



*Prayer
&
Providence*

Lesson 6 – When God Says 'No' or 'Wait'



Learning to Pray from the Psalms

Communal Lament Psalms

- Psalms 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85
- Ps 44:26 Arise for our help, And redeem us for Your mercies' sake.
- Ps 74:10 O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?
- Ps 79:13 So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, Will give You thanks forever; We will show forth Your praise to all generations.
- Ps 85:6 Will You not revive us again, That Your people may rejoice in You? 7 Show us Your mercy, Lord, And grant us Your salvation.



Sometimes people will complain that God did not respond to their prayer and question whether there really is a God. What might you say to such a person?



Whenever we don't receive the answer to our prayer we expect, Homer Hailey suggests three possibilities:

1. The Lord refuses to hear and grant our prayer
2. He says 'no' to our prayer
3. God says 'wait' to our prayer



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?

→ Sin stands in the way

- When a people or an individual turn from God, and refuse to hear him, sin stands in the way of God hearing them.
 - **Isa 59:1-2** – “... And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”
 - **Isa 1:15-16**
- If we will remove the sin that stands in our way, He is ready and willing to hear us.
 - **Isa. 55:6-7; 58:9** – “Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'”



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?

→ Hidden iniquity in the heart

- **Ps. 66:18 – “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”**
 - **If one hides evil in his heart while he is insincerely praying to God, he deceives himself and is attempting to deceive God. The Lord will not hear his prayer.**
- **Prov. 28:9 – “One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.”**
 - **We must come before the Lord with clean hands and a pure heart (Ps 24:4)**



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?

→ Pride and self-righteousness

- **Luke 18:1ff**
- **Luke 18:9-14**
 - **“... The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' ... everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**
 - **The Lord will not hear the prayer of the one who refuses to humble himself and recognize his condition before the Lord**



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?

→ If we are unforgiving

- **If we refuse to forgive someone, the Lord will not hear our prayer and forgive us.**
 - **Mark 11:24-26 – “... if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses ...”**
 - **Sometimes, we may think the Lord does not answer our prayers – perhaps He will not hear them because of an unforgiving spirit on our part**
- **Would seem to be a common problem**
 - **Luke 17:3-4; Mt. 18:21-22; Eph. 4:32**



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?

→ If it is not prayed in faith

- **When one prays, he must believe that God hears and will answer his prayer**
 - **James 1:5-8 – “... let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind ...”**
 - **Heb. 11:6 – “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”**



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?

→ Selfish prayers with impure motive

- Some will mistakenly pray for things simply to gratify their own desires.
 - **Jas 4:3 – “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”**
- A Christian’s concern should be for spiritual growth and development
 - **Should pray about the simple needs of this life as well**
 - **But be careful not to go beyond and ‘ask amiss’**
- James and John’s request
 - **Mark 10:38 – “But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you ask.’”**



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?

→ Frivolous prayers

- Lord, give me a sunny day for a good golf game
- Help me get an A on the test (when you know you haven't studied properly for it)
- Boxer Floyd Patterson after knocking out Archie Moore to win the world heavyweight championship
 - **“I just hit him and the Lord did the rest.”**
- These kind of requests trivialize prayer and are self-serving



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?

→ Marital problems that hinder our prayers

- **1 Peter 3:1-7**
 - **V. 7 – “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.”**
- **Husband and/or wife not fulfilling their responsibilities toward one another**
 - **Problems can result**
 - **Often, too much focus on self and not your spouse**
 - **Is there any wonder that such an attitude would hinder prayer to God?**



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?

→ Marital problems that hinder our prayers

- “It may seem strange that issues domestic would have a direct effect on prayer life, but not if prayer is viewed as keeping company with God. Every aspect of life, including how we treat those around us, affects an intimate relationship.” (Yancey)
- Extends to other relationships
 - **Prov. 21:13 – “Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard.”**
 - **How I treat God’s creation will determine how God receives my prayers and my worship**



Why might God refuse to hear our prayer?

The problem might be with me ...

- Sin stands in the way
- Hidden iniquity in the heart
- Pride and self-righteousness
- If we are unforgiving
- If it is not prayed in faith
- Selfish prayers with impure motive
- Frivolous prayers
- Marital problems that hinder our prayers

What is one of the first words a child learns?



“No!”



When God Says 'No'

- Paul – recounts heavenly vision (2 Cor. 12), then shares this:
 - 2 Cor. 12:7-10 – “... a thorn in the flesh was given to me ... Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ ...”
 - “God says ‘no’ when that for which we ask is not best – when He has something better for us. Let us have the grace to bear whatever the thorn may be and to realize that our Father sees and knows what we cannot, and works out His divine purpose in us.” (Homer Hailey)

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Isa. 55:8-9)



When God Says 'No'

- Moses – to be punished for his actions in the wilderness
 - **Num. 20:10-12**
 - **Later, Moses pleads for the Lord to reconsider**
 - Deut. 3:23-26 – “Then I pleaded with the LORD at that time ... I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon. ... the LORD said to me: ‘Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter.’”
 - **Answer was an emphatic ‘no.’ He was allowed to view the land from Mt. Pisgah, but that was all.**
 - **The Lord’s judgment remained consistent**
 - **However, the Lord had something better for Moses (Mt. 17:1-3)**
- The Lord’s answer of ‘no’ to our prayers may be because there is something better

A vertical strip on the left side of the slide shows a scenic landscape. It features a dense forest of evergreen trees in the background, a clear blue sky, and a calm body of water in the foreground that reflects the trees and sky.

The Blessing of Unanswered Prayers

“Unanswered Prayers” by Garth Brooks

Just the other night at a hometown football game
My wife and I ran into my old high school flame
And as I introduced them the past came back to me
And I couldn't help but think of the way things used to be

She was the one that I'd wanted for all times
And each night I'd spend prayin' that God would make her mine
And if he'd only grant me this wish I wished back then
I'd never ask for anything again

Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers
Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs
That just because he doesn't answer doesn't mean he don't care
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers

A vertical strip on the left side of the slide shows a scenic landscape. It features a dense forest of evergreen trees in the background, a calm body of water in the middle ground that reflects the trees and sky, and a clear blue sky above. The overall color palette is dominated by blues and greens.

The Blessing of Unanswered Prayers

She wasn't quite the angel that I remembered in my dreams
And I could tell that time had changed me
In her eyes too it seemed
We tried to talk about the old days
There wasn't much we could recall
I guess the Lord knows what he's doin' after all

And as she walked away and I looked at my wife
And then and there I thanked the good Lord
For the gifts in my life

Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers
Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs
That just because he doesn't answer doesn't mean he don't care
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers



When God Says 'No'

- What if God answered positively to every possible prayer?
 - Can you imagine? What a disaster that would be!
 - Like the movie “Bruce Almighty”
 - Mahatma Gandhi was once asked, “If you were given the power to remake the world, what would you do first?” He replied: “I would pray for power to renounce that power.”
 - Most of us learn over time that some prayers prove better off unanswered
- Some prayers are conflicting or contradictory
 - Some farmer may be praying for rain while the man beside the river who is still recovering from a flood may be praying for it not to rain
 - Christians on both sides of the Civil War – praying for victory over an enemy or oppressor



When God Says 'Wait'

- Job
 - Job 19:1-2,7 – “Then Job answered and said: ‘How long will you torment my soul, and break me in pieces with words?’ ... ‘If I cry out concerning wrong, I am not heard. If I cry aloud, there is no justice.’”
 - Job 30:20 “I cry out to You, but You do not answer me.”
 - Finally, Job receives his answer – ch. 38-41
 - Job’s response – Job 42:1-6
- The Lord delayed His response for Job’s benefit
 - Hearing the failed attempts at answers from his friends
 - Enduring the suffering – more self-aware before the Lord
 - Job was blessed more greatly than before
- Sometimes we must wait patiently for the Lord to work out His purpose in us



When God Says 'Wait'

- The Canaanite Woman
 - Mt. 15:21-28 – Jesus has gone to the region of Tyer and Sidon
 - She cries out for healing of her demon-possessed daughter
 - Her cries go unanswered by the Lord – becomes annoying to His disciples
 - Finally, He responds to her – shows herself to be one of great faith. Jesus grants her request of healing.
 - What, we might ask, was accomplished by this delay in responding to her pleas?
 - Allowed for a fuller expression of faith by the woman
 - An occasion for instruction by the Lord to His disciples:
 - Mt 15:24 "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
- When God delays His answer to our petitions, someone or some cause will be benefited



When God Says 'Wait'

- **Jairus' daughter - Mk. 5:22-43**
 - **This ruler of a synagogue had a daughter near death**
 - **Jesus allows Himself to be delayed by another woman's needs; during this delay, the daughter dies**
 - **Jesus finally arrives at Jairus' house and raises her from the dead, resulting in an even greater miracle**
 - **Cause for even greater rejoicing and likely a greater building up of Jairus' faith and others'**
- **Lazarus raised from the dead - Jn. 11:1-45**
 - **Jesus delays going to the aid of Lazarus who had been sick**
 - **Lazarus is in the tomb four days already when they arrive**



When God Says 'Wait'

- **An incredible miracle results**
 - Joh 11:45 – “Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.”
- **The delay which brought great sorrow to Lazarus’ sisters brought even greater joy to them when they received him back from the dead**
- **Enhanced the glory of Jesus among the Jews of the area producing faith in them**

“Faith will accept the Lord’s delay in answering prayer in the assurance that He knows best and that He is working out some unseen thing for our good and the glory of His cause.” (Hailey)



“Teach me, O God, so to use all the circumstances of my life today that they may bring forth in me the fruits of holiness rather than the fruits of sin.

Let me use disappointment as material for patience.

Let me use success as material for thankfulness.

Let me use trouble as material for perseverance.

Let me use danger as material for courage.

Let me use reproach as material for long suffering.

Let me use praise as material for humility.

Let me use pleasures as material for temperance

Let me use pain as material for endurance.”

John Baillie, Scottish Theologian



When God Says ‘No’ or ‘Wait’

“Prayer does not work according to some fixed formula: get your life in order, say the right words, and the desired result will come. If that were true, Job would have avoided much suffering, and Paul would have shed his thorn in the flesh.”

(Yancey)

- When prayers are neither heard nor answered, there is a reason: sin or some hindrance stands in the way.
- When God says no to His servant, there is a reason – He has something better for him or a better objective in mind
- When the answer to a prayer is delayed, there is a reason – it’s for someone’s good or to serve a larger purpose
 - **Sometimes we must accept the answer ... ‘wait’**



Next week – Lesson 7 – “What do I Expect When I Pray?”