

**THE UNANSWERED PRAYER**  
**Personal Prayer Life**  
**Dr. George O. Wood**

For these three Sunday mornings we have been on the theme of prayer. Two weeks ago we looked at the question Why pray? Then last Sunday, How to pray every day? Today is the theme is Unanswered Prayer.

I know that's a big subject and I'm not sure it can all be handled within the time frame that we have. If we had all the time in the world I'm not sure it could be handled. I sort of would like to introduce this message with a story I heard.

I'd like to introduce this message with a story I heard on Friday night. A brilliant nuclear physicist was asked to go on a lecture tour of America universities. He agreed to go on the tour provided the agency would provide him some practical help such as a chauffeur who would just take him around and he wouldn't have to worry about getting anywhere. The chauffeur was provided. Every night the chauffeur would drive him to the hall that he was lecturing in and take a seat in the back and listen to the lecture. After hearing the lecture about eleven or twelve or thirteen times the chauffeur said to the professor one evening, "I've heard you give that speech – it's brilliant. I think now that I've heard it so many times I know it well enough I can give it myself." The scientist said, "Why don't we trade? Why don't you try that the next school we go to. They don't know you from me. You just put on my suit and I'll put on your chauffeur's uniform and we'll go in that way and see if we can carry it off."

So the chauffeur agreed to try it. The next university they came to the president met them and introduced them. The time came for the speech and the chauffeur-now-turned-scientist gets up and makes an absolutely brilliant address. He doesn't miss a lick in the whole speech. When he's done he gets thunderous ovation. He sets down and the university president gets up thanks him and says "Now it is the custom in our university after having a guest lecturer that we provide opportunity for questions. Are there any questions to ask our distinguished visitor?" A young student got up and asked a question which was so technical that it flew right over the head of the chauffeur. He was wondering how in the world he was going to handle this complicated question. He didn't even understand the vocabulary of it. But he had gotten his senses back by the time the questioner was done. He responded, "That question is so simple anybody knows the answer to that. Even my chauffeur out there can answer that question. Will you please stand and answer it?"

So I would welcome if there are any "chauffeurs" here today. I'd welcome you tackling this question Unanswered Prayer.

Why doesn't God answer my prayer?

I want to share with you seven areas of response to that question of why God doesn't answer my prayer.

The first I going to be very simple. It's going to sound like a cliché. It is a cliché but it's also the truth. I'll just state the principle and then move right on. The first principle we need to respond to when we say why doesn't God answer prayer, we need to simply say, God answers all prayer. He simply says Yes, No or Wait .

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Second response we need to make to that question is that we may not now or ever on this side of eternity know the answer to that question.

Fifteen years ago after we had first come here Jewel's came down ill and was diagnosed as having cancer. He had raised his little girls all by himself he was a widower when Jewel was two years of age and he had twin girls that were two weeks of age. He worked as a laborer in the cotton mill at minimum wage all his life and within an inch of retirement when he could have kind of kicked back and taken the rest of his life easier and enjoyed some traveling and visiting his kids which he would have loved, he was stricken with cancer. We struggled with that over a period of months. Finally he passed away. One of the things we had to cope with in our family early on was Jewel felt really bitter toward God. "Why God would you do this to my dad? Why didn't You answer prayer? How can I go on serving you as a Christian and as a pastor's wife when you don't answer prayer?"

I think we can all identify with that. If you haven't been through that struggle maybe sometime in your life you will go through that struggle. There aren't any answers. We still don't have any answers as to why he was gone at the age that he was. We have to work through and get ourselves to firmer footing. There's a process we go through to come out balanced in a time like that.

But it is a question... Why? And we do not know.

When we open the pages of scriptures to Acts 12 we find an incident there where two of the top three apostles are in prison. First James and then Peter. The church is praying. James is executed and Peter is released. We're never told why it was that God did not answer the prayers of the church for James.

We are told in Acts 7, we sort of get an idea by watching history what the purpose of Stephen's death was. It worked out for greater glory and that Saul of Tarsus was influenced through it. Ultimately that became the goad in his conscious that drew him to Christ. But with James he's just gone. Never a reason given.

Cecil Osborne has said, The world is full of people searching for one simple answer. Hope is held out that perhaps astrology or transcendental meditation or a new guru or some new charismatic religious leader may provide the simple answer. The longer I live the more I'm willing to come to terms with the inexorable fact that trees and human beings grow slowly. It's not always a matter of microwave spirituality. You get an instant answer. Human beings grow slowly and we work through things just like trees. So we may have to be content not knowing on this side of eternity.

There's a third response to the question, Why doesn't God answer my prayer? God does not answer Yes to some prayers because of the Law of Internal Contradiction.

What do I mean by that? I mean God tracks our prayers and sometimes our prayers are inconsistent with one another. So if the Lord is going to answer all of our prayers he's going to have to decide on some occasions which ones to answer No and which ones to answer Yes.

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For example, Augustine, the great 4<sup>th</sup> century church father was before he became a Christian was an educated pagan. He was well versed in the philosophy of his day and the morals of his day. His mother was a devout believer. She prayed continually for Augustine's salvation. One day Augustine came to her and told her he was moving to Rome. She begged him not to go to Rome. Thought Rome would corrupt him even more and prayed to God that he would not go to Rome. But he went to Rome anyway. In the process of going to Rome in Rome he is reached and won for Christ. His mother's been praying, "Lord, save him but don't let him go to Rome." That was a law of internal contradiction. He needed to get to Rome in order for the grace of God to touch him there.

Maybe you're prayed like I have prayed, "Make me more like Jesus." Then there comes an opportunity in life where I really have a moment that I can be made more like Jesus. I'm praying something entirely different in the practical circumstance that I'm facing. The law of internal contradiction. Is there anything that I'm asking for now which is in contradiction to other more fundamental praying that I have made about being a disciple of the Lord and following him and Lord, have your will in my life.

A fourth reason God does not answer Yes to some prayers is because of the Law of External Contradiction. That is two people are praying for diametrically opposite things. And God cannot say Yes to both.

We were in Israel a few weeks ago. On the plane out of New York there were other tour groups. One had a number of people and when we landed in Israel our group went up to Jerusalem and theirs went to Galilee. I was praying for good weather. There's nothing like being able to see Israel in good weather. And we had good weather. But up in Galilee it rained cats and dogs for two solid days. He other tour group got rained on. I was talking with our tour guide and said, "I sure am glad that God answered our prayers." She said, "which prayers is God going to answer? The farmers here are praying for rain. There's a real drought." I'm saying I'm more spiritual than that other group because we got good weather and they got rain. The farmers were praying for rain. Who had the more basic need? The farmers with the need for rain or the tour group. The Law of External Contradiction applies when we pray for someone else's salvation. God will not override their own free will. Although our prayers he will use as an instrument in bringing them face to face with the conviction of the Holy Spirit. God will not yet override their will.

A fifth reason that God does not say yes to all of our prayers is because of the Law of Cause and Effect. The Law of Cause and Effect forbids us at times to short circuit processes that God uses normally.

For example if I get up in the morning and I kneel at my bed and pray, "Lord, make me a millionaire today." Obviously the way to become a millionaire is to invest and work and not play games of chance. So you have to invest and work but that's not done in 24-hours. It may be a lifetime to do that. He doesn't omit his laws of cause and effect.

God cannot say yes to our prayer to live in this life forever. There's a law of cause and effect. Sin brings death and therefore all of us have a judgment on us that's biological. A time bomb ticking away. God as chosen within his law not to grant eternal life to us in this sinful body which we have. Without us going through translation or resurrection God cannot and will not answer that prayer because of the Law of Cause and Effect he's placed into motion.

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A sixth reason that God does not say yes to some of our prayers is because those prayers are outside of his will.

How does a prayer get outside of the will of God?

Really two things we can say. Sometimes we are out of the will of God in asking it. Sometimes it's plainly not God's will to grant it.

What does the scripture say to us about being out of the will of God in praying. We're out of his will in praying if we have unconfessed sin in our life. Psalm 66:18 says "If I have cherished sin in my heart the Lord would not have listened. Isaiah 59:2 says "But your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear." God purposes when we come to him in prayer we first seek that cleansing of the heart. 1 Peter 3:7 tells husbands to be considerate as they live with their wives and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you in the gracious gift of life so that nothing will hinder your prayers. That is, he's saying, husbands your prayers can be cut off if you live inconsiderably or with sin in respect to how you should be treating your wife. That also I think works the other way around.

The Lord tells us over and over again that if we're out of sorts in our relationship with people then we're really not cleared up in our relationship with him. One of the ways to be an effective prayer is to look at the enmity or anger that is between us and another.

Another way we can be out of the will of God is not asking in faith. James 5:15 tells us that the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned it will be forgiven. Faith being a requirement for healing prayer. It's not to day that every person who is ever prayed for will be made immediately physically well. But if there is to be wellness it must be accompanied by a prayer of faith.

Wrong motives can sometimes hinder us and keep us out of the will of God. When we pray, James 4:3 says when you ask you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. Hypocrisy can be a way that we're out of God's will like the Pharisee of Luke 18 who said that he was in wonderful shape with God and the publican standing there said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." God did not hear the one for his posturing in prayer and that's hypocrisy.

An unforgiving spirit may also keep us out of God's will. Matthew 5:23-25 and Matthew 6:15. Then all praying too must be in Christ's name, John 14:13 "I will do whatever you ask in my name." This is not so to speak remembering to add the name of Jesus as a P.S. of a prayer – by the way, Jesus, this is in your name. But to ask in his name means the prayer understands the character of God and the character of Jesus and what he would truly stand behind.

These are conditions that the Bible puts on us in terms of praying in God's will.

We look at our own life. Is there anything that is amiss?

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Then we need to recognize too that sometimes it's not us at all but it's God's will not to answer the prayer in the way we have asked him too because he has other purposes in mind that we do not see. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had this experience in Daniel 3. They prayed for the Lord to deliver them from the fiery furnace but they obviously had faith in God because they said, "But if not we'll serve you anyway." God was more glorified by what he allowed them to go through.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7-11 has this thorn in the flesh, which is literally a stake in his skin. It's the idea of a prong that's pressing him. Many people think it was pressing migraine headaches. No one knows for sure. I think the reason why no one knows for sure is that God doesn't want us to know for sure. We've all had thorns in the flesh. Those who say that the thorn came because Paul had sin in his life or didn't have faith are close to blaspheming God. Here is a person whom the Holy Spirit laid his hand upon to write for us the scripture. He's giving us something vital about praying and saying that sometimes we may ask God and he says no. But if he says no he says no he says to us, "My grace is sufficient for you." If I don't give you what you ask you'll find nevertheless that I am sufficient for what you need.

There is a beautiful prayer that Paul prays in Romans 1 that also God doesn't say yes to. And he doesn't say no to like he does with the thorn in the flesh. It's the time when God says to him Wait. In Romans 1, he is praying that in God's will he might visit the saints in Rome. When he's writing that letter he's writing from Corinth. Immediately after writing that letter he gets on a boat and heads to the east and winds up in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem he is arrested and imprisoned in Palestine for two years. Then put on a prison ship and wrecked in the winter in the Mediterranean and stranded, marooned on an island. It's a full 3 years or more after he writes the Roman letter before he arrives. God did not answer his prayer to go right away.

Paul had also prayed that when he got there he might strengthen the Roman believers and give to them some spiritual gift. When he arrives in Rome the year is 61 A.D and the Nero persecution is coming up three years later when Christians are going to go through a terrible fire of persecution. The Lord in helping that Roman church get ready for the persecution lets the choice apostle Paul go through his own personal fire. That out of it he might instruct the church how to face suffering and give to it the letters of Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon which tell us God is with us no matter what.

So the delay was occasioned so that some greater purpose of God might be taking place in his life.

So if God says no if it's out of his will it could relate to us or it could relate somewhat to his purposes.

There are even accounts in scripture where people have persisted and kept on praying even though God said No and God because he respected their persistence answered Yes even though he knew that the answer would not be good. He nevertheless people what they asked because of their persistence.

For example the children of Israel. In the wilderness they asked for meat instead of manna. Psalm 116 gives us the interpretation of that. When God gave them their meat it says he gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul.

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And Hezekiah, 2 Kings 20, asked when God told him to get your affairs in order. You're going to die. Hezekiah said, Please, I don't want to die. And he begged God. He begged him to give him 15 more years and finally God said ok. But in that fifteen years Manasseh was born to him. And Manasseh became the worst king the country ever had. Hezekiah lived. But he lived outside God's will and people paid a horrible price for it.

So sometimes we have not because it is out of God's will. Either we're out of God's will or God does not intend it because he has some other purpose in mind.

The seventh reason we need to advance as to why God does not say Yes to our prayers is that sometimes an answer might be delayed by hindering spiritual forces.

Daniel tells us about this in Daniel 10 in a very mystical passage that I'm not sure I even know all that it means. But he simply prayed a prayer. When the messenger gets through with an answer to his prayer it's 21 days. The messenger relates how he had been hindered in the heavenly realms in getting back with the answer.

Paul says in Ephesians 6:12 "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against rulers, against authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." We're in for a fight. Sometimes the consequence of that spiritual struggle is that there is not instantaneous answers. It involves wrestling something through to a conclusion.

I don't want you going away from here this morning saying, Pastor Wood gave us a message on why God doesn't answer prayer. You will miss me and you will be damaging your faith if you go away with that impression. I want to say very factually and scriptural here's what the Bible itself tells us why God doesn't say yes to all of our prayers. But at the same time we know that the scripture continually encourages us nevertheless to pray. Jesus is at the lead in that. He teaches us perseverance in prayer. He says, "Go on asking, go on seeking, go on knocking." In Luke 18:1 of his parable of the widow who beseeches the judge to redress this injustice which she has experienced. Jesus tells that parable that we should always pray and not give up. The writer of Hebrews in chapter 12:3-4 tells us "Consider Jesus who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary or lose heart in your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. Christ resisted and struggled and you haven't yet resisted as much as he and struggled as much as he so don't abandon the struggle. Keep on struggling.

James 5:16 reminds us that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Hebrews 11:32-38 reminds us of the two groups of God's people who pray. Those who pray and with faith shut the mouths of lions and subdue kingdoms. And great and mighty victories occur because of them. Then those who are stoned and sawn asunder and dwell homeless and destitute in caves and hunted down as the refuse of the world. Both of these are pray. Both of them have faith.

Prayer is vital. If we are to see God answer yes it's vital because there are many things God withholds unless we pray. We looked at that two weeks ago. But prayer is also vital for us if God says no to our prayer or wait to our prayer. Because if we quit praying what happen is our

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spirit begins to dry up and we then do not become capable of dealing with life in the manner in which God wants for us.

I brought an illustration. I have in my hand a dead branch, a dead stick. I want it to represent our life if we go without prayer and there's some adversity that comes against us. The dead stick breaks. Because there's no life fluid in it. But on the other hand if we're a green shoot and have flexibility we can bend with the adversities in life. Prayer is that kind of vitality that keeps us flexible and keeps us living and lets us go through times and maybe things aren't working out all right but instead of being snapped and broken off by those adversities we have some flex. And we can get on. We can see God work in deeper purposes in our life.

Pray at all times

Lord, we thank you that when we call upon you, you always hear us. There is no prayer of the heart, no prayer of the lips that comes unanswered in your presence. In you we live and move and have our being. Lord, each of us in this room if we've prayed at all know that there are times in our life where we've been sorely tested in this matter of prayer. What we've prayed for did not happen. But given enough time and as we stay open to you we find that even though you've said no on that occasion we become stronger in you. You promise never to leave us or forsake us. We remember that some things in life are like Elijah's problems and he needed to pray again. It may be that some within our body that's here today have become discouraged in prayer and have dropped out of praying. Help us Lord to pray again and to seek you and your strength helping us in prayer. We thank you Lord. Amen.