

THE MYSTERY OF UNANSWERED PRAYER

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

ATTENTION:

Of all the things that weigh us down, perhaps no burden is greater than the silence of God.

- The desperate question, *Where Is God When We Need Him?*
 - A godly mother prays for her wayward son. He was raised in the church, he went to Sunday school, he knows the Bible-but when he left home, he left it all behind. For many years his mother has prayed for him, but to this day he remains a prodigal son.
 - A wife prays for her husband, who left her after twenty-three years of marriage for a younger woman. He seems utterly unreachable, and the marriage heads swiftly for divorce. It hurts so much!
 - A husband prays for his wife, who has terminal cancer. Treatments make her so sick. She has 6, maybe 7 months to live. The whole church has been passionately praying and praying. She dies five months later.
 - A young man prays fervently for deliverance from an overpowering temptation, but the struggle never seems to end. It seems like the more he prays, the worse the temptation becomes.
- So, we cry out with the psalmist,
*Lord, why do you stand so far away?
Why do you hide in times of trouble?*
Psalm 10:1

ATTUNE:

The Problem No One Talks About

- A lot of us/believers struggle with the issue of unanswered prayer.

- If there is a God, if he really does answer prayer, why doesn't he answer my prayers?
 - For those who are in pain, a strictly academic answer will not do.
 - Nor will it be enough to simply say, "*God always answers prayer. Sometimes he says yes, sometimes he says no, and sometimes he says wait awhile.*"
 - All answers sound simplistic and superficial when someone cries out to God from the pit of despair, and the heavens are as brass, and the answer never comes.
 - Remembering times when they prayed, said all the right words with all the right motives, asking others to join them in prayer, deeply believing that only God could help them; and after they prayed, they waited and waited and waited, but God never seemed to answer.
- As a matter of fact, *Many good, devout people secretly doubt that God answers prayer.*

My Grace Is Sufficient

The bible gives us the opportunity to look over the shoulder of a believer who experienced the silence of God.

- No story of unanswered prayer is more encouraging than the account of Paul's unanswered prayer in [2 Corinthians 12](#).
 - In that passage Paul reveals that 14 years earlier he had been caught up into heaven and had seen things that no mortal man had ever seen before.
 - When that great experience was over, something else happened to Paul that would change his whole perspective on life. Let him tell the story in his own words:
Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself.
2 Corinthians 12:7
- The nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh is in dispute.
 - The crucial point is that Paul prayed for God to remove the *thorn in his flesh* so that he could get on with his ministry.
⁸ Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me.

- He prayed about this need in his life - God *would* not answer his prayers.
 - Three times God told Paul “No.”
 - Paul was a man of prayer.
 - He writes about prayer in all his letters.
- Some important things we learn from Paul’s example:
 - Unanswered prayer happens to the very best of Christians.
 - When it happens, it is humanly unexplainable.
 - When it happens, God has a higher purpose in mind.
- In Paul’s case he kept on praying until God finally gave him an explanation.

[9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.”](#)

Sometimes our prayers are not answered because God can do more through us by not answering our prayers than He can by answering them.

- Sometimes God’s no is better than his yes.
 - Think of it this way. What would happen if God answered all your prayers all the time in the exact way you prayed?
 - Forget for a moment that some of your prayers are foolish and shortsighted.
 - Just suppose that God answered them all.
 - Would that produce spiritual maturity in your life?
 - I think not. If God always answered your prayers, eventually your trust would be in the answers and not in the Lord alone.
 - But when God says no, we are forced to decide whether we will still trust in God alone or not.

The words of to an unknown confederate soldier say this well:

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;
 I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
 I asked for health, that I might do greater things;
 I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
 I asked for riches, that I might be happy;

I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
 I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men;
 I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
 I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life;
 I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
 I got nothing I asked for, but everything I had hoped for.
 Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
 I am, among men, most richly blessed.

PROJECT:

Sometimes our prayers will go unanswered and that is God at His best!

- Unless you admit that fact and deal with it as a Christian, you will probably give up prayer altogether.
- *When we pray, we tend to focus exclusively on the answers **BUT** God wants us to focus on Him.*
 - Sometimes that means our prayers will be answered in amazing and miraculous ways
 - Other times our prayers will not be answered at all.

ACTION: What to Do When Your Prayers Are Not Answered

1. Keep on praying.

- Sometimes God’s answers are delayed for reasons beyond our knowledge.
 - I love the stories of people who have prayed for a loved one for 20 or 30 years and finally they decide to surrender their lives to Jesus
 - Pray, pray, and keep on praying.

2. Give God the right to say no.

- *In the ultimate sense, God already has that right, whether you acknowledge it or not.*
 - But it is important that we internalize it and acknowledge it!
 - How much wiser it is to say, “Lord, I am praying this prayer from the bottom of my heart, but even as I pray I confess that you have the right to say no if that’s what is best.

- Jesus let “God be God” when He prayed...
“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”
Matthew 26:39

3. Keep on doing what you know to be right.

- In the darkness of unanswered prayer, you may be tempted to give up on God.
 - You may feel like throwing in the towel and checking out of the Christian life.
 - Keep on praying, keep on believing, keep on reading God’s word, keep obeying.

He Maketh No Mistake

A. M. Overton wrote a poem. It seems that while the preacher was speaking at his wife’s funeral Mr. Overton was sitting in the pew writing this poem. **“He Maketh No Mistake”**

*My Father’s way may twist and turn,
My heart may throb and ache
But in my soul I’m glad I know,
He maketh no mistake.
My cherished plans may go astray,
My hopes may fade away,
But still I’ll trust my Lord to lead
For He doth know the way.
Tho’ night be dark and it may seem
That day will never break,
I’ll pin my faith, my all in him,
He maketh no mistake.
There’s so much now I cannot see,
My eyesight’s far too dim;
But come what may, I’ll simply trust
And leave it all to him.
For by and by the mist will lift
And plain it all he’ll make,
Through all the way, tho’ dark to me,
He made not one mistake.*

In the end that will be the testimony of every child of God. When we finally get to heaven, we’ll look back over life and see that through all the twists, turns and detours “He made not one mistake.”