

When the Sun Goes Down

I have seen the sun stand still. I stand by it. I've seen God answer plenty of prayers with a miracle. I've seen people physically healed in a way that left doctors speechless. I've seen couples who had been labeled infertile give birth to healthy boys and girls. I've seen people lose their job, pray, and quickly land a new job that paid twice as much and required a fraction of the travel as the last job.

Sometimes—a lot of times—it goes that way. Faith works. Prayers produce. Praise God. There's nothing better.

But sometimes—a lot of times, honestly—it goes the other way. Sometimes the sun doesn't stand still. Sometimes the sun goes down.

Sometimes you pray your best, most honest, heartfelt prayers—and there is no answer. Or the answer is no. Sometimes, even though your motives are pure, your desire is good, and your need is urgent, the breakthrough doesn't come. The turnaround moment doesn't occur. The cancer spreads. The finances get tighter. The marriage feels more lonely. The kids grow more distant.

Sometimes the sun keeps sinking down, down, down ... and no amount of hoping, fasting, or right living can stop it.

Remember, before Joshua ever saw the sun stand still, he had to watch in agony as the sun set slowly on an entire generation. Yes, God gave him the privilege to lead the charge into the Promised Land. But not before he was forced to endure forty years of wilderness wandering because of someone else's hesitancy. It wasn't his fault or his lack of faith. He believed. He wanted to obey. Joshua even did everything he could to persuade Moses to see the situation through eyes of faith. But that generation couldn't see through the doubts and dangers. So Joshua didn't get to inherit the promise for a long, long time. Joshua spent a large part of his life living in the shadow of a setback. And I imagine there were days when he wondered whether the sun would ever shine again.

Maybe you're living in a similar shadow right now. You thought you'd be a lot closer to completing your life goals by now. And you're pretty sure that you've done your part to make it happen. But

someone else let you down. Something snuck up from behind and knocked you out cold. A crisis came along and crippled your ambition to do great things for God ... or even expect anything good from Him at all.

These seasons of setback can be fatal to your faith. It's easy to lose your way when the sun goes down. You can easily slip into a deep spiritual sleep in an attempt to escape the pain.

Or you can choose to convert your times of crisis into the greatest opportunities of your life. It all depends on how you see your crisis—and whether you seize the chance that lies before you.

I can't in good conscience promise that God will make the sun stand still every time you walk in audacious faith. Your faith does not control God—in fact, human faith on any scale can never put divine providence in your back pocket. That means that, sometimes, people you love will get sick and they won't recover. You won't achieve everything you attempt. You'll have to absorb and manage some pain you didn't create or invite or deserve. You'll have days filled with frustration and misery.

Audacious faith does not guarantee a crisis-free life. But audacious faith does enable you to seize the opportunity to see God's glory in the midst of every crisis in your life.

Even when—and maybe especially when—the sun goes down.—Pastor Steven Furtick

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Faith isn't a matter of trusting when things go right; it's when it looks like things have gone wrong that faith comes into play. And our reaction should be one of trust when things go differently than we had hoped or asked. Our trust in the Lord that He knows better than we do will show people that we serve a magnificent God—one who is worthy of our trust and our service. Thank God He knows better than we do, and thank God He does what He knows is best!

Life is not a straight line leading from one blessing to the next and then finally to heaven. Life is a winding and troubled road. Switchback after switchback. And the point of biblical stories like Joseph and Job and Esther and Ruth is to help us feel in our bones (not just know in our heads) that **God is for us in all these strange turns**. God is not just showing up after the trouble and cleaning it up. *He is plotting the course and managing the troubles with far-reaching purposes for our good and for the glory of Jesus Christ.* — John Piper²

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Very few people ask for trouble. We certainly don't ask God to give us problems. But maybe we should.

I received an interesting note from Thomas Wylie of Westminster, Maryland, who visited the Biosphere Two, a man-made living habitat in Arizona. During the tour the guide explained that one oversight of the designers was their failure to create wind within the structure. No wind to blow the trees back and forth created a problem: The trees would grow to a certain height and then topple over from their own weight. Lack of wind resulted in the trees not having a deeply extended root system.

Mr. Wylie explained that this thought made him realize that without the winds of adversity we cannot grow and become the people God designed us to be without toppling over. I agree. You cannot raise champions on a feather bed. The percentage of people who overcome adversity to go to great heights is legendary.

From time to time when the weather doesn't suit us, all of us are inclined to say things like we wish we could make it rain or stop raining, the wind to blow more or less, that it would get cooler or warmer, etc. The biosphere clearly demonstrates to us that man is far more likely to "forget" some things or doesn't have the wisdom to know things, as they forgot to let the wind blow to give the trees those roots. It really causes us to be grateful that God is in control of the total picture, and while we might not understand His head, we can certainly trust His heart. — Zig Ziglar

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What we call adversity, God calls opportunity. What we call tribulation, God calls growth.—Author unknown

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You might be experiencing a little faith fatigue. You aren't alone. All of us go through prayer slumps! Sometimes it's the slow erosion of faith. But more often than not, the loss of a prayer life is traced to unanswered prayer. Death by disappointment. What do you do when God doesn't answer how you want or when you want? Let me tell you what you don't do: you don't stop praying! It's always too soon to quit. It's always too soon to give up.

One promise has sustained [a couple of my friends] through the toughest times and deepest disappointments: Luke 7:23: Blessed is he who is not offended at me.

Here's the context.

Jesus is doing miracles right and left. He is healing diseases, casting out demons, and restoring sight to the blind, but John the Baptist misses the miracle train. It seems like Jesus is rescuing everybody except His most faithful follower who is in prison. And John is His cousin, nonetheless. It seems like Jesus could have, and maybe should have, organized a rescue operation and busted him out before he was beheaded. Instead He sends a message via [John's] disciples. He tells them to tell John about all the miracles He is doing and then He asks them to relay this simple promise: Blessed is he who is not offended at me.

Have you ever felt like God was doing miracles for everyone and their brother, but you seem to be the odd man out? It seems like God is keeping His promises to everyone but you? I wonder if that's how John the Baptist felt. What do you do when you feel like God is answering everyone's prayers but yours?

In the words of my friends who have experienced their fair share of unanswered prayers: "We try to live our lives unoffended by God. Jesus promises that we will be blessed if we aren't offended." When God doesn't answer how or when you want, you have a choice to make. You can give up or hang on. You can let go or pray through. You can get frustrated with God or choose to live unoffended.

My friends have chosen to live unoffended: “Jesus promises blessing if we are not offended when He does things for others. And if He does it for them, He might do it for us. *I don't know why God does what He does. I do know that 100% of the prayers I don't pray won't get answered.*” I love that approach to prayer, that approach to life. 100% of the prayers you don't pray won't get answered.—Mark Batterson¹

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