

How To Say “Amen!” When God Brings Disappointments

2 Samuel 7:18-29

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 12-16-2012

Introduction

It's interesting how people handle disappointments quite differently, whether it's the loss of a football game loss or the loss of a lifetime dream. Some get very depressed and withdrawn, while others seem to handle far greater disappointments quite well and to take all in stride. It's not like they aren't disappointed, but the disappointments don't seem to be as huge for some people as for others. And the amount of success that you have already achieved does not seem to factor into the situation. Alexander the Great conquered most of the known world in an unbelievably short period of time, was the most powerful man in the world, and had wealth beyond measure, but when his men were too exhausted to push on into India, he purportedly broke down and wept and was depressed beyond measure that there were no more worlds that he could conquer. He couldn't handle the disappointment. Hugo Grotius, the father of modern international law, though a Christian, said this before he died: “I have accomplished nothing worthwhile in my life.” And those who heard him say that were probably thinking, “Are you crazy? You are one of the most successful people that we know.” But he felt absolutely dejected because of some disappointments. John Quincy Adams, the sixth American president under our *present* Constitution, after suffering some disappointments, wrote this in his diary: “My life has been spent in vain and idle aspirations, and in ceaseless rejected prayers that something would be the result of my existence [that would be] beneficial to my species.”

Well, in this chapter you are going to see a stark contrast between those men and David and we are going to be looking at the reasons why. David probably faced more disappointments than any of those men that I just listed, but he handled them all remarkably well. And I think that that was *certainly* the case in *this* chapter. Four times the Bible says that it was in David's heart to build God a temple. He longed to have *that* be the crowning achievement in his life. If there was one thing that he could be remembered by, he had earlier wished that people would remember that he had built a magnificent temple for God. Yet in verses 5-11, God told David in no uncertain terms that David could not build that temple.

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Yet, despite having his dreams dashed to the ground (rather brusksly, I might add), we find David saying, “Amen, Lord. Whatever you want, Lord, I say Amen to it. And I praise You. You are so gracious, and so good, how could I say anything but ‘Amen!’?” That’s in effect what he was saying. There is not the slightest hint of resentment in David’s prayer. Instead, we find a heart that is full to overflowing with God’s goodness. David focused upon the wonderful promises that God *had* given, not upon the “No.” He focused upon the hundreds of presents under his Christmas tree rather than upon the one present that that was missing, that he had hoped would be there but was not going to ever be there. All of the commentators that I own agree that there must have been a huge disappointment to David in the first half of this chapter, and yet he responds with extravagant gratefulness and praise. What’s going on? There’s a lot going on, but one thing is for sure - David valued the Giver far more than the gifts. So today we are going to be looking at two things at the same time: we are going to be getting some lessons on prayer (and I think it is a fantastic passage on prayer) and we are also going to be looking at keys to a heart that is not overcome by disappointments. I’ve divided the passage up into seven parts – the number of perfection, right?

I. A response of a man who is confident in God’s grace (v. 18a)

The first thing that I want you to see is that David’s response to God’s “No” is not servile; it does not flow out of fear; it does not show insecurity; it does not question whether God loved him. Sitting before God’s throne shows a confidence in God’s grace, and shows that David had developed a very comfortable relationship with God very similar to the friendship enjoyed by Abraham and Moses. Of course, David had had times when he prayed standing, kneeling, and flat on his face. But Scripture indicates that David also prayed with postures that showed that he had developed as close a friendship with God as Moses and Abraham had. There are Psalms that show that there was not a moment of the day when he was not communing with God, which means that there was not a posture of the day that was wrong for him to use as he communed with God. When he wrote Psalm 63 in the wilderness, he spoke of the deep communion that he was having with God as he was lying in bed with insomnia. Now that probably wouldn’t be Kosher in the tabernacle. But *this* posture actually was. In fact, God several times has us sit to force our hearts to embrace the same lesson. Verse 18 says,

2Samuel 7:18 Then King David went in and sat before the LORD...

This has puzzled some people who think that the only appropriate posture for prayer is standing or kneeling. But I have several Scriptures from Judges, Ezekiel, Luke, Acts, Ephesians, and Revelation that show the posture of sitting while praying can be just as appropriate (Judges 20:26-27; Ezek. 44:3; Luke 22:14-22 with Matt 26:26; Luke 22:30; 24:30; Acts 2:2; 16:13; Eph. 2:6; Rev. 4:4; 11:16) as the postures of standing and kneeling. It depends on the context. In fact, in two Revelation passages the elders go from sitting before God's throne to falling on their faces before God's throne. And we aren't told that David sat throughout the entire prayer. He may have, or he may have started praying with sitting and moved to kneeling or standing. We aren't told. But the mention of sitting is very significant – especially for an Old Testament saint. Now it is true that we can kneel boldly before the throne of grace and we can stand boldly before the throne of grace, but of all the postures for prayer, sitting shows par excellence that David was totally secure in God's grace. One of the verses that I am still blown away with in Ephesians 2:6 that says that we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies. It's amazing when you think about where Christ is sitting – at the right hand of the Father. We are seated before God's throne. And when you study how Paul ties that in with our confidence in God's grace, and it is truly mind blowing.

But what's even more amazing is that prior to Christ's ascension, David was doing it here. That's why some commentators speak of this as being an audacious boldness and faith. So it's not the sitting so much that I want to emphasize as it is his audacious boldness and faith. David prayed this prayer with total faith. Faith must characterize our prayers no matter what posture we are in. You could be kneeling on the ground begging God to forgive you of your sin, but if you doubt that God will cast your sin into the depths of the sea, your prayers will not be heard no matter what posture you use. God only hears the prayers of faith, and Romans 14 tells us that whatever is not of faith is sin. The same is true of every other aspect of prayer and worship. For prayer and worship to get past the ceiling, we must approach God's throne with a total faith that we are accepted in Jesus and that we are loved in Jesus. David stands as a model of this confidence.

II. A response of humility (v. 18b)

Of course, David's sitting before God was not arrogant or prideful. The first words to come out of his mouth show amazing humility:

2Samuel 7:18 Then King David went in and sat before the LORD; and he said: "Who *am* I, O Lord GOD? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?"

And let me let you in on a little secret with regard to capitalizations in the New King James Version. You already know that when the Hebrew has Yahweh, it ordinarily is represented in the New King James Version as LORD, with all capital letters. The one exception is when it says “Lord GOD” and the word GOD is in all capital letters. In this phrase the word “Lord” is Adonai and the word GOD with all caps is Yahweh. I don’t know why they did that, but that’s the way it is translated. Adonai emphasizes God’s sovereignty and Yahweh emphasizes God’s transcendence and aseity. The Hebrew root of that word Yahweh is I AM and especially emphasizes God’s aseity, which means that God is not dependent at all upon creation but creation is totally dependent upon His overflowing provision. Adonai Yahweh, Sovereign Lord who is transcendent above all creation. So now you know how to read two names of God from the New King James Bible. I’ll read it again, substituting the Hebrew names:

Then King David went in and sat before Yahweh; and he said: “Who *am I*, O Adonai Yahweh? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?”

He is overwhelmed that the Sovereign Yahweh would be so kind to him. He comes realizing that he is a tiny speck in this universe and he is even a tinier speck compared to God’s transcendence. That’s the implication of that double name. So his use of Adonai Yahweh shows humility, and the expression “**Who am I**” shows humility, and the phrase “**what is my house**” shows humility.

And here’s the point: when you approach the throne of God with confident faith (point I) *and* with humility (point II), God loves to hear your prayers. But those first two points are also critical to responding to disappointments properly – we must accept those disappointments with a faith that God is working all things together for our good, and with a humility that acknowledges that anything God gives is good way beyond what we deserve. Think about it: we were children of God’s enemy, and He not only adopted us, He washed us, clothed us with new clothing, allowed us to take on His name, and spread all kinds of Christmas gifts in front of us. David’s focus was not on the one gift that he had hoped would be under the tree. In fact, he doesn’t even bring that up in this entire prayer – not once. His focus was on God’s goodness, greatness, graciousness in contrast to his own comparative unworthiness and smallness.

III. A response of astonishment (v. 19)

The third thing that I am sure was very pleasing to God was that David accepted God's huge gifts under his Christmas tree with astonished delight. Verse 19:

2Samuel 7:19 And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Adonai Yahweh;...

How could this be such a small thing for you, Lord? How could that be? I am blown away by it, and yet it was nothing for you. In a moment David is going to explain how incredibly huge God's gift seemed to him. God had promised not only that David's son would build an earthly temple and that He would not take His mercy away from David's descendants, but He had also promised an eternal throne, an eternal kingdom, and that the Messiah would be David's descendant. What an honor! He is going to say that this promise is huge. But He starts by being astonished that God is so great, that to God it is nothing. Verse 19 continues:

...and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come. Is this the manner of man, O Adonai Yahweh?

This is the first of ten times that David calls himself Yahweh's servant (or slave) in this prayer. Ten times. And God is so exalted above mankind that it blows David away that God would stoop way down to minister to a slave like him. It's not as if David lacks faith that God will fulfill His promise. No. He knows God will fulfill His promise because God is a God who cannot lie. But he couples his bold faith with astonishment at the greatness of God, the foreknowledge of God, and a kindness that exceeds anything man would do. When you are astonished that God would even take you on as a servant, let alone bless you with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, you will have the approach to God that handles disappointments quite well. But when you take God's incredible blessings for granted and act as if you deserve more, and you complain when he takes a few things away, you have a character issue that will guarantee that you will continue to struggle with disappointments.

IV. A response of gratitude for God's goodness (vv. 20-21)

Fourth, David's response was a response of gratitude. Look at verses 20-21:

2Samuel 7:20 Now what more can David say to You? For You, Adonai Yahweh, know Your servant.

2Samuel 7:21 For Your word's sake, and according to Your own heart, You have done all these great things, to make Your servant know *them*.

David recognizes that he did not earn this because of his own righteousness. Instead, God's promises were "**For Your word's sake, and according to Your own heart, You have done all these great things...**" This whole prayer is so God-centered. Notice that though he had earlier sat in astonishment that all of these gifts were a small thing *for God*, here he says that for *David* they are "**all these great things.**" They *are* great things. And so David shows gratitude. You show me a person who has as much gratitude as David did even after a disappointment, and you will be showing me a person who can handle any disappointments with poise. Gratitude to God is one of the graces that flows from the Holy Spirit.

V. A response of praise (v. 22)

The fifth response was one of praise. Verse 22:

2Samuel 7:22 Therefore You are great, O Adonai Yahweh. For *there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears*

He piles terms of greatness on top of each other. The phrase, "You are great," when it is followed by Adonai Yahweh, doubly emphasizes God's Sovereign greatness. But then he adds, "**there is none like You.**" David would not even dream of comparing God's greatness to any human greatness. Nor can God even be compared to the greatest gods that humans have concocted in their brains, for he insists, "**nor is there any God besides You.**" And then he ends by saying that nothing that David has ever heard with his ears can compare to the greatness and goodness of God.

These affirmations of greatness are the essence of worship. And the greater God appears in your mind's eye, the lesser the problems and disappointments of life seem to be. Think of it this way: if you have a million dollars and you lose \$100, you are not going to be nearly as disappointed as you would be if you have only \$1000 in the bank and you lose \$100. Well, in the same way, praise reminds you that God is great, and the greater God is in your mind, the more your disappointments will be like a millionaire losing \$100. They are much easier to take. But if you have never developed a close friendship with God and your life is not wrapped up in him, even though you are a believer, disappointments will be much more bitter because the loss is by comparison greater - God is only \$1000 in your mind. Does that make sense? The more time you spend in the discipline of praise, the greater God will become in your vision, and the greater will be your appreciation of what you already have in Christ Jesus. But it will also cause your faith to grow.

It may seem superfluous to tell God He is great when God knows who He is. But David is not doing so to give God information he doesn't have. You don't tell your wife that you love her or appreciate her to give her new information. You don't tell her how beautiful she is because she was somehow unaware of that fact. You tell her because it is of the essence of relationship to engage in praise from time to time. And David's heart so overflows with appreciation to God for what He has done and promised that David can't help but overflow with praise. And praising God is almost as good a cure for disappointments as thankfulness is.

VI. A response of thankful remembrance (vv. 23-24)

And that's the next point. Remembrance of what God has done for him in the past is a form of thanksgiving. Verses 23-24

2Samuel 7:23 And who is like Your people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people, to make for Himself a name—and to do for Yourself great and awesome deeds for Your land—before Your people whom You redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, the nations, and their gods?

2Samuel 7:24 For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, Yahweh, have become their God.

Where the previous part of the prayer was focused on God's *nature*, this is focused on God's wonderful *works* toward the children of men. And it's a good exercise to go through both when you have faced disappointments, because disappointments tend to make us forgetful of all the good that God has already done for us. Disappointments have a tendency to make us look at the glass half empty. David refuses to do that. Instead, he has spent time meditating upon everything good that God has done.

I could have put one more point in here – that David deflects honor back to God. And he does. God honors David with greatness, and David speaks of God's greatness. God honors David as being the leader of Israel, and David honors God by saying that they are your people that You redeemed to Yourself. God honored David with a kingdom forever, and David acknowledges that it is God's kingdom that is forever. In verse 9 God promised to make David have a great name in the earth, and in verses 23 and again in 26 David says that his desire is to see God's name exalted and great in the earth. But it is just one way of showing praise.

VII. A response of agreement and claiming the promises of God (vv. 25-29)

A. *Though he shows humility and deflects glory back to God (vv. 26a)*

But in verses 25-29 we come to the petition section of the prayer. And even that section follows the pattern of the Lord's Prayer of seeing everything (including the petitions and requests for himself) as being requests for the purpose of advancing God's kingdom. If all prayer requests are seen as parts of God's kingdom coming, and His will being done on earth as it is in heaven, then I see no reason why we cannot pray them with the same confidence that George Muller did. Everything George Muller prayed for was expended for the kingdom – everything. And when he had disappointments (such as his inability to be a missionary to the Jews) he just adjusted his prayers to promote God's kingdom and glory where God had placed him. And I see David as doing that. Verse 26 gives the God-centeredness of the requests:

2Samuel 7:26 So let *Your* name be magnified forever, saying, “The LORD of hosts *is* the God over Israel.’ ...

David's prayers were powerful because David was praying for God's will to be done. He wanted God's name, God's Lordship, and God's will exalted. And everything he asked for could be subsumed under this desire. This is Psalm 37:4. “**Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.**” All of David's prayers could be subsumed under Christ's admonition to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all of these things will be added to you. If you want a prayer life with as many answered prayers as George Muller had, make it your goal in life to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. You can pray with confidence because you are praying God's will. When you need an automobile to continue to serve Him, it's not going to be a selfish request. It's a request to advance His kingdom. But you better be serving Him with that car. The only conditions that God has placed upon our prayers being answered is that they be according to God's will, done in the name of Jesus, and agreed to by a prayer partner. It's an incredible promise. So what does it mean to pray according to God's will? It means praying the Scripture - claiming the promises of Scripture, the laws of Scripture, the desires of God as recorded in Scripture, the attributes of God, the eschatology of Scripture. It's nothing more than praying the Scripture.

B. Yet he boldly claims God's promises, name, and character as he petitions God for the future (vv. 25-29)

1. Note that God's promises don't make David passive.

And that's exactly what David does in his prayer. He asks for what God has already promised He will do. And some people feel, "If God has promised it, why do I need to pray for it?" And I will answer that question in a moment, but just notice that this is exactly what was happening with David's prayer. He prays for everything that God has just promised in the first half of the chapter. Beginning to read at verse 25:

2Samuel 7:25 "Now, O Yahweh God, [Here it is:] **the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, establish it forever and do as You have said.**

2Samuel 7:26 So let Your name be magnified forever, saying, "Yahweh of hosts *is* the God over Israel.' And let the house of Your servant David be established before You.

2Samuel 7:27 For You, O Yahweh of hosts, God of Israel, **have revealed this to Your servant, saying, "I will build you a house." Therefore Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You.**

2Samuel 7:28 "And now, O Adonai Yahweh, You are God, and **Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant.**

2Samuel 7:29 Now therefore, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue before You forever; **for You, O Adonai Yahweh, have spoken it, and with Your blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever.**"

Do you see that? God made certain promises, and David asks God to fulfill those promises. He is praying according to the will of God – as all our prayers should do. So how do we apply this?

When you have a backslidden relative, ask God to fulfill His will by praying such Scriptures as 1 Thessalonians 4:3. You can say, "Lord, you have promised to answer any prayer that we pray that is according to your will. And therefore we believe that it is Your will for us to pray for a complete restoration of Fred. Have You not said, "**For this is the will of God for you, even your sanctification**" Father, we know Fred's sanctification is your will. And since that is so, and since you have promised to finish the good work that you began in him, we ask with confidence that you would turn Fred's heart around. And we even now thank you that you will do it. We thank you for his sanctification.

What about more mundane things like bread and milk and clothing? Well, wasn't that Christ's point when he told us not to worry about those things? Matthew 6:33 gives an unconditional promise when it says, "**But**

seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” All what things? The things He has been talking about - clothing and what you are going to eat. George Muller was totally sold out to God’s kingdom and His righteousness, so he knew with a certainty that God would supply all their needs. God had committed Himself to doing so. And God did it in remarkable ways, time after time. Let me read to you a short section from Bengue’s book:

“I hate to bother you, Mr. Muller,” began the matron, “but it’s happened. The children are all ready for breakfast and there is not a thing in the house to eat. What shall I tell them?”

[I’ll just interject here that George’s close friend’s eight year old daughter, Abigail, was playing close by, so he called for her to come with him, and he went into the dining room.]

Inside they found three hundred children standing in neat rows behind their chairs. Set on the table in front of each child was a plate, a mug, and a knife, fork, and spoon.

So obviously the matron was starting to take actions of faith just like George had modeled to her. By putting the plates on the table she was plowing the field (so to speak) preparing for God’s rain - preparing for him to provide. It’s sort of like that African church that was praying for rain during a drought, and they all showed up with umbrellas - except the missionary. Anyway, the story goes on.

But there was no food whatsoever to be seen. George watched as Abigail’s eyes grew wide with astonishment. “But, where’s the food?” Abigail asked in a whisper.

“God will supply,” George told her quietly, before he turned to address the children. “There’s not much time. I don’t want any of you to be late for school, so let’s pray,” he announced.

As the children bowed their heads, George simply prayed, “Dear God, we thank you for what you are going to give us to eat. Amen.”

George looked up and smiled at the children. “You may be seated,” he said. He had no idea at all where the food he had just prayed for would come from or how it would get to the orphanage. He just knew God would not fail the children.

A thunderous din filled the room as three hundred chairs were scuffed across the wooden floor. Soon all three hundred children sat obediently in front of their empty plates.

No sooner had the noise in the dining room subsided than there was a knock at the door. George walked over and opened the door. In the doorway stood the baker, holding a huge tray of delicious smelling bread.

“Mr. Muller,” began the baker, “I couldn’t sleep last night. I kept thinking that somehow you would need bread this morning and that I was supposed to get up and bake it for you. So I got up at two o’clock and made three batches for you. I hope you can use it.”

George smiled broadly. “God has blessed us through you this morning,” he said as he took the tray of bread from the baker.

“There’s two more trays out in the cart,” said the baker. “I’ll fetch them.”

Within minutes, the children were all eating freshly baked bread. As they were enjoying it, there was a second knock at the door. This time it was the milkman, who took off his hat and addressed George. “I’m needing a little help, if you could, sir. The wheel on my cart has broken, right outside your establishment. I’ll have to lighten my load before I can fix it. There’s ten full cans of milk on it. Could you use them?” Then looking at the orphans, sitting in neat rows, he added, “Free of charge, of course. Just send someone out to get them. I’ll never fix the cart with all that weight on it.”

Many people think that George Muller was being audacious. No, he was just taking the Sermon on the Mount at face value. He was seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness with all his heart, and being a good steward of every penny I might add, and God was adding all these things to him. George had learned to take God at His word just like David did. And this whole prayer shows an amazing combination of humility and yet confidence; yieldedness to God’s will, yet total boldness in asking God to fulfill His will.

2. If God is sovereign, why pray?

People often ask, if God is sovereign, why pray? I would turn it around and say, “If God is not sovereign, why pray?” People ask, “If God has promised something in the Bible, why pray?” I would say the opposite. I would say, “Since God has made promises to His people, but since He has also demanded that we ask for what He has promised, it makes perfect logical sense for James 4:2 to say, **“you have not because you ask not.”** God is not going to fulfill His promises without prayer. That’s why in Daniel 9, after Daniel had been reading the prophecy of Jeremiah that Israel would only be in exile for 70 years, and after he has done some calculations and realized that it was the end of 70 years, Daniel prays in earnest that God would fulfill his promise. If Daniel had acted like many of us, he would have simply said, “Oh, good. God’s going to do it.” And leave it at that. But instead, now that he knows what God’s will is, he intensively fasts and prays for God’s will to be accomplished. We’ve got to drum that into our heads. That’s what it means to pray according to God’s will. And by the way, it’s one of the reasons why understanding eschatology is so important.

The session's main goals for 2013 all revolve around improving our prayer life, and Gary will share more on that in the New Year. But I hope the verse, "you have not because you ask not," is drilled into the consciousness of each of us. God has promised to provide for all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus. But because He is bound and determined to provide for those needs in a way that will stir up your faith and your relationship to Him, He has also said that if you don't meet three conditions, He won't answer your prayers. You ask in the name of Jesus, repeating back from His Bible the reasons why He should answer your prayer (that's praying according to His will), and then you join with others in doing the same. And by the way men, when you lead in prayer, please always do it in the name of Jesus. You can start your prayer in the name of Jesus and end it in the name of Jesus, but Scripture says that it must always be in the name of Jesus.

Conclusion

So there is a lot that we can learn about prayer from this passage. But we can also learn about handling disappointments. Because David had already laid his all on the altar, as soon as he discerned a "No" from God, it was easy for him to quickly get about the business of praying for and working towards what was God's will.

The characteristics of this prayer are the characteristics we must put on if we are to handle disappointments graciously. But if we will put on the characteristics of this prayer, we will also find that God delights in powerfully working through us. God enabled David to store up stones, gold, nails, wood, and all of the resources needed for Solomon to later build God's temple. And he was able in many other ways to advance God's kingdom powerfully because he had laid his all on the altar and was now consumed with a passion for God's name, glory, and kingdom. May that be true of each of us. Amen.

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