

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?
Ps. 22:1-2; Emma Simmering Funeral; January 24, 2026

Emmy was frustrated with God. She often asked me questions like: “Why won’t God answer my prayers? I keep praying and praying and it seems like He’s not listening. What have I done that God has rejected me and my prayers? Have I lost my faith?” (Emmy is not the only person from whom I’ve heard questions like that.) How do you respond to such questions?

Please don’t tell people going through that to just pray harder, as if their faith was inadequate! They are at the end of their rope and just barely hanging on. People at the point of despair don’t need to be told to “buck up” and try harder to get God to listen to them. They already think they are failures and don’t need any reminding.

What we should do is listen better to what they say is going on in their lives. These people need our compassion, not our judgment of their problems, which they will hear as condemnation. They are doubting their God and doubting their faith in God, which does not need any affirming by us. They need to know that we know that they are suffering greatly, not be told that, if they just bear down and pray harder, they will get better and everything will turn out okay. That is the sort of thing Job complained his friends were doing. Instead of helping him, they were “piling on” him with God.

**Have mercy on me, have mercy on me, O you my friends,
for the hand of God has touched me!
Why do you, like God, pursue me?**

We should recognize that people who are struggling with their faith have faith and remain Christians. What struggling Christians need to hear is that God still loves them in Christ Jesus and has not forsaken them.

In addition to the three Scripture Readings I chose for Emmy’s funeral service – all of which address our suffering – I chose Psalm 22:1-2 as my primary text for the Sermon. Many Christians recognize these as words Jesus cried out from the cross as He was dying for the sin of the whole world.

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My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Matt. 27:46)
Why are you so far from saving me,
from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

When Christians like Emmy feel like God has abandoned them to suffer alone, they need to remember that they aren't the only ones who have experienced this. While it might feel like God has forsaken us completely to suffer and die alone, He has not. That is not how God treats anyone, except for when He put His own Son Jesus through that while on the cross. To be separated from God is to suffer the pangs of hell. Jesus went through hell for us on the cross, experiencing what it felt like to suffer and die forsaken by God His Father, who would not rescue Him from the cross or answer His groaning there.

What did Emmy need to hear when she felt like God had abandoned her and refused to listen to her prayers? Where should we look for help in that situation? If we look inside our hearts, we will see the darkness of deadly sin and we will hear nothing except silence, except maybe for self-recrimination. We need to look outside ourselves to Jesus on the cross for us. The words of the 23rd Psalm remind us that God in Christ is with us and for us when we suffer, even to the point of death. **Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me** (23:4a KJV).

When Jesus suffered on the cross, He was suffering there with us. We are never alone in our suffering because God's Son walked through the valley of the shadow death before us and suffered the evil of our sins while forsaken by God His Father. Jesus did this so that, when we suffer, even to the point of death, we are never alone because He is with us. We can say confidently in faith: **I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me!**

I have not had to deal with chronic pain and suffering like Emmy did so I don't know what she was going through, but her expectations for this life sometime were – should I say – unrealistic. She kept looking for the right treatment, the right medicine, the right surgery, which would heal her body and then her suffering and disabilities would leave her. That's what she prayed for.

The problem with this is that God does not promise that, if we pray hard enough, obey Him the best we can, and have enough faith, He will relieve us of our suffering in this life – in the life to come, yes, but not necessarily in this life. Emmy wanted her pain and suffering in this life to end, and she questioned God’s love for her when it did not. It is not wrong to pray for healing and relief; I prayed for that often with Emmy, but God’s answer to her was not what she hoped for.

Because she was praying, I reminded her that she was doing what faithful Christians do: pray to God. What St. Paul wrote in Romans 8 is something I encouraged her to consider when she prayed, but she did not know what she should pray for. **“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose”** (8:26-29). When Christians don’t know what the right thing to pray for is, we can trust that the Holy Spirit knows what we need and God will give us what will work out for our good.

Another thing to trust in while suffering in this life are God’s promises of the life to come. This section in Romans 8 begins with the reminder: **“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”** The **“glory”** Paul means is the glory of life everlasting with God in heaven when our bodies have been raised from the dead. Our faith is the same as that of the long-suffering Job, who confessed: **“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.”** Because Jesus, our Redeemer, has died and risen, we who die with Him will rise with Him to live forever.

Emmy looked forward to joining her dear husband, Howard, in the glories of heaven. She missed him sorely; his death left a big hole in her heart and life. Her body will be laid to rest next to his, where they will await that great and glorious day of resurrection.

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Emmy had things in common with that woman in the Gospel Reading who had suffered for a long time, spent a fortune on medical treatment, and had found no relief. If Emmy had lived in the days Jesus walked this earth, when Jesus came by, I'm sure she would have said to herself: **“If I touch even His garments, I will be made well”** (Mk 8:28), but Emmy never had that opportunity. That frustrated Emmy in her suffering, and her questions sounded a lot like Jesus': **“My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?”**

That frustration is gone because she is with God now in heaven, and **at the last**, when her body is raised to life gloriously, **with her eyes she shall see God**. What Jesus said to the woman He had healed, Emmy can now hear. **“Daughter, your faith has made you well (lit. saved you)”** (Mk 8:28). Amen.