Never 'Why?' but 'What?'

In your prayers or in your mind never ask questions like, "Why is this happening to me?" "Why now, when things we have prayed about for years are finally beginning to happen?" So never, "Why Lord? But rather, "What Lord?"

It was the mastery of this principle that enabled Paul to write triumphantly to the Roman believers in Rom. 8: 28-29, ***"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. For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brothers."***

Notice ***"all things … for the good"***. Not <u>something</u>, but <u>all things</u> are being arranged by God's creative hands. And when God does things, He does all things well! This is the attitude we need to cultivate and strengthen in our hearts and minds.

- We need strong confidence in God's goodness and love for us. We need the assurance that behind it all, there is the loving and personal purpose and control of our Father God. And sometimes there may be the chastising mark of His love!
- There is an increasing confidence in the Sovereignty of God in the practical affairs of life. He is in control over local, national and international affairs. He is also in control of the work for which we are responsible. Remember, God is never taken by surprise.

During the Boxer Revolution in China in which so many workers were killed, Hudson Taylor used the phrase **"no second causes"**. There was great suffering, much perplexity and testing, but Hudson Taylor realised that God was bringing "gold" out of the fire of persecution.

So with an attitude of "Never Why? but What?" we realise that whatever might be going wrong can lead to rich and rapid spiritual growth in our lives and greater fruitfulness in our ministry. Again, in this situation Hudson Taylor commented, **"I was a little child leaning on the arm of omnipotence and I was led by a hand I could not see."**

When God gives you the answer to the question of "What?" you forget about the "Why?" question. But if you persist in asking the "Why?" question and there is no apparent explanation given – no reasons – then sadly there is no "What". Can you trust God without explanation? ***"Blessed is he who does not fall away on account of Me."*** (Mt. 11:6, Lk. 7:23) Michael Griffiths said, **"There are mysteries, but no mistakes**".

Elijah spent some time safely hidden by the brook Cherith being fed by the ravens. Then the brook began to dry up. Each of us will have to face this at some time or other. But Cherith led to Zarephath (1 Kings 17:1-24) and this led to the great triumph over the priests of Ba'al on Mount Carmel. Then finally in 2 Kings 2 there is the account of Elijah's departure into heaven.

So "drying brooks" often lead to a more successful ministry that is due to:

- God's loving care for us
- God's sovereignty
- God's power at work in human weakness – in our servanthood, in suffering and uncertainty **because** we have a sure and certain hope and confidence even though we may be facing perplexity and loss

But we will find these are the "seven league boots" to spiritual growth. We are like tea bags. We only come to full strength when we are in hot water!

So when the Lord allows a crisis in your life and ministry, don't get upset about the setbacks. Give it to God. It is possible that God is trying to get your attention so you become more aware of His plans

and purposes for you. Ask the question, "Lord, what would You have me to do?" Thank Him for the trial and acknowledge that you are in His hands. He loves you very dearly and so He sometimes "chastens" you! ***"Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*** (1 Thess. 5:18)

Then tell God that above all you want to be like Jesus at any cost. You are ready to accept change or loss. The way up is often through the way down – down in death and up in life! Suffering and glory, weakness and strength go together in authentic discipleship. The way up is to willingly accept the way down. ***"So humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt you in due season."*** (1 Pet. 5:6) The highway of triumph is so often through the low way of tribulation.

Moses longed to enter the Promised Land. I think he craved the privilege of leading his people in. How easy for us, especially leaders, to strive to be "successful in ministry". What is God's answer? ***"That is enough, speak to me no more of this matter"*** (Deut. 3:24-27).

Do you recall similar matters, great longings for breakthroughs and success in ministry? Moses was longing for something that was legitimate (entering the Promised Land). But Moses accepted God's "no". God had something far greater for Moses when he did "enter the land". He stood on the Mount of Transfiguration and saw the Lord Jesus in all His glory. So often God's purposes exceed our earthbound expectations!

There is an OMF booklet with the title, "Others May – You Cannot". A longing for the legitimate can be pressed too far. Don't fall for the "soft option", the "easy solution", the "quick get-out", the "if only ….". The self-pity of these moments gives us leanness of soul and brings barrenness in service. Leanness of soul is directly proportional to the pressure we exert on God to get our own way – see Ps. 106:14-15.

In Numbers 11 the People of God were fed with manna. They remembered the leeks and onions of Egypt and they longed for meat to eat. (Num. 11:18) God gave them what they wanted and then a plague attacked them. There is something that could be called, 'the tragedy of answered prayer'.

"Blessed is he who does not fall away (or is not offended) on account of me." (Mt. 11:6, Lk. 7:23) was the response of the Lord Jesus to John the Baptist in prison. John was killed with no rescue at the whim of a wicked woman at a dinner party!

My prayer for you, as you live under the difficulties and pressures of these days and among the claims that are legitimate and rightly enjoyed by others, but perhaps denied to you, is that you can claim the **blessing of the unoffended**. May your response to God be, "Is it not lawful for You to do what you will with Your own? Please do what seems good in Your sight."

"Now may the God of Peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good for doing His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Heb. 13:20-21)