

Spiritual Truth ONE

Remember your limited
ability to understand the
will and ways of God.
Take whatever God offers.

*Image: Jesus meets two disciples on the road to Emmaus,
Chartres Cathedral, France*



Where is God?! Why isn't God doing more to help us? Is God doing anything at all? If you're asking questions like these, it's a sign that you care deeply about what's happening in our world right now. You believe in God and believe that he could be of great help. Yet, you're confused or frustrated, or just scared. You're not perceiving God's presence or help as much as you need or expected it, and you want more.

I often feel the same way. And that's when I find myself leaning on the spiritual truths found in Scripture, which are as relevant today in these troubling times as they ever have been.

SPIRITUAL TRUTH 1:

Remember your limited ability
to understand the will
and ways of God.
Take whatever God offers.

(Isaiah 55:1-9; Luke 24:13-22)

If we examine our expectations for God carefully, most of us we will discover that we expect God to act in ways that fit with our ideas and desires. They may be prompted by something we read in the Bible or heard a preacher say, but upon close inspection, most of us are wishing and hoping and expecting God to do what we want him to do. And what happens when God doesn't come through for us as we hoped or expected? We are easily hurt, confused, distressed, or even become angry. So, the question becomes, is God to blame or is it our faulty expectations?

Biblical writers repeatedly tell us that we should not be so surprised when God does not meet our expectations. The reason is simple. You and I cannot know

or understand the mind of God, and God is often at work in ways that are unseen and can only be discerned in retrospect.

What we need to understand

Through the prophet Isaiah, Yahweh (the Lord God) explains to Israel that God's ways are not our ways. He writes:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:8-9, NIV

Isaiah is saying that we must give up trying to understand the perplexing or surprising things God does (or doesn't do). Instead, we should focus on what we can understand and benefit from. In this particular context, Isaiah is talking about God's desire to meet their core spiritual needs. Though Israel might not be able to grasp God's reasoning for how he was working in the world, they could benefit from God's love, mercy and grace, if they reached out for what God was offering. They could repent of their sins and let God satisfy their deepest spiritual needs and longings. He writes:

Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.
Give ear and come to me;
listen, that you may live.
Isaiah 55:1-3, NIV

In times of distress, we may be so pre-occupied with our fears and desperate longing for help that we miss out on what is available. As long as we cling to trying to get what we cannot have (be it answers to unanswerable questions, guarantees of safety, assurance of health, comfort from the wrong sources, or something else that is very important to us, but out of our reach), we will remain in turmoil and unsatisfied. If, instead, we leave aside what we cannot understand and focus on reaching out for what is within our grasp, we will experience greater inner peace. We will become better prepared to face our troubles and will start to see better how God is at work in us and through us for good.

Let Jesus open your eyes

In the New Testament, we find the story of Jesus meeting two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The last they knew, Jesus had been crucified, died, and was buried in a tomb. So many of their hopes for their lives and future had suddenly, in a matter of a few days, crashed and burned. (Sound familiar?) However, what they did not know and could not see is that God was still very much at work in the midst of the crisis. Jesus had actually already been resurrected. God had inaugurated an incredible plan to bring salvation and hope to the entire world through Jesus' death and resurrection. In fact, they were so swallowed up in their grief that they couldn't even recognize Jesus when he appeared to them on the road. Luke says, when Jesus asked them what they were discussing, "they stood still, looking sad" (Luke 24:17, NRSV).



In this time of crisis and uncertainty, beware of getting “stuck” on the road of life, stopped in your tracks with downcast faces, supposing all is lost. When life’s events just don’t make sense to you and you cannot imagine how God could be a part of what is happening, remember the limitations of your ability to grasp God’s ways. God may be up to something that you cannot even imagine, let alone comprehend.

I am not saying that God caused COVID-19 or that everything is going to turn out OK for everyone. It’s not. But this story reminds me of what Isaiah told us. God’s ways are not our ways. God often surprises us. Over and over again in the Bible, we read that God is at work in seemingly hopeless situations to bring good out of evil, loss, disaster, and suffering. The story of the sad disciples on the road to Emmaus who could not see the risen Christ standing in front of them reminds us that we all need Jesus to open our eyes. On our part, we need to look for Christ in the midst of the crisis, in places and ways that we wouldn’t expect him to be.

Spiritual application

By all means, pray for every need and concern on your heart, because we never know when God may choose to use our earnest prayers to bring about some healing, deliverance, provision, or some other badly needed help. But, if your prayers aren’t being answered in the ways you expected, don’t be discouraged. Don’t

stop reaching out to God. Ask Jesus Christ to open your eyes to what you cannot see on your own and ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your faith and use you for good in the midst of the present crisis. And, no matter what happens, don't forget to seek what you know is for sure being offered to you. Repent of your sins, let go of your attachments to what cannot satisfy or distracts you from God's will for your life. Seek God's grace, mercy, and spiritual food that money cannot buy. "Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live," says your loving, merciful God (Isaiah 55:3).