

# When Prayers Don't Get Answered

8 August 2018



What if God were much kinder and even more good than we could imagine? I think of recent experiences with my newborn. After a week of little to no sleep from struggling with a child who could barely hold down her milk without gagging, crying or vomiting, I remember looking at her through bleary eyes at some arbitrary dark hour and thinking, 'I would sacrifice even more if it ensured that you get all the nourishment you need.' Consider, then, a very striking verse from the mouth of Jesus regarding the Father's thoughts toward us, *'If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!'* ([Matthew 7:11](#))

Why does God sometimes not answer our prayers?

Before we can truly lay down all our striving to make things work using our own abilities, anxieties and defense mechanisms, we need to settle deep down in our hearts the true nature of God's heart towards us. Of course, there are many opportunities in the course of our journey of following after Christ to question His dealings with us. Given the wide, open-ended promises to us regarding prayer, the question begs to be answered: why does our experience often seem so contrary to the simplicity of this promise (the promise that when we request help from God, He will supply it)? Why does God sometimes not answer our prayers?

## **What Are We Praying For?**

As much as it is the heart of a loving father to bless his child, a good father is careful to give only those things which will benefit his child in a healthy way – with an eye to the future, not just the present. Children ask their parents for many things, but how many of those things are for their ultimate good and how many are only fleeting desires that may give short term satisfaction but be of no benefit to their future?

Our prayers reveal the true desires of our hearts.

What things are you asking God for? Our prayers reveal the true desires of our hearts. Do we seek

for what can truly satisfy and those things with eternal value, or do we only look for temporary pleasures – for comfort and convenience, here and now?

More than anything else, Father God cares that we have everything we need for our salvation, because He knows that salvation is the very best thing for us. We need to make peace with the fact that if the thing we are asking for is going to impair our salvation in any way, God will withhold it from us because of His mercy.

## **Praying in Jesus' Name**

As Christians, we have found favour with God in a peculiar manner, which we would do well to remember. We were brought close to God, reconciled, by the life and sacrifice of Jesus. The favour we enjoy with God remains only as we continue to remain in Christ. Jesus taught us how to pray effective prayers in the following way, *'In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.'* ([John 16:23](#))

Approaching the Father 'in Jesus' name' is more than a phrase to attach to the end of your prayer. It means to approach the Father with your request through the way opened up by Christ. It is an active reliance and acknowledgement of the perfect sacrifice of Christ. The opposite of praying 'in Jesus' name' is approaching the Father on the merit of your own good works.

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The seven sons of Sceva ([Acts 19:13-17](#)) amply demonstrated how futile it is to use the name of Jesus in prayer without an accompanying life of faith in Jesus. As we go on remaining in Christ by a life of faith and obedience, we continue to enjoy the favour of the Father. When we separate ourselves from Christ through ongoing self-trust and disobedience, the favour of God can lift from our lives and instead we experience discipline.

This realisation should produce a great sense of relief, but also humility, in us, knowing that there is absolutely no way that we can curry favour with God; we are completely powerless. All I need do is humbly submit myself to the Lordship of Jesus and approach the Father, trusting completely on all the merits of Christ.

## **Unanswered Prayer Protects and Matures Us**

Now it may be tempting to think of the principles just listed as keys in the password to instantly unlock the vault of our desires. However, there is a destructive tendency within human nature that God needs to heal by the way He responds to our prayers. We have a tendency to treat God as a provider and as a means to a greater end. Our hearts tend to shrink from keeping Him as our greatest love and treasure. God is acutely aware of this danger, which has the potential to lead us to utter and eternal destruction. So He seeks to heal our wayward hearts and form steadfastness and faithfulness within us.

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Perhaps the best example in Scripture of Father God's patient and careful ministrations are demonstrated in Israel's pilgrimage from Egypt into the Promised Land. God did not lead them immediately from the filth, destitution and cruel treatment of slavery in Egypt into a freedom accompanied by comfort, independence and a land of their own. God knew that a freedom which included all these 'blessings' would have immediately and utterly destroyed them. Instead, He led them into a desert of lack and hardship, which required them to turn to Him again and again. God kept the Israelites dependent on Him, which kept their hearts from wandering too far from Him. This was His mercy. This was His medicine for their wandering hearts.

This pilgrimage is an analogy of our faith journey from salvation 'till eternity. God wants the children of His great love to grow up into maturity – into the image of His firstborn, Jesus. This is what is going on in this Scripture that says, *'...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.'* ([Romans 5:3-5](#))

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Until we have an experiential, deep-rooted understanding of the depth and the breadth of God's love for us, we will not know how to pray. God is far more good, generous and kind than we could ever dream or give Him credit for. God is the Greatest Good in the entire universe. Will you choose to trust God when you have not yet received what you are asking for? Will you choose to consistently respond to His grace, His callings and inward promptings, and thereby remain in Christ? I encourage you to make this commitment in your heart. As you do this, you will encounter the joy, peace and love of God that is only found through constant communion with Christ, and you will reach the goal that all of the Christian faith is really about. May you know this love and all the riches that are hidden in Christ. Amen.