
Why Unanswered Prayer?

Radio Message by Dwight Porter, D.D.

AT TIMES God does us a great favor by not giving us what we ask for. He may have another plan for us, which is certainly superior to ours. It is His sovereign right to respond by saying, YES, NO or WAIT. Many people bury their head in the sand and refuse to face up to the reality of failure in prayer. Are your prayers going unanswered? Do you know the actual reason? Or do you have the conception that prayer is a hit-or-miss proposition anyway?

Before we give a Scriptural answer to this honest question, let us discuss what we mean by an answer to prayer. It is asking for that which He wills for us, rather than always asking for what we want. So many have the attitude that God is supposed to give us everything we ask for. "And whatsoever ye shall ask IN MY NAME, that will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). "IF ye abide in me, and MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU (obedience), ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

We must depend upon the Holy Spirit for guidance. "Like-wise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26). How wonderful to rest fully upon the Spirit to direct us.

An answered prayer is not always measured by our own desires and will. The Apostle Paul did not always receive what some people would classify as an answer to prayer. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: For my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (II Corinthians 12:7-9).

Paul heard from heaven, but not as he requested or expected. But remember, He did hear. The reply assured him of God's will in regard to this particular request. When we pray in faith, God will give assurance that He has undertaken.

He has not promised to do things for our glory, and we must realize that genuine prayer does not move God to do our bidding. It is our yielding to His will, plan and purpose concerning that which we present to Him. Stop listening to your desires and prayers. Wait before God, believe Him, and you will see His hand move in your direction. Genuine prayer is the blending of finite desire with Infinite will. After you have asked and exercised faith in His promise, it is just a matter of renewing your commitment to Him to accomplish His will.

Our Lack of Faith

As a Christian, we can have unhindered communion with our Heavenly Father. Listen to Jesus Christ as recorded in John 11:42: "I knew that thou hearest me always." Do we know that? We have the promise of His Word. Do we believe it? Do we read it? There is no communication with God in having prayers answered until we believe His Word and rest upon His promises. "But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

God will not force His intentions upon anyone. Who are we to think it possible to get things from God without asking and believing? The Bible says that "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17).

I am talking to someone right now who is having difficulty exercising faith, and it is because you are not feeding upon the Word of God — the Bible. Your prayer has not been answered because you have not studied the Word to know God's prom-ises. The only faith you have exercised is in your own desires and not in His will.

Family Relationships

Another reason for unanswered prayer may be due to improper relationships in one's home. Notice I Peter 3:7: "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowl-edge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life: THAT YOUR PRAYERS BE NOT HINDERED."

The real you is revealed at home more than in any other location. We expose our actual condition to the other members of our household. What we really are determines God's response to our prayers. His holiness and righteousness will never be contaminated. Thus, it becomes impossible for God to bless an unclean vessel. If there is a lack of harmony in your home, your prayer life is hindered.

Failure to Reconcile

When we have offended others and have not acknowl-edged our wrong doings, we will not have prayers answered, nor will our gift to the Lord be acceptable. Many times our improper relationships with other Christians will hinder our prayers. "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24).

It is hypocrisy to make any attempt to pray or worship God if we do not honestly forsake sin and make an effort to undo wrong actions. We should pay our debts and ask forgiveness for sins against others. The Lord's Prayer includes "and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:1 - 4).

Listen to Zacchaeus after he came in contact with Christ: "And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8). God cannot possibly answer prayers for an unrepentant thief!

Indifference toward the Bible

If God is going to respond to our appeal, He must recognize our attitude toward His Word. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination" (Proverbs 28:9). There is no answer or response if our prayers are abominable to God. This is the result of turning away from God's Word – the Bible. "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Psalms 1:1-3). "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:1).

Listen to the plain teaching of Psalm 66:18: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." If we are willing to sin, excusing and refusing to confess it, God cannot and will not answer our prayers. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, and he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1,2). "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and his ears are open unto their prayers: But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (I Peter 3:12).

What to Do

Go back and re-examine your attitude as to what constitutes an answer to prayer. Get your heart into God's Word and receive faith and exercise it. Go to those you have not had right relationship with. Pay your past-due debts to God and man. Stop being indifferent toward God's Word. Be a believer and a doer of it. Acknowledge the sin that has been revealed to you and confess it to God. As a Christian, we must do as God's Word plainly states: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

Remember, God's forgiveness does not depend upon our faithfulness. He is the One who is faithful and just to do two things – forgive and cleanse. Right here and now you can confess and believe God to forgive you, and this very hour be on praying ground. God not only can, but will answer your prayers according to His promise.

Prayer is communion within the family of God. Are you in His family? Have you come face to face with Jesus Christ? Have you talked direct to Him in prayer? We are lost from the transforming power of Christ. "There is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners: of whom I am the chief" (I Timothy 1:15). Acknowledgement of our sins is not enough. Such sorrow for our transgression against a holy God causes us to turn from our sin in complete dependence upon the power of Christ to take it away. This turning, demanded by

God, is called *repentance*. Christ said in Luke 13:3: "I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (This is repeated in verse 5.) "And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). I would suggest that you find a quiet place of prayer and upon your knees, tell God of your sin which He has revealed to you through His Word and by His Holy Spirit. Tell Him of your being sick of what the devil has forced you to do that is so displeasing to Him. Ask Christ to cleanse your heart, making you the person He promised. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17).

After your prayer to God, believe Him to have heard you and to do according to His promise. "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31). Rest upon God's promise that you are in His family. "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:12).

Here is a suggested prayer for you who are in earnest: *Dear Christ, I admit that I am the sinner you died on the cross to save. By Thy help, the best way I know how, I do here and now turn from my sin and trust Thee to cleanse my sinful heart. I believe Thy promise to save me this moment. In Christ's Name I pray, Amen.*

Right now, I sincerely hope and pray that you will seriously consider what you have just read and realize your condition in the sight of God and discover why He cannot answer your prayer. Remember, to be in God's family provides the glorious potential of answers to prayer from your Heavenly Father. These answers are not automatic. As a Christian, you must meet God's conditions for answered prayer.

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