**Prayer: When God Says “No”**

**Introductory text, Luke 11:9-13.**  Many people “lose their faith” in prayer if not in God, when their earnest prayers are not answered *when* or *how* they want them to be. I’ve have had many prayers answered *affirmatively* and it greatly bolsters my faith. But I’ve also had many prayers that seemingly have gone unanswered… and such occasions challenge my faith. What about you? Have your sincere and earnest but “unanswered prayers” caused you to question the efficacy of prayer, or even God’s presence in or care for your life? Have they produced disbelief in or disobedience to God? Perhaps there are other reasons our prayers sometimes seemingly go unheeded, unanswered, or are rejected. So, **when God says “No”…**

1. **Be Patient and Persistent, Luke 18:1-8.**

His answer may actually be “Not now” rather than “No.”

* Abram and Sarai waited 25 years for Isaac to be born, cp. Gen.12:4; 21:5.
* Simeon waited all his life for the Messiah to come, Luke 2:25-32.
* God (alone) knows when *“the proper time”* or *“the fullness of time”* is, 1Tim.2:6; Gal.4:4.

1. **Examine Your Motives, Jas.4:3.**

*Motives* matter in prayer.

* Those to whom James wrote had already been charged with having *“evil motives,”* Jas.2:4.
* Even in 4:3, note that *“****your***(rather than *God’s*) *pleasures”* were the source of *quarrels, conflicts, wars in your members,* v.1; were associated with *lust* and *envy, fights,* and *quarrels,* v.2; and led to *adultery* and *hostility* toward God, v.4.
* “Bad” motives in prayer (or otherwise!) are often those which are *selfish* in nature, v.3b; Phil.2:2-4.

1. **Trust that He knows what is “good” better than we do, Jas.1:17.**

God, obviously, knows “good” better than I do.

* But we sometimes forget this and become *physically-oriented* in our prayers. How many *physical* things are mentioned in the prayer Jesus taught His disciples in Matt.6:9-13?
* We also forget this and become *short-sighted* in our prayers, cp. Matt.16:21-23.
* *Maturity* and *discernment* help tremendously, Heb.5:14; but we must never forget that God is the ultimate arbiter of what is “good,” Isa.55:8-9; Jer.10:23.

1. **Trust that He knows what we “need” better than we do, 2Cor.12:10.**

When we realize that our motives can be improper, and that our thoughts or understanding of what is “good” can be flawed, then it should not surprise us that God knows our “need(s)” better than we do also.

* Before Jesus taught the disciples *how* to pray, He said, *“Your Father knows what you need,”* Matt.6:8. This is true *“before you ask Him,”* or even whether or not we accurately assess our *needs* and *ask for them* or not.
* Paul thought he *needed* his *“thorn in the flesh”* to be removed, 2Cor.12:7-8. But God knew he actually *needed the thorn,* 2Cor.12:9-10!
* It may well be that what *we think* we “need”- and thus *ask for* in prayer, is not actually what *God knows* we “need” at all.

1. **Understand that your request may contradict *“His will,”* 1John 5:14.**

Numbers 3 & 4 are leading to is this: *My/your* prayer may actually be *against* or *contradict His will.*

* We’ve already noted that we can *“ask amiss”* (KJV) or *“with wrong motives”* (NASB) in Jas.4:3 (the literal interpretation is *“wickedly”*).
* And we’ve seen that Peter’s *desire* in Matt.16:21-23 was contrary to God’s.
* Surely this leads us to the conclusion that *our prayers* are not always (if not *often are not*) *“according to His will,”* 1John 5:14, and are thus rejected. Which is why *“if it be Your will”* is not only an important part of our prayers, it must also be our mindset, cf. Matt.6:10b; 26:39!

1. **Ask “Am I *abiding in Him, His words* and *His love”* by *“keeping His commandments?”* John 15:7,9-10.**

God may still say “No” to our earnest prayers- though everything we’ve discussed is correct and proper, if/when **we are not entitled to ask.** What does that mean?

* Prayer is *privilege* granted to those who *abide in Jesus, abide in His word,* and *abide in His love* by *keeping His commandments,* John 15:7,9-10.
* But *“those who do evil”* are not granted this privilege, 1Pet.3:10-12.
* Perhaps my prayers have gone *unanswered* because **I am not *who* or *what* I’m supposed to be.**

**Conclusion**

So, before we “give up” on prayer or on God because He hasn’t/doesn’t “answer my prayers,” ask yourself:

* 1. Have I been *patient* and *persistent,* and am I willing to continue to be so?
  2. Are my *motives in prayer* pure and spiritual, or selfish and physical?
  3. Am I trusting that God knows what is *good* better than I do?
  4. Am I trusting that God knows what I *need* better than I do?
  5. Am I sure that my request is *“according to His will,”* or am I willing to trust that if the answer is “No” that it wasn’t?
  6. Am I *who/what* I need to be to have the right to even make my request?

Jas.1:6 says that only prayers which are *“in faith”* are promised to be answered. This emphasizes that we not only believe that our requests are within His *power* to accomplish, but also within His *will* to do so. All that we’ve covered in this lesson hopefully helps us to see this clearly.