

Unanswered Prayers

2 Samuel 12:15-23

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 5-19-2013

Introduction

Today we are going to look at David's unanswered prayer. And I think all of us can relate to him on that issue. If you are anything like me, you have probably had several unanswered prayers even in this last week. And it's easy to get discouraged when you have *lots* of unanswered prayers. Now, we tend to get discouraged, not so much because we *want* what we have prayed for, but especially because our unbelieving hearts tend to latch onto unanswered prayers as a reason to doubt God. And the unanswered prayer could actually be about a fairly trivial thing, and it could still lead to doubts. I'm caught in a traffic jam, and I pray that I won't be late to a meeting, and God doesn't answer my prayer. I pray that God would open someone's eyes to understand a doctrine, and God does not answer my prayer. I pray for healing, and God does not answer my prayer. And my own heart has been tempted from time to time to doubt God's promises and to wonder if God really cares about me. Now, I banish those thoughts from my mind almost as soon as they come, but they do come. They come despite the fact that God has answered thousands of my prayers, some in rather miraculous ways. And if you are honest, I'm sure many of you have struggled with this same problem of unanswered prayers. What are we to make of them?

For sure we should not question God's love for us. God affirms His love for David and for David's next child by Bathsheba in verses 24-25. For sure we should not question whether God is at work in our lives. He was definitely at work in David's life. In verse 25, God sent the prophet to David to encourage David in that regard. For sure we should not let unanswered prayers dampen our faith or enthusiasm for the Lord. And we will be seeing that David was a good role model on that point too. In fact, when it comes to faith, I believe that unanswered prayers can actually be a blessing. John Kapteyn said, "Faith is not proven true by answered prayer, but by unanswered prayer that does not make us waver or give up on God." So take heart, if you, like David, have had unanswered prayers. Verses 20 and 23 as well as the Psalms that David wrote during this period of His life show that David continued to worship and trust God even when his prayer was not answered. So let's dig into the text, and let's start by looking at some of the reasons for unanswered prayers. And we are going to venture way beyond

this text this morning, just to fill in some of the holes. And I am going to do that because this is such an important topic.

I. Some Reasons Why It Is Good For God To Say "No!"

A. Discipline (vv. 13-14; Ps. 38)

This chapter gives at least two reasons why God did not answer David's prayer to spare his son, and it hints at more. Look at verses 13-14
**2Samuel 12:13 So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."
And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.**

And before I apply this, let me point out that the death being referred to is not capital punishment from men. We have already seen that God's law would not have let that happen, even with confession, because there were not two witnesses unimplicated in the same sin who could cast the first stone. It's just part of the limits placed on civil government. By the way, that's why Cain was not put to death. Even with Achan, who confessed his sin, Joshua still had to send people to the tent to investigate whether his confession was true and get the solid evidence, because confession alone does not allow for capital punishment. Some people have been suicidal and have confessed to things they didn't do. So, because of all the checks and balances in Scripture, David was not in danger of capital punishment.

So what death was Nathan talking about? I am convinced that he was talking about the disease and death that God brings to believers as a discipline for rebellion. And there are a lot of Scriptures that talk about that. 1 Corinthians 11 says that weakness, sickness, and even death had come to Christians in the Corinthian church because they had partaken of the Lord's Table while in rebellion. American Christians don't tend to think about that very much, but I am convinced that a lot of disease is a loving discipline from God. And I've even told you stories of miraculous deaths that God has wrought. 1 John 5:16-17 speaks of sins that can result in a believer's physical death. So David was in danger of dying at the hands of God's providence because of his serious sin that he had not yet repented of. So even though he got off the hook of capital punishment, apart from repentance he would not have gotten off the hook of the providential bringing of death. But in verse 13 God promises to lessen David's discipline. He would not die. But God did not completely remove all discipline.

When we read Psalm 38 last week, we saw that David had excruciating pain from a venereal disease that he contracted, and the baby may have died from the same disease. We aren't told what disease the baby had. So part of God's discipline was the disease. And verse 14 indicates that

part of the discipline was the death of his son. We will be seeing that it is quite appropriate for David to be praying that God would lessen that discipline, but the unanswered prayer was clearly God's decision to not do so. Verse 14.

2Samuel 12:14 However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *who is born to you shall surely die.*"

And we looked at that sufficiently last week. But it illustrates that unanswered prayer can sometimes be a discipline issue. And people think, "Well, that doesn't make sense. How can God forgive and still discipline?" But think of discipline as discipleship. In English it really comes from the same root word. Repentance often lowers the amount of discipline for our children, but it does not necessarily always completely remove the discipline. Psalm 99:8 says, "**You answered them, O LORD our God; You were to them God-Who-Forgives, though you took vengeance on their deeds.**" God forgave, but He still disciplined.

B. For the sake of others (v. 14)

But verse 14 also highlights a second reason for unanswered prayer. In this case the unanswered prayer was for the sake of others – so that others would not blaspheme. God didn't want others thinking that there would be no consequences for sin, so God gave David and the child a horrible disease, and possibly other diseases along with it. And we saw last week that Psalm 38 describes that in gory detail.

C. Reasons from other Scriptures

1. Ongoing sin

But let me quickly give a bunch of other reasons why we could have unanswered prayers. These other Scriptures show that it is not that God doesn't care about us. In fact, it is precisely because He loves us. Psalm 66:18 says,

Psalms 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.

Major ongoing sin that is not repented of will close an individual, a family, a church, and even a nation from having their prayers answered. 1 Samuel 8:18 promises to afflict an unrepentant country with tyrants, and without repentance, even though they cry out to God for relief, God will not answer them in that day. I think America is in that state. The prayer, "God bless America," should be coupled with prayers of repentance on behalf of America.

2. What we are praying for is impossible

Another reason is if the prayer is impossible to answer. If you have already conceived a baby girl, it doesn't matter how much you pray for a boy, you are going to get a girl. It's too late for such a prayer. And by the way, you ought to be praying for your future children long before your attempts to conceive. You can pray for salvation, safety, health, and other blessings for that child. We prayed for our children long before, and during, and after conception.

But there are many prayers that are just not possible for God to answer because they are contrary to His design for creation. Sir Eric Roll told about a youngster that was praying fervently that God would make Tokyo the capital of France. He thought that rather odd, but it turned out that the child had missed that answer on his geography exam. But just think of what a topsy turvy world this would be if God answered all the whimsical prayers of His children.

3. God foresees problems that would come from saying "Yes"

A third reason for unanswered prayer is that God foresees problems that might come from saying "Yes." We don't know if that might have been the case with this first child, but there are Scriptures that indicate that God sometimes gives a "No" or a "request denied" because it would otherwise be harmful. Wise parents say "No" on a regular basis because they love their children. Think of your toddler who wants to touch the hot stove and you say "No." He may think you are just spoiling his fun and have absolutely no good reason for saying "No." But making up the difference between a toddlers understanding and your understanding is needed before the child can see that your "No" was a blessing and that its not that you're a kill joy. Well, the difference between our understanding and God's understanding is far, far greater. He has His reasons and they are all good.

In his wonderful book on prayer, B. M. Palmer told the story of a woman who had spent a summer away from her children and was very anxious to get back to them. When she learned that all the rooms on a certain steamer were taken, she wept bitterly because she knew that every other ship was also booked for the next two weeks. But a few days later when she learned that her ship that she would have been on had sunk, she rejoiced at God's unanswered prayer. A loving God is in control, and David knew that.

4. God foresees blessings that could arise from saying "No"

A fourth reason for unanswered prayers is that God foresees blessings that will result from refusing our request. Elijah begged God to let him die,

but God had something spectacular that he wanted to do in Elijah's life by refusing that request. Moses begged God to let him not lead Israel, but God had spectacular things in mind for Moses. Tremendous blessings flowed because God said, "No" to Moses's prayer. If David could have seen the joy in that baby's eyes in paradise, once that baby was freed from its painful disease, there is a sense in which David would realize that God had something far better. David prayed for healing, and God gave permanent healing.

Let me tell you a story I got from a local town newspaper in Georgia.¹ Tom Benefield told a story about his grandpa on his mother's side. He was a carpenter who was barely making ends meet during the Great Depression. But he had a heart for the Lord and he still sought to minister to the needy as much as he had time to do. His church had pulled together a long list of items that they were going to donate to an orphanage in China that was in desperate need. And along with some other work that he did, he built wooden shipping containers to send all of the stuff by steamer ship. After getting all the crates packed, sealed, and on their way, he reached into his shirt pocket to put on his glasses so that he could drive home – and the glasses were gone. He looked all through the car and couldn't find them. He remembered putting them on that morning, so he retraced his steps, but couldn't find the glasses anywhere. He had just bought them for \$20 that morning (and that was a lot of money back in those days), and began to panic, prayerfully searching high and low for where he had placed them. When he mentally replayed his earlier actions, it dawned on him that his glasses had probably slipped out of his shirt pocket unnoticed and fallen into one of the crates. And so with a sinking feeling he realized that his brand new glasses were on their way to China! God had not answered his prayer to help him find his glasses.

It was the Great Depression and he didn't have a lot of discretionary money. And he started to complain bitterly to the Lord. "Lord, its not fair. I've been very faithful in giving of my time and money to your work, and now this." But it seemed like it was too late.

Several months later, the director of the orphanage was on furlough in the United States, and was visiting all the supporting churches. And when he came to Tom's grandpa's church, the missionary began by thanking the

¹ http://www.millercountyliberal.com/news/2011-07-27/Opinion/The_carpenters_glasses.html

people for their faithfulness in supporting the orphanage. And let me read you the next part of his report to the congregation, as told by Tom.

“But most of all, I must thank you for the glasses you sent last year. You see, the Communists had swept through the orphanage, destroying everything, including my glasses. I was desperate. Even if I had money, there was simply no way of replacing those glasses. Along with not being able to see well, I experienced headaches every day, so my coworkers and I were much in prayer about this. Then your crates arrived. When my staff removed the covers, they found a pair of glasses lying on top. Folks, when I tried on the glasses, it was as though they had been custom-made just for me! I want to thank you for being a part of that.”

The people listened, happy for the miraculous glasses. But the missionary surely must have confused their church with another, they thought. There were no glasses on their list of items to be sent overseas.

But sitting quietly in the back, with tears streaming down his face, an ordinary carpenter realized the Master Carpenter had used him in an extraordinary way.

If we could see the future of why God sometimes says, “No,” we would be praising God and agreeing with Him. And that’s exactly what David did in 2 Samuel 12:20. And what’s remarkable about David’s praise is that he didn’t yet know the reason why God said “No.” But by faith He got up, cleaned himself up, put on a new pair of clothes, and went to worship and adore the God who controls all things and who loved him.

5. Saying “Yes” would not be in your best interests

Another reason for God's No answers is that a "Yes" may not be in our *own* best interests. Maybe you are asking for more money, or greater responsibility, or a new position, and God may not think that you can handle that position. Or God may know about some danger associated with that new thing. Before my mother was married, she was traveling home from medical school to Detroit for Christmas break, and at the airport felt so disappointed when everyone was told to disembark from the plane because of icing problems. And as she was leaving to get a train ticket, she heard that they were going to fly after all, and a lot of the people reboarded. But she had already traded in her ticket, and she decided to go on by train. At exactly that time, my dad, (who had had no eyes for my mom up until that point), was back at the missionary medical training school. And he suddenly had God so impress upon him that this woman was in danger, that he felt compelled to pray for her safety. He had no idea why God was pressing him to pray, but he prayed until God gave him a sense that his prayers were answered. It was later discovered that the plane she should have been on

crashed because of icing. When my dad heard the story, he realized that if God had burdened him to pray for this woman, maybe he ought to think about marrying her. And he did. So *there* was a case where if God had said “Yes” to my mother’s desires to fly, she would have been dead, and I would not be alive.

When Amy Carmichael was a child, she used to pray that God would change her eyes from brown to blue. And obviously God did not answer that prayer. Later, as a missionary in India, she was grateful for her brown eyes, as it helped her to blend in with the population better and to be less intimidating. Garth Brooks, in a song, Unanswered Prayers, recalls pleading with God to be able to marry his high school sweetheart. God did not answer that prayer, and looking back years later, it became apparent to him that she would have been a terrible choice for him. God knows the future, and when a loving God says “No,” to David, David gets up, washes himself, and worships. He trusts the God who loves him.

6. Saying “Yes” would be bad for other people

Sixth, there are times when saying “Yes” to our prayers would be very bad for other people. A father discovered that his daughter was stringing along three fellows, and for their sakes he had to say "No" to his daughter's desires because he didn't want those men's hearts to be hurt by her insensitivity. Here's what clued him in that his daughter was stringing along three guys. He found this note pinned up on the bulletin board beside the family phone:

"Daddy - I am going to wash my hair. If Tom calls tell him to call at eight. If Herb calls and Tom doesn't, tell Herb to call at eight but if they both call tell Herb to call at 8:15 or 8:30. If Timmy calls and Tom and Herb don't tell Timmy to call at eight, but if they both call (Tom & Herb) or one calls tell Timmy to call at 8:30 or 8:40. Tina."

Do your prayers to God sometimes sound as confusing as that? You want to have your cake and eat it too. So if it is not in the best interest of others, God will sometimes say “No!” We are not praying according to God's will.

7. You don't need what you are asking for

Seventh, we may simply not need what we are asking for. A father wrote back to his son in college and said, "Am enclosing \$10 as you requested in your letter. Incidentally, \$10 is spelled with one zero, not two." God sometimes does that to us, doesn't He? He gives us, not what we ask for, but what we need. He says in Philippians 4:19, “**my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.**” All our

needs, not necessarily all our desires, even though there have been hundreds of times that God has given above and beyond what I have asked. And so, it may not be a common reason. But it is a reason.

8. God has something better in store for us

Eighth, God may have something better in store for us. Mary and Martha asked Jesus to heal Lazarus and they were bitterly disappointed when He did not do so. But after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, they could see that *His* answer was really far better. They were definitely not going to complain.

9. We pray at cross purposes to other believers

A ninth reason for unanswered prayers is that our prayers may be at cross-purposes to other people's prayers. If believers on both sides of a war pray for victory, they can't both be answered yes. Same goes for if I pray for a different team to win than what Scott is praying for. Right? And God will likely answer Scott's prayers before mine, because Scott has more interest in the game than I do.

10. Praying for things already finished

Praying for things already finished is a tenth reason. David at least knew that much, and he quit praying the moment God's providence made it clear what His answer was going to be. There is no point in praying for a baby boy if your wife is already pregnant. It is going to be what it is going to be.

11. His "No" brings greater glory

The eleventh reason is illustrated in the man born blind. In John 9:3 Jesus said, "**Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.**" How many times had he and his parents prayed for healing, and he was not healed until Jesus prayed for him. And the reason their initial prayers were unanswered is that the earlier "No" brought more glory to Jesus. I think this was definitely the case with Joni Eareckson Tada. God's "No" to prayers for healing resulted in incredible glory being brought to God and incredible ministry being opened up through her books and through her ministry, which is called Joni and Friends.

12. God's "No" will open an adventure

And that's actually a good example for #12 as well, because God's "No" opened up a lifetime of adventure and challenge for her. God's "No"

to Moses opened up forty years of adventure and digging deeper into knowing God.

13. Because He wants you to do it yourself

Thirteen is that there are times God won't answer our prayers because He wants us to fill the need ourselves. 1 John 3 says in effect, "Don't pawn off your responsibility on someone else when I have already given you the resources and I have providentially brought this poor person to you." 1 John 3 says, "**But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?**" James 2:16 says that the prayer that a poor person be blessed and filled is not a good prayer when it is in your power to bless and feed him. Prayer without action is not good. And many of our prayers are prayers that we could easily answer ourselves. We pray that politicians would change, and we don't go to talk to them. It's so easy - talk to Sarah, who is with the National Write You Congressman Campaign. We pray that a missionary would have funds, and we don't give to him.

Spurgeon tells the story of how he met with his large board to pray for a pressing financial need. Just before they prayed he said, "Wait a minute! Before you begin this prayer meeting there is something I'd like to do." He took out a sheet of paper and wrote, "C.H. Spurgeon gives 50 pounds" and passed it around for others to fill in. By the time the paper returned, the prayer meeting turned into a praise meeting because the whole need was met. If your prayers for action are not being met, it may be because God is calling you to meet them. The Lord has many times stopped me from praying and called me to be the answer. Don't be like spiritual Congressmen who always want to solve problems with other people's money and other people's efforts. God has good reason to say "No" to such a prayer.

14. The request itself is sinful

Number 14 should be obvious. James 4:3 says, "**You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.**" So if the request itself is sinful, or sinfully motivated, obviously God is not interested in answering it.

15. Bad timing

Or sixteen, it may be bad timing. David wanted to build the temple so badly, but God said "No, your son Solomon will build a house to Me." And God gave His reasons. When Lazarus got sick, the sisters sent for Jesus and

asked Him to come quickly before He died. Christ didn't come quickly. He waited and let Him die because timing was essential for the glory of God.

16. May not be possible in God's plan

The last reason that I have given in your outlines is that a "Yes" answer may not be possible in God's plan. It is true that Scripture says that nothing is impossible for God, but in context it is clear that nothing is impossible that is consistent with God's nature and plan. Scripture says that God cannot deny Himself, so He won't go contrary to His plan. It says that it is impossible for God to lie or to sin because it is contrary to His nature. And so there are some things that are not possible, simply because God planned it differently. Christ prayed, "**O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.**" He said, "if it is possible." And if there had been any other possible way of salvation, the Father would have granted that request. And you can think of many examples where God has to deny someone's prayer as impossible. If two men are praying that they might get married to Sally, both prayers may be honorable prayers, but it is only possible to answer one. So keep in mind that within God's will there are good prayers that cannot be answered. But always, God has His reasons. It isn't arbitrary. His plan is perfect.

So hopefully, just going over those reasons has sparked some encouragement in you if unanswered prayers have made you question God's existence, God's goodness, or God's loving care for you.

II. Some Ways That God Says "No!"

A. He May Make A "Yes" Providentially Impossible (David)

But, while it is nice to know that God has good reasons for saying "No," it would also be helpful to know *how* He says "No." Maybe this is not a "No." Maybe this is simply a "Wait." There are times when God tells us to wait. But let me quickly list five ways in which God says "No" so that you can recognize them.

The first way God does it is by making a "Yes" providentially impossible. That was certainly the case with David here. Once the child had died, there was no more use in praying for healing. Although even that is not an absolutely certain test. There have after all been cases of people being raised from death. But generally speaking, it ought to be fairly clear when providentially God has made the answer impossible. It won't do much good to keep praying that a different Congressman will win an election.

Maybe the prayer can change to “Shorten his term Lord.” But he is already elected. If you have been praying that so-and-so will marry you and they marry someone else, well, that’s a pretty clear answer. So providence is the first way.

B. He May Say "No!" Through The Bible

Another way God says, "No!" is through the Bible. You may think that was the situation with David, since Nathan told him that his child would surely die. And I will deal with that in a bit, because Scripture says that promised judgments are a different situation - they are conditional. But I am talking about something clearly laid out as a moral principle in the Bible. Let’s take the case of a divorce that has happened. A man is divorced by his wife and he is praying that God will bring her to repentance and restore her as his wife. So far this is an appropriate prayer, even though a divorce has happened. But if she gets married to another person, even if that person dies, the Bible flat out forbids this first man to remarry his former wife. You will find that in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and in Jeremiah 3. Once a second marriage has happened, reconciliation and remarriage to the first partner would be offensive to God, and no matter how hard you pray, God’s answer is “No! Don’t do it.” And it shocks me that Bill Gothard mandated what God condemns on this issue.

Of course, there are a lot of times when the “No” is a “No” right from the beginning. Some of the things that pastors in this city are praying for they should know better. I have heard pastors pray for more welfare programs. The Bible describes that as theft and sin. That is an overreaching of the Government’s roles. I heard one pastor pray for government subsidy of the church. It was embarrassing. And if *pastor’s* can pray for unbiblical things, you know there are a lot of prayers by non-pastors that God has already given the answer “No” in his Word. “Lord, bless this lady as she preaches.” And God says, “No! Ladies shouldn’t be preaching.” “Lord, I know that my son is living in rebellion to your word, but please bless him anyway.” “No. I’ve already said No in My Word.” We just need to fill our minds with God’s Word. Much of what the 21st Century church prays for is unbiblical. And God can say “No!” by opening our eyes to understand the Scriptures.

C. Guiding us to stop praying

Another way that God says “No” is through guidance. God showed Paul that he should stop praying. But I think an interesting one is in the last verses of the book of 1 John where John tells us that there is sin leading to

death and sin not leading to death. And if a brother is committing sin leading to death, we are not supposed to pray for them any more. How in the world are you going to tell when that circumstance is true? And I think the answer is, “Through guidance.” God gives us the go ahead to pray sometimes and at other times closes our mouths. I have had times in my life when God made it as clear as clear could be that I should quit praying a given prayer, and I quit. So guidance can be a factor.

D. He May Remove Your Desire

Another way in which God says, “No!” is by removing the desire from our hearts as we mature. What was once a compellingly urgent desire in our hearts is suddenly unimportant to us. I have seen God do this many times. God replaces our desires with His desires, and the more in tune we become with God’s desires, the more our prayers become in tune with the Spirit’s intercession from within us. But sanctification frequently takes care of our questions of “Why.”

E. He May Give Your Heart's Desire In A Different Way

Another way in which God says “No” is that He gives us our heart’s desires in a totally different way than we anticipated. No one is going to complain if you have been praying for a \$2000 Red Chevy Caprice and God gives you a blue \$10,000 car with 80,000 less miles on it. And you can think of other ways in which God answers, but He answers above and beyond what we could ask or think.

III. Three more lessons

A. Don't be fatalistic (vv. 16-18,22-23)

But let me end this morning with three more lessons. And the first is, “Don’t be fatalistic.” You might think that verse 14 is as clear a “No” as you could get. After all, doesn’t Nathan say, “**The child also who is born to you shall surely die**”? Was David living in rebellion to God’s declaration by fasting and praying for seven days? I don’t think so. God didn’t command him not to pray. If He had given that command – “I don’t want you praying about this,” then yes, it would have been disobedience. But I think David was actually being a role model for us – both in this passage and in the Psalms that he wrote during this period. He was a model of how to avoid fatalism. He was being as aggressive in prayer as God was allowing him to be. And let me explain.

I have actually heard people say that they have given up praying that America would be spared from judgment because in their mind it is too late according to Romans 1. They believe God has said “No” before they even start praying. But I want you to notice how the story goes in verses 15-17. **“Then Nathan departed to his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David, and it became very ill. David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground. So the elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground. But he would not, nor did he eat food with them.”** Why did David pray so earnestly for the child? Hadn’t God already made His “No” quite clear? Wasn’t this a waste of energy? Well, think about the city of Nineveh. Jonah had told Nineveh that in 40 days it was going to be destroyed. Why wasn’t it? Some people think it was a false prophecy. No. It was not destroyed because of the genuine and deep repentance of the city - and Jesus said that it was a genuine repentance. In fact, Jonah anticipated that. He complained that this was the way God generally works, and the whole reason he didn’t want to come to Nineveh in the first place because he was afraid that they would repent and that God would relent. He wanted them destroyed.

You see, Jeremiah 18 says that all God’s prophecies of judgment are conditional. He says, **“The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it...”** David knows that it is never sinful to pray for mercy; He knows that the child is not dead yet, so he perseveres in prayer. And we should take our cue from David and not be fatalistic. As long as you can claim the Scriptures as the basis for your prayers, keep praying till a “Yes” becomes impossible or God leads you to stop praying.

B. Once a clear “No” is known, show submission and worship (v. vv. 18-23)

But the next lesson is that once it becomes impossible, have an attitude of submission to God like David did. Verses 18-23 show David’s ability to turn it all over to God once the final decision was made and to not grow bitter. We’ve got to relinquish our heart’s desires once God says “No.” Starting to read at verse 18: **“Then on the seventh day it came to pass that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead. For they said, ‘Indeed, while the child was still alive, we spoke to him, and he would not heed our voice. How can we**

tell him that the child is dead? He may do some harm!’ When David saw that his servants were whispering, David perceived that the child was dead. Therefore David said to his servants, ‘Is the child dead?’ And they said, ‘He is dead.’ So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshipped.” [David had such a confidence that God’s “No’s” are always the best that He was able to worship and adore God in faith even though his heart was still hurting. Do you think he felt like worshipping? I doubt it. But by faith he did what he knew was right. He took the actions of faith against all feelings. Verse 20 goes on] **“Then he went to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, “What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food.” So he said, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, “Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?” But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”** Are you able to go about life even after God says a final “No” to you? And you might say, “But I can’t do it. I don’t feel like doing it.” But you know, most of life is not about feelings; its about obedience. And I have found that my feelings tend to line up properly only after I have engaged in what Scripture calls the obedience of faith. It takes faith to obey in such a situation because we don’t feel like it. Think of a train where your mind and spirit is the engine, your will is the coal car, and your emotions are the caboose. If the first two are headed in the right direction, the emotions will eventually follow. By faith submit to God, worship Him, and adore Him. Do it even if you don’t feel like it, and you will find your feelings miraculously changing. You will find healing start to develop when you do that.

C. Learn to pray in the Spirit and be led by the Spirit

The last lesson that I draw from this whole subject is that we need to learn to be led by the Spirit in our prayer life. And I should point out that God is gracious, and even during those times when we are praying wrongly, the Spirit takes over and intercedes the appropriate prayers from within us. And that is so cool. In Romans 8, Paul said, **“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought,** [he admits that there are many times when we just don’t pray right. But that is just an opportunity to trust the Spirit to lead. This is what Scripture means when it calls us to pray in the Spirit. So he goes on to say:]

but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Even during those prayers where we are asking something out of God’s will, the Spirit knows our hearts and our true needs and He is interceding to the Father from within us *so that* all things will work together for our good and for God’s glory. If you did not offer up any prayers, fearing that you might pray wrong, the Spirit could not take those prayers and perfect them with His intercession. So it is better to risk praying wrongly than to not pray at all, because it is in the act of praying that the Holy Spirit intercedes properly through us. Even when we don’t know how we ought to pray, God uses those prayers to make us more dependent upon the Spirit. And so to me, 2 Samuel 12 is a marvelous and rich passage on the meaning and method of prayer. And prayer is the major theme of this whole year, so you will hear about this subject more as the year progresses.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by reading two quotes. The first is from C. J. Mahaney’s comments on Mark 10. He said,

I want to celebrate unanswered prayer. I want to ... thank God for all the prayers I have prayed sinfully motivated, that the Savior hasn't answered. I want to thank God that he is sovereign, not sentimental. I want to thank God for all the times when ... I have approached the Savior demanding that he do for me whatever I ask, ... that the Savior’s response was not simply, “You don't know what you are asking”, but that he withheld an answer to that prayer. I am grateful to God for unanswered prayers.

The second quote is a poem written by a confederate soldier. He titled it *The Blessing of Unanswered Prayer*.

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 got everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am, among all people, most richly blessed.²

There is a sense in which all our prayers are answered, and they are all answered well by a good, loving, all-wise God. So he is not ignoring us. And how we respond to Him in those situations will impact whether we grow spiritually or whether we go backwards. If you are discouraged by an unanswered prayer, I call you to wash yourself and worship just as David did in 2 Samuel 12. Amen.

² <http://historyaddict.com/CSPrayer.html>



2 Samuel 12:15-23

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 5-19-2013

Introduction

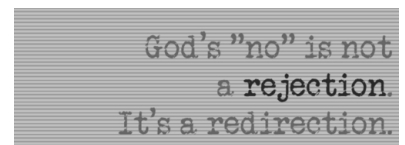
- I. Some Reasons Why It Is Good For God To Say "No!"
 - A. Discipline (vv. 13-14; Ps. 38)
 - B. For the sake of others (v. 14)
 - C. Reasons from other Scriptures
 - 1. Ongoing sin
 - 2. What we are praying for is impossible
 - 3. God foresees problems that would come from saying "Yes"
 - 4. God foresees blessings that could arise from saying "No"
 - 5. Saying "Yes" would not be in your best interests
 - 6. Saying "Yes" would be bad for other people
 - 7. You don't need what you are asking for
 - 8. God has something better in store for us
 - 9. We pray at cross purposes to other believers
 - 10. Praying for things already finished
 - 11. His "No" brings greater glory
 - 12. God's "No" will open an adventure
 - 13. Because He wants you to do it yourself
 - 14. The request itself is sinful
 - 15. Bad timing
 - 16. May not be possible in God's plan



- II. Some Ways That God Says "No!"
 - A. He May Make A "Yes" Providentially Impossible (David)
 - B. He May Say "No!" Through The Bible
 - C. Guiding us to stop praying
 - D. He May Remove Your Desire
 - E. He May Give Your Heart's Desire In A Different Way



- III. Some Lessons From The "No!" Passages Of Scripture
 - A. Don't be fatalistic (vv. 16-18,22-23)
 - B. Once a clear "No" is known, show submission and worship (v. vv. 18-23)
 - C. Learn to pray in the Spirit and be led by the Spirit



Conclusion

