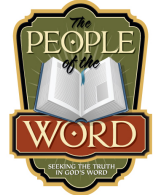


IS GOD LISTENING TO MY PRAYERS?

Luke 11:5-13

Every one of us have at one time or another had that sense that God is not listening, that He is not responding, that God is busy elsewhere to be attentive to our needs.



How many of us can relate to the Psalmist plea?

Psa. 10:1, *Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*

13:1, *How long will you hide your face from me?* Psa. 22:1...*why have you forsaken me?* 22:2...*I cry out by day, but you do not answer.*

Our pleas...

- My marriage isn't getting any better.
- There is no healing for my or my loved ones illness on the horizon
- My children and or grand-children are not walking with you
- The career-outlook is not looking any more promising
- My consuming desire for alcohol or gambling or not the next shining thing is not going away.

I have a god-son who lives on my street, he comes over periodically and we chat around the firepit about things the bother him, concern him. One of his deepest concerns is this one – why does it seem like God isn't listening to my prayers?

I'd like you to turn to Luke chapter 11 where Jesus tells a story on the heels of *The Lord's Prayer* for anybody who has ever been frustrated by the experience of prayer. I don't know if this parable has an official name, so I named it, "**The Parable Of The Grouchy Neighbor**" I'll give the end at the beginning in the form of an outline if you'd like to write in the margins of your bible.

11:5 – Is God listening?

11:7 – Disappointment

11:8 – Development

11:10 – Devoted

It's a story about a friend, who had a friend, who had a friend.

The story begins when Friend #1 has an unexpected problem, he has an unexpected out of town guest show up at his front door at midnight, and the friend was hungry for something to eat, and he had no food in the house. I don't know if you have ever had someone show up knocking on your door when you're sound asleep, It rarely, if ever, good news.

In an attempt to be a good host he sneaks out and goes next door to Friend #3's house to try to ask for some food...WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? IT'S MIDNIGHT!!!

Recap: Friend #1 goes to Friend #3's house, to get some food to share with his unexpected guest, Friend #2 whose been traveling.

So he knocks on the door....and Friend #3 wakes from his sleep, wipes the sleep out of his eyes, looks out the window and sees Friend #1, his neighbor and says to him, probably in a loud whisper, "What do you want? It's midnight."

And Friend #1 cups his hands and says, "I know, I'm really sorry to bother you, but Friend #2 came into town unexpectedly. He'd been traveling all day. We ate up all we had for dinner tonight. And I need some bread right now. Can you loan me a few loaves so we can all get back to sleep?"

But Friend #3 doesn't want to get up, wake up the rest of his family and be bothered by the request.

And so he responds, Luke 11:7, *"Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything."*

Now let's stop there for a little bit....That had to be a frustrating experience for Friend #1 who was desperate.

My guess is that when it comes to prayer, all of us in this room today fall into one of three different groups and the first group is one that all of us have been in at one time or another. We've been....

1. Disappointed Prayers (11:7)

You had a problem; a need; a challenging situation; a crisis...and your natural instinct was to pray...so you prayed to God, but it felt like no one was home; like God wasn't listening or responding to your request. You relate quickly to the Psalmists and their frustrations.

I'll tell you, I've prayed hundreds of prayers in my lifetime that at the time left me a disappointed prayerer.

- I've prayed for guidance at critical crossroads in my life and sometimes felt nothing.
- I've prayed for my mother in law's healing from cancer, and for my father in law's healing from cancer, but they both died relatively young, and we miss them.
- I've prayed for a relationship with my dad, he doesn't seem interested.

Haven't you been there?

- You sat next to the hospital bed and pleaded with God to sustain the life and restore the health of someone you couldn't imagine living without.
- You begged God to miraculously remove your son or daughter's addiction.
- You've pleaded that God would reach down like He did to Lydia in the 16th chapter of Acts and opened your loved one's heart to the Gospel.
- You asked God for that new job; that pay raise; for your business to stay afloat just 6 more months.

My guess is that everyone of us in this room at one time or another has been disappointed by prayer.

Now. To lighten the mood just a little bit, I laughed at the greeting card that says on the cover, *"You are the answer to my prayers."* Then you open it up and it reads, *"You're not what I prayed for, but you're the answer."*

We've all had some of those kinds of answers to prayer, haven't we?

I don't know all the reasons God doesn't answer our prayers the way we think He should and often it's mysterious....but there are some things I've learned about this over the years. For instance...

A. Sometimes we just ask God for the wrong things.

At the end of this story in Luke 11 Jesus says vv. 11-12, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?"

A loving father is not going to give something to their child that will be harmful for them. Think back to when our kids were young, or perhaps, you're there right now. If I allowed my 10 year old son to eat whatever he wants for dinner....we would have Baskin Robbins ice cream every night at our house. Why do we say no? Because we love them. They simply ask for the wrong things.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE: Imagine your 16 year old comes to you on the same day he gets his drivers license and says, "Mom, Dad, how about letting take the car off-roading this weekend? There's about 7 of us who are heading down to Mexico."

After you stopped laughing, you would probably explain that you want him to get a little more experience under his belt; put a few more miles on around town before his first road trip. He asks for the wrong thing.

Asking for the wrong thing is kind of like what one writer refers to as prayer malpractice.

EXAMPLE: Karen and I have been married for 32 years now. But like most marriages, we got off to a rocky start the first couple of years. It's a pretty difficult adjustment, the blending to two lives.

And when that started occurring do you know what I used to pray, "God, change her, change Karen." I really had that prayer down. Over time, I realized I was praying for the wrong thing...And I started praying, "Oh God, search my heart. Help me to see what I'm bringing to this relationship on my side of the equation that needs attention, needs to change."

We ask God for the wrong things, and...

B. Sometimes we ask with the wrong motives.

In the 20th chapter of Matthew (verses 20-28), you'll recall the mother of James and John said to Jesus, "Jesus, I've just got a little request of you. Not a big deal. When you come into your kingdom...how about letting one of my sons have the spot of honor on your left, and the other have the spot of honor on your right?" After all, my boys left a pretty lucrative fishing business.

What was she saying? I want my boys to have the top spots. I want them to be elevated above everyone else.

Jesus said, "*You don't know what you're asking...My way is the way of the cross; my way is the way of suffering; my way is the way of servanthood to seek the lower places in life, dying to the need to be recognized and important, and you're concerned about honor?*"

James put it this way (James 4:3 NLT) “And even when you do ask, you don’t get it because your whole motive is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.”

It’s praying with the wrong motive—for our pleasure, our ego, our pride.

C. Third, sometimes we just ask with the wrong timing.

Sometimes we ask for the right thing but at the wrong time.

In the 9th chapter of John is the story of the man born blind. He’s an adult when the scene opens. Jesus’ closest followers ask him, “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” The fallacy of the false dilemma. How does Jesus respond? “NEITHER...this happened SO THAT the work of God might be displayed in his life.” How many prayers for healing do you think this man’s parents prayed?

God’s timing is different than ours and He prepares us and He matures us for the right time in order to fulfill His purposes.

Back to your 16 year old teenager who asked to head to Mexico the day he got his license? What if he asked you a couple of years later, after demonstrating what a good driver he is. Demonstrating responsibility and character and good decision making. Wouldn’t you be more apt to hand him the keys? Yep...but probably NOT to Mexico. How about Mojave?

Now there’s a second group of pray-ers among us and that’s the...

2. Developing Pray-ers (11:8-10)

Typically a developing pray-er is a disappointed pray-er who didn’t give up on God when God didn’t answer their prayer in the way they thought He should—they didn’t give up even though maybe the asked for the wrong things, or with the wrong motives, or it was simply the wrong timing.

That’s what friend #1 does in the story Jesus told in Luke 11...even though he was disappointed when his neighbor, Friend #3, didn’t fly out of bed to give him some food that he could share with his guest, Friend #2...he didn’t give up.

Jesus talks in v. 8 about how the guy just keeps knocking and won’t take **NO** for an answer...Jesus refers to his persistence as “*shameless audacity*” (TNIV).

Now right out of this story that Jesus told I want to share with you several marks of a developing pray-er....

A. First, developing pray-ers possess a personal relationship with God.

When Friend #1 had an unexpected problem, who did he turn to, who did he ask for help? A friend....someone he had a personal relationship with. There’s a big difference between having a neighbor and having a friend. There are some neighbors you wouldn’t want to wake up at midnight for anything, aren’t there?

Fortunately, this man possessed a close enough personal relationship with his neighbor that he knew it could survive this middle of the night door pounding session.

Hebrews 10:19 (NLT) says, “We can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus.” What is the most holy place? The very presence of God the father.

We have access to the God of the universe because we have been adopted into His family as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ.

Most of us have a smart phone these days. When I receive a call, there is caller ID that pops on the screen. If the caller is in my address book, I see their name and often their picture. If one of my kids calls me, I know it. And when they call, I do everything in my power to answer that call. I will drop most anything to talk to them, to meet them and if I'm in a meeting, I text back immediately. If they need me, I excuse myself. Contrast that, to say...for instance if you called me. Straight to voicemail (only a joke!).

Friend #1 approached friend #3 based on a personal existing relationship.

B. Secondly, developing pray-ers maintain a healthy sense of inadequacy.

Think about it...this man had to go to a friend in a very humble way and say, “I’ve got a need that I am incapable of meeting.”

Prayer is an acknowledgment on our part to God that we are inadequate for the challenges that come our way in life. That we are not that wise, that we don't have all the facts, that our perspective is short-term.

Psa. 73:1, Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. 2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. 3 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

In verse 16, the Psalmist LEANS IN... “When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me (I DON'T GET IT!) 17 **till** I entered the sanctuary of God...73:22-26, I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Reminds me of Peter's great confession, John 6:68, “...Lord, to whom shall we go? You (alone) have the words of eternal life.”

THIRD,

C. Developing pray-ers are persistent.

Developing pray-ers don't give up on prayer, just because they aren't getting an answer.

In the parallel passage of Matthew 7:7-8 Jesus says...

“Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks.” – NLT.

Notice the escalation of urgency in the commands found in verse 7. *Keep on asking...Keep on looking...Keep on knocking.* The verbs are all present imperatives. Nowhere in Scripture are we chided for coming again and again to God in prayer. In fact we are encouraged to do so e.g. the persistent widow gets justice (Luke 18:1-8), the Hebrew writer encourages us to “*approach the throne of grace with confidence*” (4:16).

What is the promise for persistence? Verse 8 – we find open doors (Matthew), mercy and grace in our time of need (the Hebrew writer).

The difficulty is the gap between the promise (.....) and the performance. That's the parenthesis which demands patience...and trust.

You've got to be persistent....keep knocking until God shuts the door.

Now Jesus is not trying to compare God to a grouchy, reluctant friend, but to contrast him (the grouch) with God. He's saying, “If an imperfect stubborn friend will eventually respond to your passion, **HOW MUCH MORE** will a loving and gracious God who wants only what's best for you respond?”

Now an interesting phenomenon that happens over time is often one time disappointed pray-ers who didn't give up on God, but became developing pray-ers, eventually wind up becoming....

3. Devoted Pray-ers

These are the people who've reached the point in their prayer life that they know the power of prayer works in two primary ways.....Sometimes God works to change circumstances through prayer, but more often than not God works to change you through the power of prayer. It's usually one or the other...sometimes BOTH.

A. Sometimes devoted pray-ers have experienced the power of prayer to change circumstances.

Tony Campolo is a Christian sociologist, an incredible communicator, preacher, and college professor in Pennsylvania. He writes in one of his books:

"There's a Pentecostal college near Eastern College where I teach. I'm not Pentecostal, but I talk so fast that they think I'm speaking in tongues, so it works out okay. One day they invited me to speak at a chapel service. I like speaking there because they're dynamic, happy people.

Just before I spoke, 8 guys took me to a back room and got me down on my knees. Then they laid their hands on my head and prayed for me. That was good. I need all the prayer I can get. Only one problem, these guys prayed a long time. That's usually okay, but the longer they prayed the more tired they got. The more tired they got, the more they leaned on my head. I want to tell you, when eight guys are leaning on your head, it doesn't feel so good.

One guy wasn't even praying for me. Instead, he went on and on praying for somebody named Charlie Stoldfuss. 'Dear Lord,' he shouted, 'You know Charlie Stoldfuss. He lives in that silver trailer down the road about a mile. You know the trailer, Lord, just down the road on the right-hand side.' I felt like saying, 'Knock it off, buddy. What do you think God's doing, saying, "What's that address again?" '

Anyway, he went on and on. 'Lord, Charlie told me this morning he's decided to leave his wife and three kids, walk out on his family. Lord, step in. Do something. Bring that family together again,'

So I'm asking myself when's this guy going to knock it off so I can get these preachers off my head? But he kept on going on and on about Charlie Stoldfuss, leaving his wife and kids, he's living in the silver trailer a mile down the road, right-hand side. Finally the prayers were over. I got to the pulpit and preached. After I finished, I got in my car, drove down the Pennsylvania Turnpike headed for home. As I drove onto the turnpike I noticed a hitchhiker. Now, I know you're not supposed to pick them up, but I'm a preacher, and whenever I can get anybody locked in as a captive audience I do it. So I stopped and picked him up. We drove a few minutes, and I said, 'Hi, my name's Tony Campolo. What's your name?' He said, 'My name is Charlie Stoldfuss.'I couldn't believe it.

I got off the turnpike at the next exit and headed back. He got a bit uneasy with that. After a few minutes he said, 'Hey, mister, where are you taking me?' I said, 'I'm taking you home.' He narrowed his eyes and asked why. I said, 'Because you just left your wife and three kids, right?' That blew him away. 'Yeah, yeah, that's right.' With shock written all over his face, he plastered himself against the car door, never took his eyes off me. I drove off the turnpike at the next exit. Then I really did him in as I drove right up to his silver trailer. When I pulled up, his eyes seemed to bulge as he asked me, 'How did you know that I live there?' I said, 'God told me.'I believe God did tell me. We got out of the car, and I ordered him to get into that trailer. Half shaking, he answered, 'Right, mister, sure, I'm going.' When he opened the trailer door, his wife exclaimed, 'You're back. You're back.' He whispered in her ear, and the more he talked the bigger her eyes got. Then I said with real authority, 'The two of you sit down. I'm going to talk and you're going to listen.' Man, did they listen. I was like E. F. Hutton."

That afternoon Charlie Stoldfuss and his wife both decided to become followers of Jesus Christ, humble themselves and work on their marriage.

Sometimes prayer changes circumstances.

B. But secondly, I think even more often than changing their circumstances Devoted Pray-ers have experienced the power of prayer to change them.

Prayer changes us--it slows us down, it helps us get the right values in perspective; it gets us in tune with God's plan for our lives.

Jesus prayed if possible for another way, other than the cross, for God to take it away.... but God didn't change those circumstances. **Instead** God sent an angel to strengthen Him and in the hours that followed He gave His son the grace, the strength, the power that He needed to face them.

Maybe God won't change your circumstances because of prayer, but He'll always strengthen you to go through them with the power of His Holy Spirit.

Someone said, "Sometimes God knocks us off our feet so we have to fall to our knees."

CONCLUSION

To sum up, keep these things in mind when you pray:

- (1) God will answer our prayers in His **way**. I John 5:14, *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to **his will**, he hears us. "Not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36).*
- (2) God will answer them in His **time**. Recall that James gives two reasons why we don't receive – A. We don't ask (4:2); B. We ask with the wrong motives (4:3).

God ALWAYS ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS. The answer may be: YES. NO. SLOW. GROW.

I don't understand God and His ways that are so much higher than my ways. But I've reached a point in my life where I've just decided to allow God to be God.

And if He changes circumstances in my life through prayer, I'll thank Him. And if suffering and disappointment comes into my life and He gives me the strength to go through them and changes me, I'll also thank Him.

If you've ever wondered if God is listening to your prayers, please don't give up. God can handle your doubts. Tell Him about them.

Give prayer another try...develop your prayer life....and grow to the point of becoming a devoted prayer that realizes, sometimes God changes circumstances, and other times He'll do a far more difficult thing and change you.

Word Power

*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.
And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.
I John 5:14-15*

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him - Psa. 62:5

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened - Matt. 7:7-8

*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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!
Amen - Eph. 3:20-21*

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful - Col. 4:2