

The Mystery of Prayer
“Does God Answer Every Prayer?”

Introduction: Last week: “Do my prayers even matter?”

- Won’t God just do what He wants?
- He is Sovereign! What good is praying?
- Foreknowledge vs. Pre-determined counsel
- A sovereign God gave us the gift of free will
- Has invited us to partner in a relationship with Him
- I don’t have to pray—I get to pray!

Today—A second question: “Does God answer every prayer?”

Contextual Backdrop: “For everyone who asks, receives...”

How does our experience align with that truth?

- Does it?
- Cheesy answer: All prayers answered: yes, no, wait!
- Not sure that answer is sufficient

I. The human experience with prayer is often one of disappointment.

(ILL) Lowell, Indiana—generator—keys, jobs, does He care?

*Makes it easy to pray less and feel less prepared for crisis

1. Damage done when we blame lack of faith or sin.
2. Testimony about missing the wreck or plane crash—what about those who didn’t?
3. Is God to get credit for one and blame for the other?
4. What we think about God really matters!

A. Understanding disappointment with God

“Disappointment occurs when the actual experience of something falls short of what we anticipated.”—Philip Yancey

(ILL) Niagra Falls

By the way—An Atheist is never disappointed with God because they expect nothing!

B. Questions that shape the issue of disappointment with God

1. Is God unfair?
2. Is God silent?
3. Is God hidden?

C. Probing the fairness of God biblically

1. Golden calf at Sinai (who is on the Lord's side? 3000)
2. Miriam leprous for 7 days criticizing Moses (Exodus 32)
3. Earth swallowed up Korah, family, 250 priests consumed by fire (Numbers 16)
4. Blessings and cursings

"Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Deuteronomy 28:1-2 NKJV

"But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you. Deuteronomy 28:15 NKJV

5. Achan and family destroyed—Joshua 7
6. New Covenant

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. John 1:17 NKJV

D. Considering the biblical witness of God's silence

NOTE: Some say God talks to them all the time

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, 19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. Hebrews 12:18-19 NKJV

1. There was a time God was very audible
2. 613 commands, Urim-Thummim
3. Crystal clear commands

Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the Lord is not among you. 43 For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the Lord, the Lord will not be with you." 44 But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses departed from the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah. Numbers 14:42-45 NKJV

4. A time when God spoke clearly but a mob of slaves couldn't get across the wilderness.

TRUTH: They would never grow up and be adults if they continued to have it all laid out for them.

E. What about the hidden-ness of God?

NOTE: There was a time

Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And it came to pass that everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting which was outside the camp. 8 So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle. 9 And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. 10 All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door. 11 So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle. Exodus 33:7-11 NKJV

No hide and seek but still the people were fickle! (Pillar of fire, cloud)

SUMMARIZE: Old Testament—God met things with fair justice

- He was neither silent nor hidden (Red Sea, Manna, Water from the Rock)
- It didn't produce faith!

For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. Hebrews 4:2 NKJV

- I thought miracles produced faith! NO!
- Some want a world stocked with signs and miracles! Then people would believe!
- Would they? Signs addict us to signs, not to God
- Since we don't live in this kind of world many are disappointed.

II. These questions form the divine perspective.

Remember: What we think about God really matters.

A. What does scripture reveal Him to be?

1. Not a mechanical, unfeeling, robot or an indifferent puppet
2. A person with feelings, emotions, can be grieved, angered, resisted, and wants to be known.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Matthew 23:37 NKJV

3. People who did know Him were familiar with Him (Abraham/Moses)

B. So how must God feel? (biblical review)

1. At creation—It is good! Man-very good
2. Did not create robots or machines—unknown author wrote—"a world in which the sculpture can spit in the eye of the sculptor."
3. Rebellion (seemed like freedom)—brought limitation instead (curse-distance from God!)
4. God wanted His creation to love Him, trust Him, have faith in Him.

C. God's dealings with humanity

1. Adam-Noah—much judgment
2. Abraham—now stands face-to-face—promise
3. By Jacob—dreams, a ladder, a wrestling match
4. By Joseph—unusual events, pain, forgotten, prison

NOTE: If anyone could say God was silent, hidden, or unfair—Joseph. He had to trust, not that God would prevent hardship, but that He would redeem it.

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Genesis 50:19-20 NKJV

5. 400 years of slavery—Silence? Hidden?
6. Moses—display of power but power cannot control love!—Judges
7. No longer fact-to-face—through kings He spoke (Saul, David, who broke all the rules, Solomon)
 - a. Success seemed inevitable—poised for it
 - b. Glory of God
 - c. Give me wisdom! Epitaph by Oscar Wilde—In this world there are two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, the other is to get it.
8. The kingdom divided—God turns to prophets! Elijah and Elisha were exceptions when it came to signs. Again Mt. Carmel changed nothing.
9. Exile—silence, Hidden-ness again

O Lord, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save. Habakkuk 1:2 NKJV

Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence — Isaiah 64:1 NKJV

10. Even still some hope of another day—He would not remain silent forever.

"But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall." Malachi 4:2 NASB

11. For 400 more years they wandered

12. But then, silence/hidden-ness was broken

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:1 NKJV

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 NKJV

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets. Hebrews 1:1 NKJV

13. He did miraculous signs

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Matthew 12:38-40 NKJV

14. Yet we read

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. 16 And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. 17 Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" 18 For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy. 19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him." 20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. 21 The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" 22 Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" 23 Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!" 24 When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it." 25 And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children." 26 Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified. 27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. 28 And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. 29 When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified. Matthew 27:15-31 NKJV

Fairness? Silence? Hidden-ness?

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Nothing mattered. Nor does it matter today.

- He wants to be loved
- He wants to be trusted
- He wants us to have faith!

I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8 NKJV

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Hebrews 11:6 NKJV

III. How does all of this have anything to do with prayer and how does it help us answer the question—does God answer all my prayers?

A. What is the biblical testimony?

READ AGAIN:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! Matthew 7:7-11 NKJV

“Everyone who asks receives...”

What do we know?

1. **He is sovereign—but in His sovereignty he has given us free will.** Prayer can move God (Moses, Jonah, Hezekiah, many in this place).
2. **Prayer is the most important activity we can engage as humans.** The biblical narrative is woven around God’s response to prayer.
 - Cain prayed for leniency
 - Israel cried for freedom
 - Abraham’s prayer for a son
 - Hezekiah praying for healing

NOTE: “The extent to which God’s will is done on earth as it is in Heaven depends more on prayer than on human activity.”—Greg Bova

3. We live in a fallen and broken world because of sin. Man’s free will has created distance, pain.
4. This broken world is not our final resting place. We long for the day that “we skip about like calves from the stall.”

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21:1-4 NKJV

5. We confess we see through a glass darkly now.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV

6. We acknowledge that signs don’t win or keep our love.

What do we do? We pray!

1. He told us to
2. Ask and we will receive—He will hear from Heaven

Conclusion: In what manner do we pray?

- A. Not doubt but faith
- B. Faith that we have a good Father who knows how to give good gifts to His children
- C. He knows what is good/power/wisdom

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. James 1:17 NKJV

Might be

1. Immediate desire
2. Broader prospective
3. Opportunity to abide
4. Grace to endure
5. Always a deeper knowledge of my Father