

We believe discipleship is a direction
not a destination.



Prayer: Does it Make a Difference

Week 7

Course Outline

- **Prayer Dilemmas**
 - **Week 7 Ch 16-17**
 - Unanswered prayer, whose fault is it
 - Living with not knowing
 - **Week 8 Ch 18-19**
 - Prayer and healing
 - What to pray for if not healing



Course Outline

- **The Practice of Prayer**
 - **Week 9 Ch 20-22**
 - How do I pray?
 - Should I “forward this prayer”
 - Rule #1 Love the Lord your God
 - **Week 10 Review, Conclusions**



Prayer Dilemmas

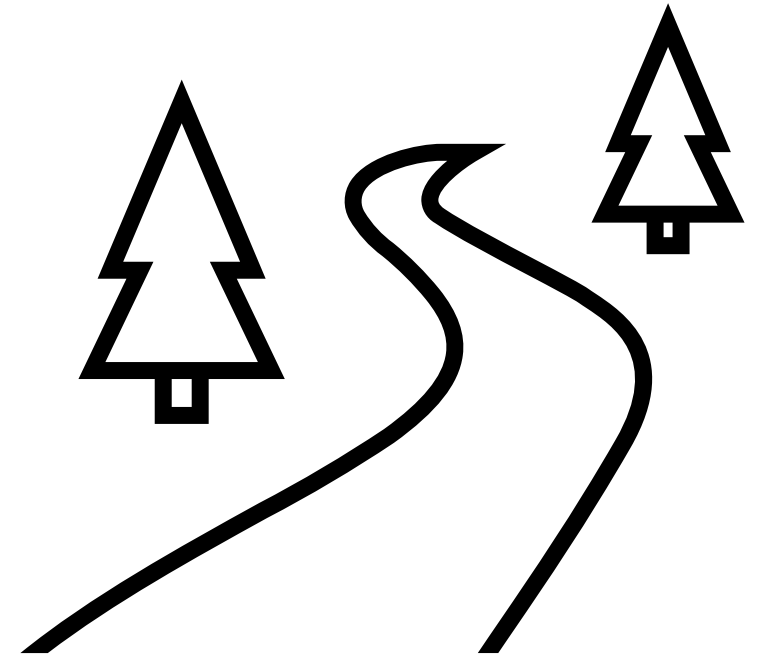
Unanswered Prayer: Whose Fault?

Chapter 16



Unanswered Prayer

- What are some of your unanswered prayers?
 - Child walking the wrong paths
 - Your addictions
 - Spouses, children, friends, family addictions
 - Abuse, verbal, physical



So Far

- We have discussed moving from petition to companionship in prayer
 - Not expecting my will be done
 - But trusting Gods will be done
 - And just spending time with God during the good and the bad
 - But
- Unanswered prayers form a barrier for many to God



-A Threat to Faith-

- Of Human Bondage
 - By Somerset Maugham
- This is based on Somerset's life and his stuttering
 - This, and other, unanswered prayers led to his loss of faith



A Threat to Faith

- Phillip Yancy also mentions George Orwell
 - Orwell wet the bed as a child at boarding school
 - He prayed fervently to stop
 - It did after several beatings
- How many people lose or reject God because of similar experiences?



A Threat to Faith

- What is the common thread in these stories?
 - An unanswered prayer
 - And disappointment
- Why disappointment?
 - But “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” James 5:16
- I prayed in earnest!



-The Inconsistency Problem-

- What about all the **answered** prayer?
 - What about all the prayers **answered** but **unprayed**?
- *Prayer and Its Remarkable Answers*
- *The Wonders of Prayer: A Record of Well Authenticated and Wonderful Answers to Prayer*
 - 630 documented accounts of answered prayers



The Inconsistency Problem

- A study surveyed 5,600 people
 - 41% report frequent answers to prayer
- On and on and on
 - Prayer after prayer is answered, so many stories!
- One last one
 - The man who escaped the towers of 9/11
 - That's an answered prayer



The Inconsistency Problem

- But what about all the others who died?
- What about **ALL** the unanswered prayers
 - Is it comforting to hear of others answered prayers
 - When you are dying?
 - When your child is dying?
 - When you are being abused?



The Inconsistency Problem

- “Somehow we must offer our prayers with a humility that conveys gratitude without triumphalism, and compassion without manipulation, always respecting the mystery surrounding prayer.”
 - We can't fix how others see prayer
 - But we can work on how we see prayer



-What We Do Wrong-

- Sometimes sin disrupts communication with God
When you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will refuse to look at you; even if you offer countless
prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with
blood. Isaiah 1:15
- Sin in our lives can disrupt our prayers



What We Do Wrong

- Is there such thing as a frivolous prayer?
- Some examples:
 - You pray for a clear sunny day for the kid's game
 - Farmer prays for rain for his crops same day
- A criminal prays not to get caught
 - Making God an accessory to the crime!



What We Do Wrong

- We pray for everything
 - Change the light to green God, open a spot up
 - In your will of course
 - I'll acquiesce to you oh God
 - Because its not that big a deal
 - But when it's important, God I need you to come through
 - Not like the light stuff



What We Do Wrong

- Have we conditioned ourselves that we have two kinds of prayers?
 - The trivial and the serious prayers?
 - Is this a good thing?
- I think this lends credence to Mr. Yancy's point that our prayers should be more
 - Discussion based; relationship based
 - Then wish based



-Contradictory Prayers-

- In the American Civil War both side prayed to God
 - Both sides prayed for victory
 - Both sides could not have their prayer answered with a “Yes”
- Who does God listen to?



Contradictory Prayers

- The South's general Stonewall Jackson refused to fight on Sundays unless attacked
 - He held worship services for his troops
 - Called for days of prayer
 - "it hath pleased Almighty God, the Sovereign Disposer of events, to protect and defend the Confederate States hitherto in their conflict with their enemies, and to be unto them a shield."
- Sounds Christian



Contradictory Prayers

- Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue unto all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword ... so still must it be said that "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

President Lincoln



Contradictory Prayers

- At the end of the war Lincoln called for reconciliation
 - Not vengeance
 - For healing of the wounded
 - Caring for the widows and orphans
- Both the North and the South claimed God to be on their side
 - They were both equally convinced of their rightness



-The Blessing of Unanswered Prayers-

- What if God answered everyone's prayers?
 - There would be a lot more lottery winners!
 - Getting like \$20!
- Think of all the prayers you have prayed?
 - Are there any you would take back?
 - Sometimes unanswered prayers are a blessing



-No Fixed Formula-

- We just covered several dilemmas with prayer
 - Its inconsistency
 - Contradictions
 - When we are just in the wrong
- So, if we can get the formula just right
 - Then my prayer will be heard and granted!
 - The answer is no



No Fixed Formula

- For every account of an answered prayer, you can find one of an unanswered prayer
 - And of those unanswered prayers you will find that a lot of them meet our criteria for an answered
 - They are good, faithful Christians
 - Doing Gods work (missionaries)
 - Unselfish prayer
 - Is not contradicted by others



No Fixed Formula

- “For a missionary couple who stand beside a mound of earth in a garden in Nigeria, no logical explanation of unanswered prayer will suffice. They must place their faith in a God who has yet to fulfill the promise that good will overcome evil, that God’s good purposes will, in the end, prevail. To cling to that belief may represent the ultimate rationalization — or the ultimate act of faith.”



Prayer Dilemmas

Unanswered Prayer: Living With the Mystery

Chapter 17



Some But Not All

- Some but not all unanswered prayers trace back to:
 - A fault in the one who prays
 - God's respect for our freedom
 - Dark powers at work in our world
 - The sin in this world (Disease, violence, ...)
- With this in mind, will all your prayers be answered?
 - Even if you are in "the right"



The essence of request, as distinct from compulsion, is that it may or may not be granted. And if an infinitely wise Being listens to the requests of finite and foolish creatures, of course He will sometimes grant and sometimes refuse them. Invariable “success” in prayer would not prove the Christian doctrine at all. It would prove something much more like magic.

It is not unreasonable for a headmaster to say, “Such and such things you may do according to the fixed rules of this school. But such and such other things are too dangerous to be left to general rules. If you want to do them you must come and make a request and talk over the whole matter with me in my study. And then — we’ll see.”

C.S. Lewis



-Sweeping Promises-

- Our real problem isn't the no answer
 - It is all the promises made in the bible
- What if there was a bible verse that said:
 - "I am bestowing the gift of prayer. You must realize, of course, that humans cannot have perfect wisdom, so there are limits as to whether your prayers will be answered. Prayer operates like a suggestion box. Spell out your requests clearly to God, and I guarantee that all requests will be carefully considered."



Sweeping Promises

- But there is not a verse like that
 - We have bible verses that say:

¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

Matthew 18:19



²¹ Jesus answered them, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you tell this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done. ²² And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

Matthew 21:21–22

²⁴ Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for— believe that you have received, it and it will be yours.

Mark 11:24

¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

John 14:14



Sweeping Promises

- Some sweep these verses away as promises to the apostles
 - That seems unlikely, not all their prayers were answered
- Others explain these verse with the “fine print” clause
 - whatever you ask **in my name**
 - **If you remain** in me and my words remain in you
- This seems much more the case



Sweeping Promises

- The more we know God
 - The more we are in Gods will
 - The more our prayers will align with Gods will
- This all reinforces the relationship aspect of prayer
 - These verses give us confidence and hope in the power of God
 - If it is in Gods will all things are possible



-A Time to Wait-

- This does not mean these verses mean nothing
 - We are called to pray boldly
 - With confidence
 - Even annoyingly (The annoying neighbor)
- But some prayers require waiting
 - Let's consider these verses



The Lord is good unto them that wait for him.

Lamentations 3:25

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

Galatians 6:9



-A Time to Wait-

- This is the hardest part for many of us
 - Waiting for the thing to happen
 - But in our waiting what happens?
 - Growth, understanding, maturity
 - But sometimes nothing
 - We may die never seeing our prayer answered!
- Remember, to someone waiting
 - Telling them its good for them is not helpful



-The Surprise Factor-

- We focus on our unanswered prayers more than the answered prayers
 - We see God perform a miracle for one person
 - But then question why not over here?
- An imprisoned pastor in China thanked God for
 - “Giving him good health in harsh conditions”
 - But never questioned why the prayers for his release were not answered



-God's Smile-

- “If you want to see God smile, tell him your plans”
 - We plan out how things should go and then tell God
 - If our prayers are not answered, we ask why
 - But we may never know what the yes answer might have brought
 - But God does and smiles knowing the better choice was made



-Human Agents-

- Well God if you're not going to do anything about it, I guess I will
 - And God says, “Your prayer is answered.”
- While you're waiting for some prayers to be answered
 - Get to work



Dimly Seen

- For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12
 - In the end we can not see nor understand God fully
 - His ways are not our ways
 - We must accept that we may not ever understand everything, but we must trust



Closing Thoughts

- Prayer must be more about building a relationship with God
 - God is not our Genie to grant our wishes and desires
- I believe the deeper our relationship with God is
 - The easier it will be to
 - Wait on Him
 - And to hear no from Him



Course Outline

- **Prayer Dilemmas**

- ~~Week 7 Ch 16-17~~

- ~~Unanswered prayer, whose fault is it~~

- ~~Living with not knowing~~

- **Week 8 Ch 18-19**

- Prayer and healing

- What to pray for if not healing



We believe discipleship is a direction
not a destination.



Prayer: Does it Make a Difference

Week 7