

This is week 2 of a series called, "Why". We are wrestling with different "why" questions that so many people ask about God.

For example, last week we thought about the question, "Why don't I always feel God's presence?" Next week, we are going to talk about what quite honestly might be the most commonly asked question maybe in the history of the world that pertains to God and it falls within the genre of "Why doesn't God seem fair?" Or as we ask it, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Have any of you ever wondered something like that in your life? And then the last week, we're going to talk about, "Why would God use someone like me? With all of my problems, all of my doubts, all of my fears, all of my insecurities, all of my sinfulness, why would God use someone like me to make a difference in this world?"

Today though, we are going to talk about one of the more commonly asked questions by those who pray or those who are Christians and that's the question, "Why didn't God answer my Prayer?"

If you've prayed a lot, if you're a person of faith, chances are at some point you asked God to do something that you knew God could, you thought He should, He didn't. And if you're like a lot of people, it rattled your faith and you're wondering, "Why didn't God do what I asked Him to do?" especially in light of some verses in the Bible like this one, [John 14:13-14](#) says, Jesus said: *I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

You read a verse like that and you think, "Well, I asked in the name of Jesus and I know God could and He didn't do it." And then you read about other stories in the Bible like Joshua who prayed that the sun would stand still and it did for a day. And Daniel in the Lions' Den with hungry lions everywhere and he prayed and hungry lions went on a diet. And Jonah, who got thrown into an ocean and he prays and God sends a giant fish who swallows him up, carries him safely to shore, vomits him up on the shore and you're reading all of this going, "They prayed and things like that happened and I prayed and nothing happened! Why didn't God answer my prayer?"

How many of you have ever asked a question similar to that at some point in your life? A lot of us have. So often, I tell the faith-building, answered-prayer stories, because God has answered so many prayers that I've prayed and many of you have prayed really in supernatural ways, but I don't always tell the unanswered prayer stories. I'll tell you one today: for the last few years I have been praying regularly for 300 people to be meeting in this place. All that has happened is that

we've gone from around 145 – 120. Other good things have happened, but why would God not help us get those people here?

The reality is for so many of you, you've got things much bigger than a football game gone bad or a little sore arm, but you might have prayed for someone that they would be healed of some sort of a disease or illness and then they weren't. And you knew God could do it and God didn't do it.

Or may for you, you've prayed for someone to come to know Christ and the harder you prayed it seemed like the further away they got from Him. And you end up asking the question, "Why God did you not answer my prayer?"

What I want to do today is I want to try to bring some possible Biblical reasons as to why God didn't answer all of our prayers. And just like every week in this series, I have to say very clearly, I can't bring definitive and specific answers to every single example, I would be crazy and borderline arrogant to try to do so. But what I want to do is I want to raise some potential Biblical reasons as to why maybe God didn't answer some of our prayers.

So, let's look at four different possible reasons as to why God didn't answer our prayer. The first one is this:

1. Maybe it's because you have a broken relationship.

Maybe you have a broken relationship. And some of you are saying, "Ha? What in the world does that have to do with prayer?"

Well, let me show you a couple of verses; one that speaks to this indirectly, the other speaks very, very directly. And what we're going to see as we look at multiple different Scriptures and stories is that our horizontal relationships very much matter and impact our vertical relationship. Our relationships with other people very much matter in our relationship with God. Let's look at the words of Jesus in **Mark 11:24-25**, Jesus said: *Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.*

Now wait a minute, Jesus is talking about you praying and then suddenly He says, 'If you've got a horizontal relationship that's not right, let's deal with that first as you're praying to me'.

Where else would Scripture talk about something like this? Well, First John says this, the Bible says very clearly: **1 John 2:9** *Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.*

You can't go around giving all of this, "Oh, I love God, I love God and yet, I hate every single one of those no good, low down, pathetic people!"

God says your horizontal relationships impact your vertical relationship. Where else does Scripture say it? You can read about this in Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus said: ²³ *So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you,* ²⁴ *leave your gift there in front of the altar. Make peace with that person, then come back and offer your gift to God.*

In other words, you're coming to give something as an act of worship, but you get to the altar and then you remember that someone is angry at you – go and sort it out.

Now, you'll notice (pic of angry man) it doesn't specify if it's slightly irritated, or if it's completely raging, foaming at the mouth anger, or somewhere in between. And how do you know if someone is angry at you? It might be obvious, but it might not. It might also be the case that you can't fix it, regardless of how much you apologise. Does that mean you should never come back to worship?

Obviously not. The point is that our horizontal relationships impact our vertical relationships. To some level or another, Scripture seems to be pretty clear that our relationships matter in prayer.

Now, those are all indirect examples, let me show you a real direct example. I don't know if you've ever known kind of a mister spiritual guy who acts all spiritual in some places and then is a jerk at home. You know he's all, "Praise the Lord, halleluiah! I'm a Sunday school teacher teaching through the Book of Revelation at my church!" And then he goes home and he's a total first class arrogant bampot to his wife and kids. Here's what Scripture says that kind of behaviour will do to your prayer life; Scripture says this, **1 Peter 3:7** ⁷ *The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honour them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground.*

Be good husbands. Honour your wife, delight in her. Treat her as an equal - why? – so that your prayers don't run aground, or, in a different translation, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Why didn't God answer my prayer? Well maybe you have a broken relationship.

The second possible reason is:

2. Maybe you have the wrong motives when you pray.

Maybe you've got the wrong motives. **James 4:3** says: *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your own pleasures.*

Right like, I don't know how many people are praying, "God, help me win the lottery! Oh God, help me win the lottery! Oh God help me, in Jesus' name! If I just win this I'll give ten percent to the church I promise!" And someone else says, "I'll give twelve percent!" Someone says, "I'll give fifty percent God! Oh, think of how much good I could do if I give fifty percent of the lottery to the church!"

I suspect God may say, "**You're praying with** the wrong motives!"

The Pharisees did this all of the time! The Pharisee would stand out on the street corner and they would go, "Hey," watch this, "Hey Heavenly Father, you're so..." and they would pray long and loud showy prayers because they were praying for the applause of people and not for genuine hearts before God.

Or, if you're like me it could be, "Lord, you remember all those books I was supposed to read for this exam, well, it would be great if you would give me total recall, even although I didn't actually read them."

"God, why didn't you answer my prayer?"

Maybe you're praying with the wrong motives!

Now you may say, "But my motives are right, my motives are pure!" You know, "I'm praying for my favourite football team to win and I've got a hundred pounds on and I need them to win!"

Sometimes we're not so clear on what our motives really are. Again, I can't judge the motives but God can and here's what Scripture says in Proverbs 16:2 *All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord.*

Why didn't God answer my prayer? Well:

1. Maybe I have a broken relationship.
2. Maybe I have wrong motives.

The third thing is:

3. Maybe you don't believe God will do it.

Maybe you don't really believe that God is going to answer your prayer.

Mark 9, is a really important story about a dad who had a son that was possessed with an evil spirit. Now, anyone who is a parent can know just the trauma, the emotional burden this would give them. And so, this dad was like, 'I will do anything for him to be healed!'

Mark 9:17 A man in the crowd answered, 'Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.'

²¹ Jesus asked the boy's father, 'How long has he been like this?' 'From childhood,' he answered. ²² 'It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.'

And Jesus seems maybe offended, or perhaps hurt, I'm not sure; but he says: ²³ "If you can?" said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for one who believes.'

Now, I want to be really careful here and I want to say this, your faith matters when you pray, it does. Over and over again Jesus says, 'It was done unto them according to their faith.' It's impossible to please God without faith. If you have a little bit of faith, you can say to this mountain, "Be removed!" Your faith matters, it really does. The challenge is, there are a lot of people who call themselves Christians who really don't believe God is going to do anything when they pray. It's like the pastor and the bar owner in an old classic story. The pastor was upset because a new bar was opening up down the street from the church. The pastor was worried about the effect it might have on the community and so, the church had prayer meetings to pray against the bar. One day, not long after it opened, lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground. So, the bar owner sued the church. And when they were standing before the judge the judge said, "What happened?"

And the bar owner said, "This pastor and his church prayed and because of his prayers God struck us!"

And the pastor's like, "No, no, no, no, no, no! We didn't mean anything by that! It was just a harmless prayer meeting, that's not why lightning struck, it's not our fault!"

And the bar owner said, "Yes it is!"

And the judge looked and said, "I can't believe what I'm hearing! Here we have a bar owner that believes in the power of prayer and a pastor who doesn't!"

Right? How often do we have people who call themselves Christians who don't really believe in the power of prayer? The reason I know they don't is because you can hear it in their language. You know, "Well, it's really bad; we've done everything we can do! Now, all we can do is pray!"

Now here's what I'm not saying; in the Christian world this won't mean anything to some of you, but some of you it will. There's a teaching that's often been called like word-faith teaching. And that means if you just say the words and you just believe, and if you have enough faith God's got to do whatever you say.

For example, if you're a single guy and there's a cute Christian girl and you name her and claim her in Jesus' name, then she's going to say yes to you even if you're really, really weird! Okay, that's what people tend to believe. If I just pray enough and have faith for healing then God's got to do it. Let me just remind you, God is not your cosmic sugar daddy! He's not a cosmic vending machine where you select what you want, put in your prayer, and whatever you asked for pops out. God is not there to serve us; we're there to serve Him!

People get all upset you know, "I prayed for grandma! I prayed and thought she'd be healed and you know, she was 99 and God didn't heal her!" Like, she's 99; she's got to die sometime! It's been proven, one out of one people die, it's a fact! It's just going to happen! You can do yoga, you can do Pilates, or your jogging, you can eat organic food and blend in your spinach and super greens; you're still going to die; you're just going to die with a horrible taste in your mouth, but you're going to die eventually!

And here's what I want to say and I want to be really clear, is that just because you have all this faith doesn't mean that God's got to do it, but at the same time I want to say, your faith does matter. It does matter and I can't explain all of the nuances of that, that's something that only God can. But maybe God didn't answer your prayer because you were kind of half-hearted and you really didn't think He could. Scripture again talks about this in **James 1:6-7** *But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.*

Why didn't God answer my prayer? Well, maybe I've got some relationships that aren't where God wants them to be. Or maybe my motives aren't quite pure, or maybe I don't really have faith to believe God would do it.

Now, some of you right now, you're probably doing what I would be doing if I'm listening to this. I'm going, "Okay, at that time I did pray, I think my relationships were good as far as I know. I think as far as I can tell my motives were right on this and I really did believe God could and would do it. Why didn't God answer my prayer?"

Well, the fourth reason is this:

4. Maybe God has something different.

Maybe God has something different. And I hope you know that God's will matters more than our will. His will really matters. Even though we think we know what's best, even though in our mind this is the right thing, God's will matters. And we have confidence in this, **1 John 5:14-15** says: *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.*¹⁵ *And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.*

I love this, that we have the confidence of knowing that if we ask anything according to His will that He hears us and we will have what we ask of Him. We have the confidence to know if we're asking God for something outside of His will; even though we believe it's best, even though we believe it's right, even though we're certain this is what God should do, He loves us enough not to give us something that is not according to His will.

In fact, in the New Testament the Apostle Paul, if you know who He was and if you know his story, he wrote two-thirds of the New Testament. If there was anyone that God should have answered all of his prayers, in my opinion it was the Apostle Paul, all day long! One who suffered, suffered righteously and served God faithfully; and yet, if you read his story, he said, 'I had this thorn in my side', and we don't know what it was. Some people guess and have some ideas, but we don't know what the thorn was. And he said, 'I pleaded with the Lord three times..' and what that means is, 'Man, I fought the Lord and I prayed and I begged over and over and again, and God did not do what I knew He could do, didn't do what I thought He should do.' Instead, God did something different that was not Paul's plan, wasn't Paul's idea, wasn't what Paul would have ever picked, and God said, 'In my sovereignty in this case, I want you to learn that my grace is enough, my grace is sufficient for you.' And in whatever way, that would have done something supernatural in Paul that would have empowered him to become the

person that God created him to be. Paul would have not liked that answer, he wanted it healed, but God had something different for him that was in God's sovereign plan and goodness.

Pastor and author, Craig Groeschel, tells a story about this. About nine years ago, my wife's brother David who was 34, went into the hospital on Christmas Eve for a real serious sickness that he had. We prayed and prayed like crazy, prayed and prayed like crazy, prayed and prayed like crazy that God would heal him and we had seen God heal people in much worse condition than David was. About three weeks later God didn't heal him according to the way we prayed and Amy's brother died at the age of 34. Honestly, it's almost embarrassing for me to say, but I thought, "Okay God, after all I'm doing for you, why wouldn't you just do that for me?" That's embarrassing to say, but that's kind of what I thought. You know like, "If you're going to do it for anybody, you can do it for those who are really trying to make a difference for you. What's up with this God?"

As best I could I went and helped with the funeral and I invited people to know the Christ that had set David free from his sinful lifestyle and be transformed. So many people came to Christ, it was stunning! One of them was Amy's uncle, who we had prayed for for years and there was no sign. He was miraculously transformed and is now a very active part of our church, a strong Christian. I mean, I'm talking about, how in the world did God change so many lives through this one 34-year old kid, I have no idea. Several years went by and I asked my wife, "If you could undo all that God did to have your brother back, would you undo it to get him back?"

She didn't even hesitate, she said, "No, no, no, no, no!" She said, "We'll be together in heaven again before long, this life is a blink; after all God did, there is no way I would undo that to have my brother back."

I just remember, it just hit me again like it has a million times before, no matter what I want God is still good, He really is, He really, really is. I'm telling you, He really, really is. You're hurt and you're disappointed, I understand. Okay, I do, I understand and I'm here to tell you, God's good, He's good.

Let me summarize it this way and then we'll pray. What do I believe about prayer? Let me just tell you what I believe about prayer:

Prayer reminds me that I'm not in control and it keeps me close to the One who is.

Prayer is not so much about my wants as it is God's will. It's not, "God, do what I want, do what I want, do what I want!" as much as it is getting to know God. I mean the fact that the God of the universe gives me access to Him. To know Him

through prayer is one of the most difficult things even for my finite mind to even comprehend.

Anytime that I pray and something doesn't go the way I want, or there's a big prayer need that I have, I try to think of this story and maybe this will speak to you. Daniel 3 talks about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Three teenage boys that stood before the evil King Nebuchadnezzar; he said, 'Bow down and worship my god, renounce your God from throwing you into the fiery furnace.' And these boys facing death, okay, we're talking real problems; not a sore arm, we're talking real problems, here's what they said, they said:

Daniel 6:17-18 *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.'*

So, you want to know what I believe about prayer?

I believe God can; I believe all things are possible with God and He can answer my prayer. I believe God will; I believe He is a good God who desires to bless His children. I believe He can, I believe He will; but even if He doesn't, I still believe. Even if He doesn't, I still believe.