

“Why Prayers are Not Answered”-John 16:24, Ephesians 3:20, James 4:3

Do you all remember the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes? Calvin a precious six-year-old boy and his stuffed tiger friend Hobbes. Both named after John Calvin, a theologian, and Thomas Hobbes and English philosopher. In one strip it is late November, and Calvin is waiting with his sled for the first big snowfall. He waits and waits – but all he finds is brown grass...and no snow. So, he says, “If I was in charge, we’d never see grass between October and May. “Then looking at the heavens, he says, “On three,’ ready? One...two... three. Snow!” Nothing happens, and the little boy is downcast. Again, he yells, “Snow!” Again, nothing happens. Now thoroughly disgusted with God’s failure he shouts, “Ok then, don’t snow! See if I care. I like this weather. Let’s have it forever.” But his defiance doesn’t last long because in the next frame we find him on his knees offering this prayer: “Please snow! Please? Just a foot! Ok, eight inches! That’s all. C’mon. Six inches, even! How about 4 inches? “

In the next frame, we see him running in a circle, head down, fists clenched. Finally, Calvin is exhausted, his energy spent, his prayer unanswered, with snow nowhere in sight. In the final frame, he looks up at God and cries out in utter desperation, “Do you want me to become an atheist?”

Many of us have felt just like that only they have prayed for more important things than a few inches of snow. Some people have felt like that little boy and in frustration and desperation daring why God had not answered their prayers.

We are finishing this morning a series of sermons on prayer and this morning I want to conclude with a sermon on why sometimes our prayers are not answered. Of all the things that weigh us down, perhaps no burden is greater than the silence of God. The writer of Psalm 10 writes, “Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” A great many believers struggle with the issue of unanswered prayer. Sometimes we don’t know the mystery of why this is. So, what might be some of the reasons why our prayers might go unanswered?

First, when we pray, we tend to focus exclusively on the answers; God wants us to focus on him. Sometimes God doesn't answer our prayers because his no is better than his yes. What would happen if God answered all our prayers all the time in the exact way we prayed? Forget for the moment that some of our prayers are foolish and shortsighted. If God answered all our prayers the way we always would want him to, would that produce spiritual maturity in our lives? If God always answered our prayers, eventually our trust would be the answers and not in God. We might take God for granted. Unanswered prayer forces us to trust in God alone.

Second, our prayers might go unanswered because we doubt. Let's be honest if we can. Sometimes when we pray we go through the motions of praying for something or someone but deep down we really don't think an answer from God will be forthcoming. We have doubts. The writer James says, "But when they ask, they must believe and not doubt, because they who doubt are like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person will not receive anything from the Lord." When we pray, we are to trust that God will do the very best for us in our lives through trusting him with our prayers. Paul wrote a wonderful verse that we read a few moments ago, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." This verse has been a great encouragement in my life. As we trust God with everything through our prayers and not doubt, God is and will do more for us than we can only imagine.

Third, sometimes our prayers are not answered because we pray with the wrong motives. Sometimes we are not sincere in our requests to God. Sometimes our prayers are out of selfishness. It's all about us and our wants. God is in the business of meeting our needs and not always our wants. There are other reasons why prayers go unanswered. Praying contrary to God's will. Self-righteousness, refusal to help others, disobedience to God, to name a few.

So, what do we do when our prayers are not answered? First, keep on praying as long as you can. Sometimes God's answers are delayed for reasons we do not know. One woman prayed for her husband to come to know Jesus for 59

years. Several months before he died he did just that. Don't you think his wife would have become so discouraged because year after year she prayed and nothing happened? What if she had stopped praying after 37 years? So, pray, pray, and keep on praying.

Second, give God the right to say no. In the ultimate sense, God already has that right, whether we acknowledge it or not. But if we never acknowledge that God has the right to say no to us, we will be filled with anger, frustration, and despair. How much wiser it is to say, "Lord, I'm praying this prayer from the bottom of my heart, but even as I pray I confess that you have the right to say no if you think that is the best." Jesus gave us a great example of us when he was praying in the Garden before his capture. He prayed, "O God if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done." Let God be God. Give him the right to say no.

Third, keep on doing what you know to be right. In the darkness of unanswered prayer, we might be tempted to give up on God. We might feel like giving up and checking out. Keep on praying, keep on believing, keep on reading the Bible, keep on obeying God, and keep on following God.

Sometimes it's better that our prayers are not answered immediately. Sometimes it is better if they are not answered at all. The great question is not, "How can I get my prayers answered?" The great question is, "What will it take to draw me closer to God."

As we conclude this series on prayer let me close by reminding us five things that happen when we pray. First. Prayer helps us to deepen our relationship with God. Second. Prayer forces us to wait. Part of prayer is always waiting for God. When God answers with a yes or a no it's a no brainer. It's tough when God asks us to wait. Prayer forces us to be on God's timetable. Third, prayer opens our spiritual eyes. Prayer opens our eyes, enabling us to see what God is doing and to see things we are blinded to without prayer. Prayer allows God to show us things we need to do and to be. Fourth, prayer aligns our heart with God's heart. Fifth, prayer enables us to move forward. Prayer engages God, enables God's people, and enlarges his kingdom. Prayer accomplishes a whole lot.

What does your prayer life look like this morning? Are you persistent in prayer? Are your prayers filled with passion or are they perfunctory? Are our prayers filled with intensity or are they weak and lacking in faith? What about gratitude? How much time do we spend thanking God for all his blessings? Who are you praying for? Along with needs of people do we pray that people will grow closer and deeper to God?