

## When Your Prayers are Unanswered

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HDBC

A man took his small son with him to town one day to run some errands. When lunch time arrived, the two of them went to a familiar diner for a sandwich. The father sat down on one of the stools at the counter and lifted the boy up to the seat beside him.

They ordered lunch, and when the waiter brought the food, the father said, **Son, we'll just have a silent prayer.** Dad got through praying first and waited for the boy to finish his prayer, but he just sat with his head bowed for an unusually long time.

When he finally looked up, his father asked him, **What in the world were you praying about all that time?** With the innocence and honesty of a child, he replied, **How do I know? It was a silent prayer.**

Have you ever felt like that after you prayed? You just didn't feel like you connected. All was silent. Or maybe you have prayed and felt that God just wasn't listening, and if He did He was not answering.

Most of us have experienced this. **Why did God not give me what I asked for?** It's a good question, but one that must be answered not from our speculations, but from the Bible. When we do so we realize that it is not as simple as God just not answering or saying no. **In the Bible we find that there are reasons for a silent response from Heaven when we pray.**

Before we get to those reasons, let me say that I believe God always hears the prayers of His people. Sometimes He responds with **yes**. Sometimes He responds with **no**. Sometimes He responds with **wait**. We can find a way to understand those answers.

**Yes** – We've prayed according to His will.

**No** – We've have prayed outside His will and He lovingly says *no*.

**Wait** – The request is good but the timing is not right.

## But what about those times when there seems to be no response?

The Bible provides a checklist of possibilities. There are ten that I see. So, today I want to walk us through that checklist. When God seems to be silent you can work through this list and you will likely find the answer.

*God might not be responding to your prayer because . . .*

### 1. **You have not asked.** (James 4:2)

*You have not because you have asked not.*

Maybe you just think God should read your mind and give you whatever you want. He can! But He has chosen to work in response to our praying. So, maybe you have never received an answer from God because you have never really asked Him. So, do it.

As a parent there were many times when I knew exactly what my kids wanted, but I liked for them to ask. When a child comes into my office and looks longingly at my sucker jar, I still like for them to ask.

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### 2. **You ask with the wrong motive.** (James 4:3)

*You ask and do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your own pleasures.*

Your motivation matters to God. If your motive is selfish, God will remain silent. If you are asking for something and hearing nothing back from God, you need to examine your motives. **Why are you asking? What is the endgame?** It is not always easy for us to access our motives. **Ask some questions.**

**Is there a Biblical reason to make this request?**

If God says **yes**, who will benefit the most? Me, others, or kingdom?

Can I be content even if God says **no**?

You may have to dig deep into your heart or talk with a trusted believer.

**You might need to look in a mirror to access your true motives.**

A businessman in a service industry grew weary of being yelled at by dissatisfied customers. One day, he became oddly detached during a customer tirade; he felt as though he were watching a movie. He noted that her antics made her look like a monkey.

That observation gave him an idea. He posted a giant mirror behind the front desk—and the customer tirades all but ceased. When people saw how rude and hateful they looked while yelling and screaming, they stopped yelling and screaming. I wonder what it would do to our prayers if we could look into a mirror that reflected our true motives while we were praying. It would be interesting and probably helpful.

*God might not be responding to your prayer because . . .*

**3. You have unconfessed sins.** (Isaiah 59:1-2, Psalm 66:18)

*Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot save; neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.*

*If I regard (cherish) wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.*

This is the first thing we ought to check out when we sense that God is remaining silent is are harboring sin in our lives. God will often say **no** to get our attention and lead us to deal with our sin.

**Unconfessed sin short-circuits prayer.** This is what Isaiah was saying. It is not that God cannot hear you. He chooses to ignore our request, or to say no. It's one of the important ways that God deals with us when we have sin in our lives. He doesn't immediately step in with a spiritual crowbar and open us up. **He simply sits back and waits, silently.**

We can pray and pray. But until we deal with our sin God will not move an inch. He does this not to get back at us, but to call our attention to a

danger in our lives. He knows the danger of sin.

In his book *Why Prayers are Unanswered*, John Lavender retells a story of a young boy who found a big cigar, slipped into an alley, and lit up. It didn't taste good, but it made him feel very grown up...until he saw his father coming. Quickly he put the cigar behind his back and tried to be casual. Desperate to divert his father's attention, he pointed to a billboard advertising the circus. *Can I go, Dad? Please, let's go when it comes to town.* His father's reply taught him a lesson he never forgot.

***Son, never make a petition while at the same time trying to hide a smoldering disobedience.***

*God might not be responding to your prayer because . . .*

**4. You are being a bad husband. (1 Peter 3:7)**

*Husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.*

How can we have an unhindered relationship with our heavenly father when our family relationships on earth are not right. A husband who is treating his wife with disrespect will have his prayers hindered. That husband will hear **silence** from God, a lot!

Far too many men are offering hollow prayers to a God who is not ready to listen to them, because they are not treating their wives in the right way. Not loving them. Not encouraging them. Belittling them.

Husbands, if you having trouble getting answers from God, check out your attitudes and actions toward your wife.

**How often do you say and mean the following things?**

**Thank you.** I'm sorry. **You were right.** What can I do for you?

**I was wrong.** Forgive me.

*God might not be responding to your prayer because . . .*

**5. You doubt God.** (James 1:6-7)

God is very interested in developing a healthy faith in us. In fact, it is one of the things that most pleases Him in us. He is pleased when we have faith. In fact, it is impossible to please Him without it.

It would make sense then, that a lack of faith would negatively affect our praying. Not only has he encouraged us to have faith, but he points out that a lack of it will hinder our prayers.

*But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,*

This does not mean that our faith has to be completely perfect. Nor does it mean that even the slightest doubt or fear will short-circuit our praying. God understands our frailties. He knows our weaknesses. However, He does want us to have an unshakable faith in who He is and in His ability to carry out His will in our lives.

Make no mistake about this. **Doubt** is never presented in the Bible as a good thing. God understands our doubt and is gracious toward us when we doubt, **but He never wants us to stay in doubt. We are called to faith.**

*God might not be responding to your prayer because . . .*

**6. You refuse to help the poor.** (Proverbs 21:13)

*He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.*

If we refuse to listen to somebody who has a need, can we expect God to hear us when we have a need? We cannot turn a deaf ear to someone in need, because of our own selfishness, then expect God to

bless us. It doesn't work that way. And selfishness is so strongly ingrained in most of us. It is a constant battle to keep it subdued.

A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 5, and Ryan, 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson.

If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake; I can wait.' Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!"

*God might not be responding to your prayer because . . .*

**7. You refuse to forgive others.** (Mark 11:25)

*Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you.*

God cares about human relationships, especially the relationship between believers who are His children. I remember times when me and my siblings were at odds with each other and my parents insisted that we make things right. It was futile to try to get a positive response to them while we were fighting with each other.

One of the things that will help you to forgive others is to confess your own sins to God. Realize that your fellowship with God will remain strained as long as you are harboring unforgiveness toward others.

*God might not be responding to your prayer because . . .*

**8. You are ignoring the Bible.** (Proverbs 28:9)

*He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination.*

God will not answer our prayers if we are indifferent to His Word. He intends that our souls be **crushed** with a desire for His word. (Ps. 119:20). He wants us to be constantly seeking the deeper truths of His

Word. He is not interested in us **being spoon-fed spiritual morsels** the rest of our lives. Nor does He want us to rely of **spiritual finger foods**. He wants us to get the fork and knife and dig deep into the meat of His word.

*God detests the prayers of a man who has no delight in His Word. When we live with a closed Bible, we live with a closed Heaven; God will not answer our prayers. (Charles Stanley)*

These last two are not connected with specific verses but are clearly taught as principles throughout the Bible and through experiences we read about in the Bible.

*God might not be responding to your prayer because . . .*

#### **9. The timing is not right.**

The **story of Joseph** in the Old Testament is a good example of this principle. He was sold into slavery by his brothers. He remained faithful to God and he certainly prayed many times for deliverance, for years. Yet he stayed in slavery and bondage, until the timing was right. God was going to deliver him, but not before the right time.

God may have plans to give you what you are asking for, but just not right now. **Job is another example** of this in the Old Testament. He was righteous and faithful, yet God allowed Satan to take his wealth, his family, his home, his reputation and his health. And for a lengthy season Job sought answers, without hearing from God. But in God's timing, he was answered, restored and renewed.

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#### **10. God has something better for you.**

I point you to the story found in John 11. Lazarus, the friend of Jesus and brother of Mary and Martha got deathly sick and died. They sent for Jesus and He delayed coming until it was too late. They were begging for a healing miracle, but their brother died. Why? God had something

better. What could be better than a healing? **A resurrection!**

I also point you to **2 Corinthians 12**, where Paul shared that he had prayed three times for God to deliver him from his ***thorn in the flesh***. All three times God said no, but ultimately pointed out that His power was perfected in Paul's weakness. In other words God had something better in mind for Paul, than his deliverance.

**I heard this analogy and it's too good to not share.**

God is a loving father, not a vending machine.

**A vending machine always gives you what you want.**

**A loving father gives you what you need and what is best.**

***God's will might not seem good to me, but it is always good for me.***

God loves His children and wants to respond to all of our prayers. But more than that, he wants to mature us, grow us, and make us more like Jesus.

***More than giving us everything we want, He wants us to give us Himself.***

More than simply saying yes to our desires, He wants to lead us to desire Him above everything else.

***Everything He does in response to our prayers are for His glory, but also for our good.***