

Prayer in Times of Confusion and Disappointment

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How should we pray when we are confused? What should we expect to hear from God when times are difficult and confusing? Exodus 5-6 provides us with a story that helps answer those questions.

First, it is a story that is confusing. In Exodus 3 and 4, Moses had a mountaintop experience with God, who not only reveals his name and mission but also equips Moses with power. When Moses (and Aaron) go to Egypt, the Israelites hear the good news and see the signs, they bow in worship.(Ex. 4:29-31) However, when he goes to tell God's word to Pharaoh, Pharaoh not only rejects it but also makes life more difficult on the Israelites. With the pressure turned up, the people turn on Moses and seek mercy from Pharaoh.

Moses does what God says and life gets harder rather than easier? That is confusing! Yet I'm glad this story is preserved for us here. First, because it shows us that we should expect that there is a real enemy who opposes God's plans. Following God will lead to opposition and we shouldn't be surprised. And second, there are options on where we go when life gets difficult. Notice that the foremen of Israel (who represent the people) grovel at the feet of Pharaoh—turning against Moses (5:15, 21). However, Moses (who also represents the people) goes to God with his questions.

And these leads to our main question. What can we do and what should we expect when we encounter difficult and confusing times? Well first, we see that God receives our questions. This story and the lament psalms teach us that God invites us to come to him with our confusion and can lead with our questions (cf. Ps 22).

So what should we expect when we bring our questions to God? It seems God has a habit of answering our questions in ways we don't expect—not directly but much more comprehensively. In Exodus 6:1-8, God responds by again putting his name at the forefront—I am Yahweh. And to this name he ties both his past actions and concern (vss. 3-5) and future promises of deliverance, covenant, and promised land (vss. 6-8). Not all that Moses asked for is answered directly, but something bigger and grander is given in its place. Moses comes to know God more deeply in the midst of confusion, know his name, and recall his actions in the past and promises for the future.

What should we expect when we follow God? Perhaps the difficulty and confusion of opposition. But in the midst of the battle, God is ever-present to receive our prayers and answer by making himself known to us.

Exodus 6:2-8

² God spoke to Moses and said to him,

"I am Yahweh.

³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty,

but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them.

⁴ I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan,
the land in which they lived as sojourners.

⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves,

and I have remembered my covenant.

⁶ Say therefore to the people of Israel,

'I am Yahweh,

and **I will** bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians,

and **I will** deliver you from slavery to them,

and **I will** redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

⁷ **I will** take you to be my people,

and **I will** be your God,

and you shall know that I am the LORD your God,

who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

⁸ **I will** bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac,
and to Jacob.

I will give it to you for a possession.

I am Yahweh."

(Emphases added)
