

1. If The Answer Is No

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Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. -- 2 Corinthians 12:8-10

In 1948, on the last Sunday Francis Schaeffer preached as the pastor of the old Bible Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Edith Schaeffer prayed and wept over his decision to leave the pastorate and become a mission administrator overseas. She fervently prayed for the Lord to intervene and keep them in America, because she believed Fran's gifts were for serving a church and preaching the Bible. As she reasoned with God, she pointed out that Fran loved people and really helped them, so why would He want Fran to be an administrator?

The Lord did not intervene and keep them in their church or find them a new church in America. Literally, God's answer to her prayer was a definite "No." They first went to Holland and then to Switzerland with the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. And by starting Children for Christ classes in churches all across war-torn Europe, they achieved one of their major goals. But if God had answered her prayer literally, the work of L'Abri would not have begun in 1955, and Dr. Schaeffer would not have developed his influential ideas through his study and discussions with people from all over the world.

God looked at the intention of Edith's heart and did not answer her prayer to the letter, but according to her spirit. In her pleading, Edith revealed her strong desire for God to show her husband how and where to serve Him in the best possible ways. The spirit of her prayer indicated that she did not want Fran's good influence diminished, but increased. Were her motives pure? Were they unmingled with respect to her also desiring not to be uprooted from home, friends, and family? Perhaps not. But primarily, she wanted Fran empowered to serve Jesus Christ and meet people's needs in God's place for them, and she firmly believed America was God's place. She wanted God to put her husband where people would benefit from his compassionate care and solid Biblical teaching, and she knew how badly this was needed right where they were. As for herself, she did pray that God would help her be submissive to the will of God and to her husband. Although God did not give her exactly what she prayed for by keeping them in America, He did fulfill the intention of her heart or the spirit of her prayer by empowering Fran to help people in Europe, and later by enabling him to help Americans in Europe and America. If God had granted her request to the letter, they would not have received something far greater or blessed greater numbers.

God accomplished in the Schaeffers' lives exactly what He has promised every Christian, that He is able and willing to do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20). Knowing this, Paul could even boast in his weaknesses. Can we believe this when we pray? Can we believe that God will grant us the good intentions of our hearts and answer our benevolent requests?

By His grace, God gave the Schaeffers power to accomplish much more for Him in a nontraditional way than if they had stayed in their church in St. Louis. Even before they founded L'Abri, God used Fran's firm but tender ways as a pastor to meet the needs of hurting and searching young people from all over the world.

Sometimes God says "No" because our hearts are not right with Him. We are asking selfishly, or our requests are wrong. We need to take time for self-examination in the light of His Word. But when we believe that our hearts or intentions are right and according to His will, we must believe that when God says "No" to a specific request, He is only saying "No" to our literal request and not to the right spirit of our prayers. Along with us, God wants to promote the best interests of all concerned. In praying for guidance, God eventually taught Edith, "We feel that when one is praying for this sort of guidance, then 'no' must be taken as from the Lord just as rapidly as 'yes' and we must trust Him and thank Him for His wisdom in such leading."

What if the Schaeffers had stayed in St. Louis and not gone to Europe? They could have promoted the well being of others, led others to the Lord, and served God in either place. Suppose they had stayed, what would God have done then? God would have worked with them, and accomplished His will in Europe through other people. Knowing God will work with us wherever we go in His Name and Spirit should encourage us, but does not remove our responsibility to pray for the knowledge of His will and following Him wherever He leads. We should not take His presence for granted and pray less than we should for His clear direction. Where we do and do not witness will make a difference. If we must choose one place over another, then, as we pray for our work, we must also pray for God to send others to give a clear

testimony for Him in the place we did not choose.

What if we are asking God to send us to a specific place for a specific work, but afflictions strike and we cannot go? Did you ever stop to think what might have happened if God had literally removed all of the Apostle Paul's afflictions in answer to his prayers? What if God had removed Paul's thorn in the flesh? What if God had allowed Paul to go wherever he wanted? What if God had given Paul a greater gift of preaching to attract greater crowds wherever he traveled and had allowed people to always press around him for insights? What if God had kept Paul out of prison on various occasions? Would Paul have had the time or seen the need to dictate and write his letters? What would the Bible be like without Paul's letters? In his afflictions, the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to do a greater work than he had done when free and well. By His grace and in spite of Paul's afflictions, God increased His influence. We learn the same principle from the prayers, brief ministry, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ.

When the Lord gives us sufficient grace, as He did Paul, He promises to empower us to serve Him in His way. God's way is the only way for us to seek in prayer, and we must seek it submissively. When we do not receive from God exactly what we want, we must not assume a lot of bad things but remind ourselves that God is working out better things for us as well as others. Paul knew this, so he wrote to the Romans: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). God will do this in the life of every Christian. He will do this in your life and mine, as we seek to fulfill God's intentions for us. Let us pray in faith for God's perfect leading and provision. Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, I praise you today for who you are as the Sovereign Lord of the universe. I thank you for being all wise and powerful, and for always using your power in the most loving and compassionate ways. Thank you for saying "No" to me when I have prayed for the wrong things. I trust in you; help me to be a better servant and witness for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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