought it should and especially we thought God had our backs yet it seems he let us down, let's borrow a prayer from the prophet Jeremiah from the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 20:7-13 Message Bible

The Principle of Permission vs.7-8

Jeremiah didn't mince words with the Lord. He accuses God of having pushed or enticed him. He told God that God had overpowered him and prevailed. He describes himself as a joke or laughingstock. He even said the words of the Lord have become a contempt or reproach to him.

Some live by the principle that you should never question God. I have to tell you if that were true biblically, Jeremiah did not get that memo. He was direct and descriptive with God. In Jeremiah's mind God had some "explaining to do."

But what this portion of his prayer is doing is demonstrating the principle of permission. Not only can we tell God our hurts but we can tell God how we genuinely see God not doing his part, not coming through as promised.

Today, the very thing you may need to hear from this scripture is the permission to give voice and expression to your frustration with God.

Illustration: There was a man in a previous church who shared with me how he was frustrated and bitter toward God over the

death of his twins. His wife was pregnant and delivered both babies stillborn. For the longest time he wouldn't go to church, wouldn't pray, wouldn't read his bible. He said he lost his faith and was angry with God. His anguish raised his blood pressure which caused him to see his doctor. He informed his doctor about his anger and frustration and he had lost faith. His doctor told him, "Carl you can't be angry with something that doesn't exist." Carl said he had to own that the truth was he believed in God; he was just angry and frustrated with God.

I said it sounds like to me Carl at that time in your life, that you had the plan that when you died and went to heaven, you we're going to stomp through the gates of heaven, walk past God with your nose in the air and go pick up your twin daughters that God had waiting for you in eternity. Was that sort your plan? He smiled and said yeah that was sort of the plan.

Carl finally got to the point where he could give voice to his frustration and anger. Permission to be frustrated and angry with God made it possible for Carl to give God thanks for the day when he would be reunited with his daughters.

The Principle of Praise vs.9-10

Permission to voice frustration leads to freedom to praise God. It leads to freedom to praise God because we are not limited to just focusing on our frustrations but also how God might help.

Jeremiah not only voiced his frustration; but even in the midst of his anguish he praised God. Did you catch the words in verse v.9 Jeremiah said, **"If I say I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name, then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot."**

Here is the frustration - Jeremiah cannot give up on God or God's word. Jeremiah said the reality of God was like a burning fire in his bones. And he cannot deny it or hold it in even though angry with God.

The very thing that he sees on one hand making his life miserable, causing him to be misjudged is the very thing he cannot deny. In this portion of his prayer, these are actually words of praise. Jeremiah cannot deny God's word that first came to him and still comes to him. You cannot praise the one you cannot trust to help. But we praise the one who is big enough to hear our pain.

One thing to look for in the midst of our frustrations is the initial call and original presence of God. Praise and honor for God could be right on the heels of the disappointment. There is a story about Jesus and his disciples that appears in John's gospel chapter 21. It takes place after Jesus had been crucified. Peter informed the disciples he was going back to fishing, and the others decided to follow. The decision meant they were giving up on their mission of spreading Jesus' message and going back to their old jobs and lives before Jesus came along. One early morning when they were back to fishing, Jesus showed up along shore of the lake. He called out to them just as he had done when he first called them into ministry to follow as his disciples. The disciples ultimately renewed their commitment to him.

If the trail has gone a bit cold in seeing God's hope in the midst of mounting frustration then go back to your original call, presence, power and experience of God. Go back to the original moment to help you decide whether you really can praise God and have the fire of God deep within or was it just passing emotion or sentimentalism or did God really show up?

The Principle of Petition vs. 11-12

Because Jeremiah could praise God, he could trust God enough to

petition God for help. He could ask God for what he needed. Verse 12 tells us he prayed that his enemies be defeated. **He prayed for revenge, but for God to do the avenging; not Jeremiah.** To petition God for help is to decide to take the step of faith that:
We need his help.
We see our limitations.
We trust God is the ultimate difference maker.

The Principle of Perseverance vs. 13-18

It would be great to say that his prayer ended with the petition and then some type of hint that Jeremiah was rescued. But his prayer in this chapter doesn't end like that at all. Jeremiah goes on to express regret for the day he was even born but he goes on praying. The Bible is brutally honest about how God works and doesn't work. Life is never short on dishing out frustrations. Jeremiah teaches us the principle of perseverance in prayers. It's like the story one of our members shared about a pastor telling about getting back into riding a bicycle. He writes;

Pastor Mike's

I still remember the first time I rode my current bicycle six years ago. It had been over 20 years since I had ridden. I rode about a mile and a half away from the house and wondered who I could call to come get me. I didn't call anyone; I just kept on riding. Now I ride 50 to 75 miles each week and I never worry about getting back. Persistent riding has brought other pluses. I've lost some weight, my blood pressure is lower, my heart rate is better than a lot of teenagers', and I feel better. I haven't won any races; can't keep up with the real bikers who wear those funny pants; but bicycling has brought change in me.

God will use the perseverance of prayer to transform our frustration. (source, Pastor Michael Duncan, Eminence, Ky. 7/3/2011)

Author Richard Donovan who once wrote:

...God doesn't write blank checks. Instead, unceasing prayer grinds away at the sharp edges of our lives until our will is conformed to God's redemptive purposes, making it right for God to answer our prayers. (source, Michael Duncan)

Jeremiah kept praying through the frustration. You can choose do the same.

Jeremiah exercised permission to unload his real heart to God - we have the permission to tell God how disappointed we are.

You have the choice to go back to your genuine experiences of God and praise him.

If you praise him you'll trust him enough to petition not just so God will conform to your expectations but so that Romans 8:29 happens us "For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Any less goal will be empty and the ultimate frustration.