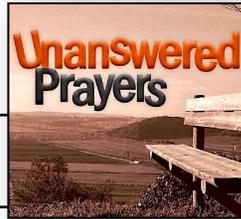


# Making Sense of Unanswered Prayer



*"1 I love the Lord because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy. 2 Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!"* Psalm 116:1-2 NLT

- When have you seen clear answered prayers? When have you experienced unanswered prayer?

The author of Psalm 116 is unknown. The theme of the psalm is answered prayer. The psalmist had a good experience with prayer. God answered his prayers. He even pictured God bending down to listen to those who pray (see v. 2 NLT). Warren Wiersbe wrote, "...God 'bends down' to pay attention and concentrate on what was being said to him... Only a God as great as Jehovah can hear the voices of millions of his children who are praying to him at the same time." (*The Transformation Study Bible*, 116:1-4).

Answered prayer had a positive impact on the psalmist's spiritual life. It increased his **understanding** of God's character (vs. 5-6), increased his **appreciation** to God (vs. 7, 12-14, 17-19), and it increased his **confidence** and trust in the Lord (vs. 8-9).

Did the psalmist have times when his prayers seemed unanswered? The psalm does not tell us. However, life experiences and the Bible indicate that people do experience what appears to be unanswered prayer.

**Central Lesson:**  
God always answers prayer with either a yes, no, or wait.

1. Requests that are not in God's **WILL** & plan for your life - He has something better (1 John 5:14).

*"And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him* [NIV - "ask anything according to his will..."]" NLT

Mrs. Billy Graham told an audience of Minneapolis women one year—"God has not always answered my prayers (That is, with a 'yes'). If He had, I would have married the wrong man—several times!"

2. The Lord may be **PROTECTING** you from danger that you cannot presently see coming.

*"The Lord keeps you from all harm and watches over your life."* Psalm 121:7

3. The **TIMING** is not right and God wants you to be patient and wait (Psalm 27:14; 32:8).

*"Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord."* Psalm 27:14. *"The Lord says, 'I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.'" Psalm 32:8*

4. Little heart or **BURDEN**—James 5:17.

*"Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years!"*

Someone has written: "Prayers are measured neither by time nor by number, but by intensity....In prayer it is better to have a heart without words, than words without a heart."

5. Failure to **ASK**—James 4:2.

*"...you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it."* NLT  
Many times, God waits to work in our lives until we ask through prayer. He wants us to seek Him and trust in Him.

6. Asking with wrong **MOTIVES** (James 4:3)

*"...when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure."* NLT

Our motive should be to glorify God, not self-gratification. (Also see: 1 Cor. 10:31; John 14:13).

7. **UNBELIEF** (James 1:6-7).

*"6 But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. 7 Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord."* NLT

A particular church was having a special prayer meeting to pray for rain during a time of drought. As people entered the sanctuary, one lady came in differently than everyone else. She had an umbrella under her arm! She had faith that God would hear and answer her prayers!

8. Unconfessed **SIN** (Psalm 66:18).

*"If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."*

Sin always has a *separating* consequence. Sin separates us from people and God. Sin is like a virus to our relationships. We must confess our sins (see 1 John 1:9) to have a clear communication channel to God and others.

9. Wrong **FAMILY** relationships (1 Peter 3:7).

*"In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered."* NLT

Some people are powerless in prayer because they mistreat their families!

10. **IDOLS** in our heart (Christ not being first in our life) (Ezekiel 14:1-3).

*"1 Then some of the leaders of Israel visited me, and while they were sitting with me, 2 this message came to me from the Lord: 3 'Son of man, these leaders have set up idols in their hearts. They have embraced things that will make them fall into sin. Why should I listen to their requests?'"* NLT

R.A.Torrey writes: "...many a man is crying to God in vain, simply because of sin in his life. It may be some sin in the past that has been unconfessed and unjudged, it may be some sin in the present that is cherished, very likely is not even looked upon as sin, but there the sin is, hidden away somewhere in the heart or in the life, and God 'will not hear'." *How to Pray*, pp 61&62.

**Central Lesson:** God always answers prayer with either a yes, no, or wait.

- Accept Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ.
- Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ► Attend a small group. ► Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.