

“Making Sense of God’s Will: Why Doesn’t God Answer My Prayer?”

Psalm 21:1-2, Luke 22:42

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An 8-year-old named Danny Dutton had his third grade homework assignment to 'explain God.' He wrote his answer like this: “One of God's main jobs is making people. He makes them to replace the ones that die, so there will be enough people to take care of things on earth. He doesn't make grownups, just babies. I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way He doesn't have to take up His valuable time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leave that to mothers and fathers. **God's second most important job is listening to prayers.** An awful lot of this goes on, since some people, like preachers and things, pray at times beside bedtime. God doesn't have time to listen to the radio or TV because of this. Because He hears everything, there must be a terrible lot of noise in His ears, unless He has thought of a way to turn it off. Jesus is God's Son. He used to do all the hard work, like walking on water and performing miracles and trying to teach the people who didn't want to learn about God. They finally got tired of Him preaching to them and they crucified him. But He was good and kind, like His father, and He told His father that they didn't know what they were doing and to forgive them and God said O.K. His dad (God) appreciated everything that He had done and all His hard work on earth so He told him He didn't have to go out on the road anymore. He could stay in heaven. So He did. And now **He helps His dad out by listening to prayers** and seeing things which are important for God to take care of and which ones He can take care of Himself without having to bother God. Like a secretary, only more important. **You can pray anytime you want and they are sure to help you because they got it worked out so one of them is on duty all the time.**”

Isn't this a great explanation about God? Many of us believe in God not because God meets our expectations, but because we trust in God. Christian faith is the act of trusting that God hears, that God cares, and that God is able to act as we have prayed. It is also our voluntary response to God's invitation to 'enter into a relationship with God. Living in faith brings us changes in our world views: we are able to realize how many blessings we already have been given in our lives than we count how many things God has done for me according to my wish list. In faith, prayer is important. People of faith pray to God. Sometimes, we pray to God for blessings, or we also pray for petitions asking for God's help and intervention. Some people pray to God for miracles, but if it doesn't happen to them, they easily blame God or blame themselves for their lack of faith. How do we understand about our unanswered prayer, purpose of prayer and God's will for us? Apostle Paul encourages his Christian communities to pray without ceasing (Colossians 1:9) which means that prayer functions the breath of the soul for communication with God. This morning, I hope that we learn the meaning of prayer through the example of Jesus' prayer life and his great attitude in prayer facing challenges in the midst of suffering and crisis.

Our first Scripture shows us a great disappointment about God. “My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer by night, I find no rest.” Have you ever experienced that your prayers were not answered despite your hard and desperate prayers? When I was a junior high school student, my church pastor and elders taught me that if my prayer was not answered yet, that was because I have lack of faith or because I pray with improper motives. They emphasized that if we pray hard, our prayer will move God and even we can change God's decision. On the journey of life, when we face many challenges that our prayers are not answered by God, some of us may be disappointed about God, they might leave their faith. God doesn't work in order to meet our expectations. Our God is not a divine vending machine – we slip in a prayer and out pops a miracle. We trust in God and follow God's will as Christians. When our prayers go unanswered, first of all, we need to revisit our faith and

whether we try to instruct God to run this world meeting my expectations rather than yielding our lives to God. God listens to our prayers, but it doesn't mean that God will answer every prayer. If your prayer still remains unanswered, it doesn't mean that God abandoned you or stopped listening to your prayer. God is still with us. Then how does God answer our prayer?

First of all, God wants us to be responsible for other's prayers. Every week, we share our prayers through our prayer chain and Sunday worship. I am always amazed by numerous compassionate, heartfelt responses and great support. Our meal support for those who are in times of need, cards, and prayers are God's indirect answers through our participations instead of his direct answer. Sometimes, when we feel down emotionally and spiritually, and even we don't have any energy to pray, someone's encouragement and prayer can be a blessing from God. Betty Phillips' grandmother's prayer: Here is the poem that was on the kitchen table at her grandmother's home.

"Good morning God and thank you for the glory of the sun; and thank you for the health I have to get my duties done. I shall devote the hours of this golden day to you and honor Your Holy Name in everything I do."

The other perspective on unanswered prayers is that God encourages us to change our perspectives when it seems that God didn't answer our prayers. One of my members shared this inspirational story with me. A different perspective can be such a blessing and God's perfect answer for us.

Me: God, can I ask you a question?

God: Sure.

Me: Promise you won't get mad.

God: I promise.

Me: Why did you let so much stuff happen to me today?

God: What do you mean?

Me: Well, I woke up late.

God: Yes.

Me: My car took forever to start.

God: Okay.

Me: At lunch they made my sandwich wrong and I had to wait.

God: Huummm.

Me: On the way home, my phone went dead, just as I picked up a call.

God: All right.

Me: And on top of it all, when I got home I just wanted to soak my feet in my new foot massager and relax, but it wouldn't work!!! Nothing went right today! Why did you do that?

God: Let me see, the Death Angel was at your bed this morning and I had to send one of the other angels to battle him for your life. I let you sleep through that.

Me: (humbled): OH...

GOD: I didn't let your car start because there was a drunk driver on your route that would have hit you if you were on the road.

Me: (ashamed)

God: The first person who made your sandwich today was sick and I didn't want you to catch what they have, I knew you couldn't afford to miss work.

Me: (embarrassed): Ok...

God: Your phone went dead because the person that was calling was going to give false information, I didn't even let you talk to them so you would be covered.

Me: (softly) I see, God.

God: Oh and that foot massager, it had a shortage that was going to throw out all of the power in your house tonight. I didn't think you wanted to be in the dark.

Me: I'm sorry, God.

Prayer helps us see our living from God's perspective. My colleague, Pastor Linda Loessberg-Zahl shared her great insight on the purpose of prayer. When we are rushing through the day, overloaded with stress or tasks it's hard to see beyond our own agenda, or our own perception of a situation. Most of us look at what's straight ahead, next on our list, what we desire. Our human agenda and limitations are something like blinders; they limit us to just our segment of the big picture. None of us have 360 degree vision, although mothers with those eyes on the back of their heads come close! When we pray, we tap into God's 360 degree vision, and catch a glimpse of the whole scene. 360 degree vision is kind of like a cyclorama, a huge, continuous mural painted on the inside wall of a cylindrical building. When a person stands in the middle of the room they are in the middle of the scene and have a 360 degree view of what's going on. The scenes on the wall give you the whole 360 degree but they were painted one at a time, as limited scenes. Our personal vision is a limited scene within the whole mural of God's will. Sometimes we feel that God's will, God's vision has to be very close to our own, especially when we feel we are right about a situation. We broaden our vision of reality and catch a fuller glimpse of God's will when we pray, with an open heart.

Our second scripture reading shows us another example of Jesus' unanswered prayer. This was a prayer that Jesus himself prayed as he was in great agony in the garden of Gethsemane. He prayed, "Father...take this cup from me." The cup meant the suffering and death he would endure the following day leading up and including his death on the cross. Who loves to face the moment of death? Even though Jesus, the son of God made up his mind to give away his life for us, he was still afraid and fearful to endure this pain of reality. Actually, Jesus prayed that "Father, deliver me from this." But God didn't deliver him from this suffering. What inspired us was the other part of Jesus' prayer, "yet not my will, but yours be done". Jesus tried to discern God's will and put himself in a part of God's vision like a cyclorama.

The essence of prayer is not to push God to fulfill my expectation, but it is our humble way to be in touch with God and discern God's will for us. In prayer, we may have an opportunity to glimpse God's purpose and will for us. Don't be discouraged nor in despair when you think that God doesn't answer your prayer right away. God still loves you and cares about you. He intends you to discern His

heart and plan for you in your prayer with God. World War II Admiral Chester Nimitz, who described his own experience of prayer over the course of his lifetime,

“I asked God for strength that I might achieve. I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey. I asked for health that I might do greater things. I was given infirmity that I might do better things. I asked for riches that I might be happy. I was given poverty that I might be wise. I asked for power that I might have the praise of men. I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. I was given life that I might enjoy all things. I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I hoped for. Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am, among all men, most richly blessed.” I believe this is the meaning of prayer. Amen.