

The Lord's Prayer: Thy Will Be Done
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Mark 14:32-36

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴ And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." ³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."

Matthew 6:9-13 NLT

⁹ Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,

may your name be kept holy.

¹⁰ May your Kingdom come soon.

May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today the food we need,

¹² and forgive us our sins,

as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

¹³ And don't let us yield to temptation,

but rescue us from the evil one.

Each week we say here "thy will be done" but what exactly can we say about God's will? We have a general idea of what God's will is: that we have peace, that we live abundantly, that we treat one another as well as God would and does, and that all things work toward good and we be a part of it. Did I just about cover it? Are we good? Can I get in the minivan and head to Minneapolis for the mission trip now? God's will can be exactly that simple in the explaining and yet infinitely more complicated in the doing. Sometimes naming God's will in a particular situation is like grasping at air. We can't hold it, we can't pin it down but we have no doubt that it exists. We do our best to define it – like air, we can name its characteristics: humidity, ozone level, the specific mixture of nitrogen, oxygen, argon, carbon dioxide, etc. But that type of definition cannot make tangible

- the coolness of the air in a forest with the light scent of deciduous trees
- the crispness of the air in the fall
- the oppressiveness on a hot summer day
- the sweet fragrance it carries when it passes by hydrangeas, lilacs, or sweet peas
- the feel of the air when the fog has set in
- the acidity when there's been a fire

- the very specific air in a hospital room

And air is all of those things **and** whatever the air is like in Kuala Lumpur and in the middle of the Atlantic and in Rio and the Sahara and all the places which exist where our eyes have never seen and our feet have never traveled. It's all air but we can never fully define it. Most of the time we forget it's there. And sometimes we are very aware of it. Sometimes we don't give God's will a second thought. And sometimes it's all we can wonder about.

When sorrow strikes us, when all seems bad, when evil seems to be prevailing, in tragedy and awful things, we may wonder aloud, or in silence, how can this, this affliction, this sadness, this horror, be part of God's will? Never does God wish nor will badness for us or upon us. God doesn't put bad things in our paths to make us stronger or because we can handle it or because God is trying to teach us something. Bad things happen but God's will is love and love, true love, is never expressed by hurting the loved. God is **not** like a teacher who is silent during a test. Although it's become cliché, I believe the God of the *Footprints* poem is far more like the God of our trials, carrying us during the hardest times, **not** lurking and waiting for us to get through them. Love doesn't leave us alone.

So why do bad things happen? I **do** need to get on the road to Minneapolis so I offer you the abbreviated version of what can be found in so many theologically sound writings. It all comes back to the gift of free will. Because God loves us, God will not coerce our love for God and God will not control us like puppets. Most of the time, we appreciate that, except when we want something to go our way or we want God to "fix" something. Don't get me wrong – God does make God's self known even here and now but, just as we are not puppets to God, God certainly isn't a puppet to us. Whether we can see it or not, God is bringing about good from bad all the time. Good things like the Susan G. Komen fund. Good things from unspeakably bad things. The words of Protestant pastor Martin Niemöller mark but one such change:

First, they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out –
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.¹

We can do horrible things to one another, and to ourselves, knowingly and unknowingly, but God is always present shaping even our worst toward good. The most difficult to accept is the good we cannot grasp or see or imagine. The smallness of our understanding does not negate the greatness of God's good.

¹ <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007392>

“Thy will be done” affirms our trust that God’s good is being worked even when, especially when, we cannot see it. “Thy will be done” is a vow that we will try not to get in the way and, even better, we will try to be a part of bringing the good about. William J. Carl III frames it this way: “To pray ‘Thy will be done’ and mean it as we put our whole trust in God is to know that God is letting us go and letting us have our way by giving us room to maneuver within the divine field of consciousness.”² Giving us room to maneuver. There is that free will again.

We tend to think how easy it was for Jesus to follow God’s will, even though, as a human, he also had free will. Our reading from Mark reminds us that Jesus knows our struggles because he has had them, too. Bad things happen. Jesus says, “I am deeply grieved, even to death.” And he even says, “for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me.” Have you prayed this prayer? God, you can do anything. I cannot stand it anymore. Please just do this thing for me. In the end, Jesus is our example at the very least because, out of grieving and pain and the desire to be free from it, he prayed these words: “yet, not what I want, but what you want.”

In every trial, and in every “yay, me” moment, Jesus says, “pray then like this...thy will be done.” Because we strive to be like Jesus but aren’t, we’re going to forget, we’re going to take God’s will for granted, we’re even going to be obstinate about our own will. For us, William Carl offers this: “Living in the will of God means prolonged obedience in the same direction. God’s will provides for us an organizing center around which we can build... [our] lives.”³ Our daily prayer of “thy will be done” serves to bring us back to center, to reorganize ourselves, our thoughts, our actions. And so, we pray...

Give grace to our smallness that we might accept your greatness which is beyond our understanding and so live our prayer with integrity and fervor: thy will be done. Amen.

² William J. Carl, III. *The Lord’s Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) p. 38.

³ William J. Carl, III. *The Lord’s Prayer for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 2006) pp. 38-39.