

When We Don't Get What We've Asked (Part 1)

Introduction: If we are honest with reality, sometimes when we pray, our generous God gives us what we ask, but there are other times when we obey the command to ask, seek and knock that we don't get what we ask. We pray for things that we believe should be the will of God – the healing of a disease, reconciliation in a relationship, financial provision – and yet, God does not grant our request. If we are going to truly have a deeper experience of prayer, we cannot ignore this issue of unanswered prayer. How do we keep asking when we experience the disappointment of not receiving? Thankfully, the Scriptures speak to this issue. This week we are going to consider three of the reasons that Scripture gives for unanswered prayer. We may not always know why God doesn't answer our prayers, but these questions are a great place to start.

Opening Discussion: Have you ever been disappointed by unanswered prayer? If so, what was the situation? How did it affect you?

Steve said this about the context of prayer:

When we think about unanswered prayers, we have to keep in mind this context: God is a person, not a principle. When we make petitions, we are making requests of a personal God who has a mind and a will and who has relationships with billions of other people and who has a master plan for history. Given this reality, it's not surprising that there are times when we can't figure God out. Ultimately we have to get to the place where we're okay with that reality.

1. How might remembering this reality help when you are facing unanswered prayer?

Question #1: What is my motivation in asking?

Read James 4:1-3

2. Verse 2 says that we sometimes do not have because we do not ask. Why do you think we sometimes fail to ask?
3. What does verse 3 say about why we sometimes do not receive what we've asked for?

Steve said:

In the church, we need to evaluate our motives in prayer. All sorts of wrong motives can creep into praying. We can be praying for the right things for the wrong reasons. Envy and pride can fuel a lot of spiritual-sounding prayers. "God bless this ministry," can be fueled by pride; that same prayer can be fueled by love/compassion. God wants to refine our motives so that we want the right things for the right reasons.

4. How do you know if you are praying with right motives?
5. If we identify that we are praying with wrong motives, how do we allow God to change our motives?

Question #2: Is some area of disobedience hindering my relationship with God (and therefore my praying)?

Read 1 Peter 3:7; Psalm 66:18

6. What do these passages say about unanswered prayer?
7. Since we will not be completely holy until we go to heaven, does this mean that our prayers will constantly be hindered?
8. To keep your prayers from being hindered what should you do if you become aware of an area of disobedience in your life?

Question #3: How might God's purposes be advanced if I don't receive what I've requested?

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

9. For what did Paul pray?
10. What was God's answer?

11. In Paul's situation, how did God's unanswered prayer lead to God receiving more glory?

Steve said:

Like Paul we need to be open to the possibility that God would be more glorified by giving us grace to endure some circumstance than by removing it from our lives. Like Paul we need to entrust ourselves to God, believing that He is good and sovereign and wise.

12. How might it help you deal with unanswered prayer if you learned to ask yourself the question, "How might God be more glorified by not doing what I ask"?

13. Is there any area in your life right now where you need to consider this question? If so, what?

14. What is the main point of application for you from this study?