

The Problem of Unanswered Prayer

by Samuel Chadwick

Samuel Chadwick addresses the complexities of unanswered prayer, emphasizing God's wisdom and timing in His responses.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:8

Topics: "Unanswered Prayer", "God's Sovereignty"

Description

Samuel Chadwick reflects on the challenge of unanswered prayers, sharing personal experiences and biblical examples to illustrate that while God promises to hear our prayers, there are conditions and limitations to consider. Through the stories of Moses, Elijah, and Paul, he shows that even sincere, earnest, and believing prayers may not always be granted, but they are always answered, sometimes with a 'No' for reasons known to God's wisdom and love. Chadwick encourages believers to trust that God's timing and ways are higher, and that even in unanswered prayers, there is a divine purpose and a greater answer awaiting in God's perfect plan.

Transcript

It is many years since I first wrote on unanswered prayer. The problem became acute when the man for whom we were praying so earnestly and confidently died while we prayed. The shock of it was overwhelming. It had never occurred to us that he might die. We had claimed the promise. We were absolutely sure of the Word. I do not think my faith was ever so sorely tried. We went back to the Word, and God gave me a message that has brought consolation to many, and through all the the years it has been a stronghold for my trust. Many years have passed since then, but the truth abides, and though it may involve some repetition, I want to pass on the message to others.

The Problem

There can be no doubt that God answers prayer. On this point the Scriptures speak plainly enough. Nothing could be more definite. All men are commanded to pray, at all times, in all places and for all needs. Assurances abound that prayer is heard. The promise are explicit, and the Scriptures are full of examples and encouragement. Christ's own word is, "Every one that asketh receiveth" (Matthew 7:8). The scope of the promise is without limit of place (1 Timothy 2:8), time (Luke 18:1; 1 Timothy 4:17), or subject (John 16:23; Matthew 21:22; Philippians 4:6). Everything that concerns man is of interest to God, and is a proper subject for prayer. God does not divide our needs into sacred and secular, spiritual and material. He who taught us to pray for the forgiveness of our sins, taught us also to say, "Give us this day our daily

bread."

Yet, as we have studied the subject, it has been made clear that there are conditions and limitations. There are laws of prayer. The unrestricted promises are hedged about with conditions. We are commanded to pray for all men, but there were some for whom the prophet was forbidden to pray (Jeremiah 7:16, see also I John 5:15,16). It is possible to ask and not receive (Psalms 66:18; James 4:2,3). Prayers that lack sincerity and faith cannot be heard. This is obvious. God judges by the heart. So do we. No one grants requests where these simple elements are wanting. The sincerity must extend to both petition and petitioner. Eloquence is not prayer (Isaiah 29:13; John 9: 31, James 4:6; I John 3:22).

Are all the sincere, earnest, believing prayers of good people granted?

The answer of experience is, No. I have seen a distracted mother cling to the corpse of her child, refusing to believe it was dead. She had prayed. God had promised. She had believed. He heard, always heard. How could her child die? When at last the truth has forced itself upon her protesting mind, the distress deepens at the thought that God has, not heard. There are many such days of desperate faith. Is God angry, as in the case of David (II Samuel 12:14-23), even though there be no such cause? Can it be that He is indifferent? Can it be that He does not know? He forgotten? It was with such thoughts as these in mind that I turned to my Bible, and in the Book I found the answer in three representative cases:

- 1) Deuteronomy 3:23-35, where Moses prayed that he might go over into Canaan.
- 2) I Kings 19:4. Elijah's prayer that he might die.
- 3) II Corinthians 12:8, 9, in which Paul prayed for the removal of affliction.

These three men occupy a prominent place in Scripture, and yet each was denied his request. Their prayers are fairly representative, and cover the ground of the problem. Let us examine them in their order.

The Prayer of Moses

Moses prayed that he might be allowed to complete his work. He had undertaken it at God's command. For forty years he had nursed and led a murmuring and ungrateful people through the wilderness. The promised land was within sight. What more natural than that he should desire to see his lifework completed? Besides, in all human judgment, he could not be spared. He would be needed in Canaan even more than in the wilderness. There were enemies to be driven out, the constitution to be established, and the people to be settled. If he should leave them now, the work of forty years would fall to pieces. Internal strife would wreck the nation. No wonder he prayed that he might go over. In spite of a nation's entreaty, regardless of his record, and notwithstanding his earnest pleading, he died; died with his work unfinished; died when he seemed to be most needed; died with the hope of years at last within his reach.

Is it not often so?

A lifework is accepted as a divine appointment. The powers of brain and muscle, time and energy - all a man is goes into the task at the cost of personal comfort and ambition. You pray for your work, that God will prosper it and bless you in it. That is right. No man has a right to be in any business for which he cannot pray. God does not put a man into business for worthless or unworthy ends. He means the work to prosper; and yet how often it happens that the prayers of good men seem to fail! Plans over which they have prayed collapse. Competitors prevail. Misfortune overwhelms. Ill health disables. Death calls, and

the work of years is left unfinished and incomplete. Death at such times seems almost spiteful in its cruelty. It strikes the arm as it stretches the hand to grasp the prize; takes the parent and counselor when they can least be spared; passes by the weakly and takes the strong; strikes down the burden-bearer and spares the burden. We plead that we may stay a little longer: only a little while; just till this is completed; just till the children are grown up, or the business settled; and the answer is, "Get thee up into the top of Pisgah" -- and die. David wanted to build a house for God. His heart was set on it. God praised him for wanting to do it, but He forbade him (I Chronicles 22:8). So is many heart set with a yearning that prays and aches for a work that is withheld. The man Jesus saved with a mighty salvation prayed that he might go with Jesus, and Jesus sent him home (Luke 8:38).

Juniper Tree Prayers. Elijah was mighty in prayer. God answered all his prayers but one, and that was the prayer that he might die. He was under the juniper tree, suffering from mental and physical reaction. Yesterday had been a great day. He had stood alone as God's champion: strong, defiant, triumphant. The next day was the day after! At the threat of a woman he fled. His nerves were unstrung. Fear, despondency, and despair took hold of him. In the fret and frenzy of depression he prayed that he might die. The disease is still with us, and is so multiplied that there are not enough juniper trees to go around. There are morbid Christians who have built tabernacles under them. Nerve collapse is more spiritual than physical, though it is usually both. There is no despondency in faith. What a mercy that God does not always take us at our word! Nothing dishonors God more than the fretful despondency of the saints. Juniper trees make poor sanctuaries.

The apostle's thorn in the flesh need not detain us, for we have already dealt with the subject of prayer and affliction. The thorn was a physical affliction, and because he regarded it as a hindrance he prayed for its removal. It was not removed, though he besought the Lord thrice. He had to learn that affliction may be God's messenger, as well as the messenger of Satan.

The Answer To Unanswered Prayers

None of these prayers was unanswered. They were not granted, but they were answered, and "No" was the answer. "No" is as truly an answer as "Yes." When a request is refused, it is as truly answered as when it is granted. Refusal may be the only answer possible to love and wisdom and truth. A child may cry for a razor, and full-grown people may cry for things equally unsuitable, unsafe, and unwise. Many have lived to thank God that He withstood their agonizing entreaties at some particular time or for some particular thing that seemed indispensable.

God never refuses without reason. He knows the past, in which there may be reasons for present disqualification. Forgiven sin may disable. Moses and David were both examples of this (Deuteronomy 32:49-52; II Samuel 12:14). There are vessels that break on the wheel, and though another maybe made, the original is impossible. Diseases may be healed, but a lost limb cannot be restored. The Lord knows the future as well as the past. The immediate may imperil the future. The eagerness for a mess of pottage may involve the loss of an inheritance. Esau got the answer to his entreaty at dinner time. Jacob got his at dawn. God spared Hezekiah fifteen years, but he had better have gone when the Lord sent for him.

The Greater Includes the Less. Delays are not denials, and it pays to wait God's time. Moses got into Canaan, and Elijah went to heaven by a more glorious way than that of the juniper tree. No inspired prayer of faith is ever refused. "No" is never God's last word. If the prayer seems unanswered, it is because it is lost in the glory of the answer when it comes. God may refuse the route because he knows a better, and

He took Moses into Canaan by a better way and in better company. I have known other people who have had to go by way of heaven to find the answer to their prayers. He took Elijah to heaven by a much more wonderful way than that of the grave. He wanted to die, and God gave his tired servant sleep and rest, and sent him away to the hills for a holiday. That is His remedy for nerves: a change of air, a new vision, and a bigger job. Paul never had any use for juniper trees, and to him God said, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and He taught him to glory in affliction and adversity. In the experience that first sorely tried our faith, God sent help out of the darkness. Through the tears of a broken heart the vision came, and when the memorial card was sent it bore this text, which rebuked our unbelief, "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever." So in Glory shall we find our prayers have been interpreted according to the infinite wisdom and eternal love of God our Father who bids us pray.

Unanswered yet! The prayers your lips have pleaded

In agony of heart these many years?

Does faith begin to fail? Is hope departing?

And think you all in vain those falling tears?

Say not, the Father hath not heard your prayer,

You shall have your desire - sometime - somewhere.

Unanswered yet! Though when you first presented

This one petition at the Father's Throne

It seemed you could not wait the time of asking,

So urgent was the heart to make it known;

Though years have passed since then, do not despair,

The Lord will answer you - sometime - somewhere.

Unanswered yet! Nay, do not say ungranted,

Perhaps your work is not wholly done.

The work began when first your prayer was uttered,

And God will finish what He has begun.

If you will keep the incense burning there,

His glory you shall see - sometime - somewhere.

Unanswered yet! Faith cannot be unanswered;

Her feet are firmly planted on the Rock;

Amid the wildest storms she stands undaunted,

Nor quails before the loudest thunder shock.

She knows Omnipotence has heard her prayer,

And cries, "It shall be done - sometime - somewhere."

- E. B. Browning

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/samuel-chadwick/the-problem-of-unanswered-prayer/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net

