

Unanswered Prayer **By General Bramwell Tillsley (Rtd)**

In retirement there is more time for prayer, yet most find it easier to talk about prayer than to pray. For example, the disciples did not say teach us a prayer, but said “teach us to pray.” Luke 11:1

Unanswered prayer is a forbidding obstacle to Christian belief. We sometimes find ourselves identifying with the Psalmist. With evil abounding on every side, he sometimes felt that God was:

1. Indifferent – the Psalmist prayed and prayed without any seeming response, thus he cried out: “O God, do not keep silent.” Ps. 83:1
2. Inactive – If God heard him, He appeared to be doing nothing about it, causing the Psalmist to exclaim: “O God, don’t sit idly by – and inactive when we pray.” Ps. 83:1
3. Inconsistent – “Behold the ungodly prosper in the world; they increase in riches.” Ps. 73:12. There isn’t any justice.

Why are prayers seemingly unanswered?

1. The ignorance of our asking

“For we know not what we should pray for as we ought.” Romans 8:26

“If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him.” Matt. 7:11

But fathers, do you not sometimes say “no” to your children? No sensible father would give a child a sharp knife or a loaded gun no matter how much the child begged. Sometimes you say “no” because you love the child – you say “no” to the immediate for the sake of future growth and development.

2. Sometimes we are praying for things we can do for ourselves

When a child asks his father to do his homework for him so that he can play, will he do it (assuming he is able)? The father may assist him – encourage him – stand by him – but he will not do for the boy what the boy can do for himself.

Perhaps we have no right to pray at all until we have created conditions under which prayer can be answered. For example, if we were to pray for souls, but personally do not share Christ with others.

John’s Gospel shows us that for miracles to happen, we must do our part:

- Water to wine – fill the pots (2)
- Healing at the pool – take up thy bed and walk (5)
- Feeding of 5,000 – bring the lunch (6)
- Lazarus – remove the stone (11)

3. Because of our unreadiness to receive

So often in Scripture, prayer and faith are linked.

“Ask in faith, nothing wavering.” James 1:6

“Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Mark 11:22

We give up too easily.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Matt. 7:7 (verb tense – keep on asking, etc.)

E.g. Parable

Friend at Midnight – Luke 11:1-3

Unjust judge – Luke 18:1-9

(Both make a contrast with God – How much more will God)

YES and NO are not the only responses to prayer. Sometimes God says, WAIT.

Thus, our prayers are seemingly unanswered because of:

- The ignorance of our petitions
- Our use of prayer where it does not belong
- Our unreadiness to receive an answer

These throw light on unanswered prayer, but is there such a thing as unanswered prayer if we keep our lives in harmony with God?

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick suggests God answers prayer in one of two ways:

1. Either God changes the circumstances
2. Or He supplies sufficient power to overcome them

“Three times I sought the Lord – but He said to me – my grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Cor. 12:8, 9

God did not make life easier, but did give the Apostle strength for life’s demands. God did not remove the thorn, but gave him strength to live with it. God did not answer Paul’s petition, but did answer Paul himself.

NEVER A PRAYER HE WILL NOT ANSWER
NEVER A SEEKING SOUL TO WHOM THE LORD SAID NAY;
NEVER A SIN THAT HIS GRACE CANNOT COVER,
NEVER A BURDEN THAT HE CANNOT ROLL AWAY.