

Prayers Unanswered

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (New American Standard Bible)

⁷ Because of the extraordinary greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸ Concerning this I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹ And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in difficulties, in behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Introduction

Last Sunday, I preached a sermon on the prayers that are never answered. Some of you may wonder, though, that your prayers went unanswered even though they had been offered very sincerely, not selfishly, with all sins repented, and in sure faith. How do we understand such prayers that go unanswered let alone explain it? That’s what I am going to talk about this morning. Prayers to which God says no.

Content

Definition of Unanswered Prayers:

Let me tell you what I mean by unanswered prayers: those prayers that you offered to God in the most sincere and earnest fashions, yet they are ungranted. E.g. A mother prayed for her 3-year-old son dying of an incurable disease. Yet, the boy died. That’s kind of prayer I am talking about. Now, please note here this excludes the *pending* prayers (that is, you are still waiting for the answers).

Every believer has unanswered prayers.

Before I dig deeper, I want you to know that unanswered prayers are a common experience among God’s people. We all have moments of disappointment. You have some. So do I. Even Jesus had one, too (e.g. He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane three times that the Lord would take the cup of death from Him yet His request was denied—Mark 14:32-42). The spiritual giants also had the same experience. Here are a couple of examples from the Scriptures.

E.g. 1. Paul the Apostle asked for the healing of his illness three times, yet it was denied (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

E.g. 2. Moses himself longed to enter the Promised Land after forty years in wilderness, yet God didn't allow him to (Deuteronomy 31:2).

At times, our prayers go unanswered. It is part of our walk with God.

God's Sovereignty: The Foundation of Prayer

Before we say any prayers to God, one thing we must acknowledge is this: God's sovereignty. Without this, our prayer life is never effective. Without this, we may remain disappointed and confused all the time with our prayers. Let me say it again: The sovereignty of God is the foundation of effective prayer.

In every prayer and petition, learn to present your case to God with the proper understanding and attitude. Do you know to whom you are talking to in prayer? He is the Creator, and you are His creation. He is the Almighty God, and you are His servant. Therefore, whenever you pray, do so in utter humility and never in arrogance. E.g. Christ is our example (Hebrews 5:7):

*In the days of His earthly life, Jesus offered up both petitions and supplications with fervent crying and tears to the One who was able to save Him from death, and **He was heard because of His reverent submission toward God** (Amplified Bible).*

Ask for God's favor in humility and never ever demand God as if He owes you anything. Prayer is not your right but rather is the privilege. That means, your prayer is not always answered in the ways you want. Rather, all prayers, big and small, are answered in the ways that God is pleased with. That's why, in every prayer, we utter to God, "Not as I will but as You will," as Jesus did. That's why we often say, "Lord willing." Within this boundary, we receive "whatever" we ask for in prayer (Matthew 21:22). Within God's will, not in our will.

Now, let us get to a tough part.

Three Possible Explanations on Unanswered Prayers

First, *God knows best*. We don't. Perhaps, our unanswered prayers can be God's greatest gifts. Have you noticed that we change our minds all the time? The answered prayers we rejoice over today may end up becoming tomorrow's curse. Today we may be disappointed with unanswered prayers, but tomorrow we may thank God for not granting our wishes. E.g. Garth Brooks's song "Unanswered Prayers."

Unanswered Prayers by Garth Brooks

- *Just the other night 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*

CHORUS:

*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*

*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*

CHORUS

*Some of God's greatest gifts are all too often unanswered...
Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers*

The second reason for our unanswered prayers is: *God's Providence*. God may have a better plan for you. At times, His plan works through your disappointment. He sees the big picture. We don't.

E.g. You know the story of Joseph well. He was sold by his own brothers into slavery in Egypt at the age of 17. You may say, what a life! (what a family!). Yes, indeed. For the next 13 years, Joseph remained slave. Thank God that, in the end, He made him prime minister of Egypt, the second-in-command. One day, Joseph and his brothers met again. This time, in Egypt. Joseph was seated up high as the ruler of Egypt and his brothers were begging for his mercy. Listen in Genesis 45: for they (the brothers) were terrified in his presence. ⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold to Egypt." ⁵ Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me ahead of you to save lives. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. ⁷ So God sent me ahead of you to ensure for you a remnant on the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. ⁸ Now, therefore, **it was not you who**

sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt (Genesis 45:3-8).

Whoa! What Joseph saying is true: God has a bigger picture which we don't see at the moment. With every unanswered prayer, be sure to check with God's plan and purpose.

The last explanation for our unanswered prayers is: *God's mysteries*. We simply cannot explain.

Mysteries are galore in our lives: e.g. A still born child. Child dies despite the mother's earnest prayer for her dying child. Victims of plane crash. Child's plea for his dying mother to no avail. Martyrs. Being passed up the promotion you wanted for a long time. No one can explain why for those things. Yet, God will explain to us all life's mysteries in the end.

Conclusion

Believe it or not, sometimes unanswered prayers protect, strengthen, and even benefit us. They even help us to grow mature in faith: Paul the Apostle learned to rely on God's grace not his own might for his ministry. I was kept back a year in school that turned out to be a disguised blessing (that led me to my wife).

The lesson: Don't sever your relationship with God based on unanswered prayers. Don't get mad at God, either. Wait a little longer with patience and trust. God will grant you the understanding of His plan and purpose for you in due time. Amen.