

Reflections on the message by Glen Rickard on Sunday 2nd May 2010

Unanswered prayer – What do you do when God is silent?

Sometimes when you pray there is just no answer. And then you read John 14:12-14, Mark 11:24, or Matthew 21:21-22.

John 14:12-14. ¹² *"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. ¹³ You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!"*

In such scriptures the Lord indicates that if we ask anything in His name He will do it. But what happens when there is no answer? We can't ignore this. This message gives some reasons and some strategies.

James 4:3. *And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure. (NLT).*

Sometimes our motives are a hindrance to answered prayer. If you pray for a brand new Porsche car, for example, you might not get it.

The following is a genuine prayer by John Ward of Hackney. *"Oh, Lord, you know I have 9 estates in the City of London and likewise I have recently purchased a freehold estate in the county of Essex. I beseech you to preserve the 2 counties of Essex and Middlesex from fire and earthquake. Oh, and as I have also purchased a property in Hertfordshire, I beg of you likewise, to have an eye of compassion on that county. As for the rest of the counties, you may deal with them as you are pleased!"* This is a selfish prayer about his own interests.

Our motive in prayer must be to glorify God. In everything we do we must ask if it glorifies God, and ask how we can glorify God in whatever it is that we do.

1 Peter 3:7-8. *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).*

Your lifestyle itself can be a hindrance. Your attitude to your wife determines whether your prayers will be answered. The husband's priority is love in the marriage. It means that we give honour to our wives. Jesus gave everything for the church and this is our model. Put your wife's interests and desires ahead of your own. Otherwise your prayers may not be answered.

Isaiah 1:15-17. *When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with the blood of innocent victims. ¹⁶ Wash yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways. ¹⁷ Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows. (NLT).*

Our attitude to the vulnerable is important to God. If we have no social concern it can hide our prayer from God. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, perhaps the greatest British theologian of the 20th Century said that he was sometimes asked why Martin Luther and George Muller had such spectacular answers to prayer. He always pointed to their holy lifestyles.

Ephesians 6:12. *For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.* (NLT)

Demonic forces can stand against our prayer, although this is truer for our church, community and nation than for us as individuals. We see an example of this in Daniel 10. We need to pray for our nation that God will break through. Fasting is a key way of going about this. You can fast anything, as long as you seek God. It is about making room for God, saying that you want Him more than your physical needs.

It may not be God's time to answer your prayer. Not all Jesus' prayers were answered.

Hebrews 5:7 *While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could rescue him from death. And God heard his prayers because of his deep reverence for God.* (NLT)

Mark 14:36 *"Abba, Father," he cried out, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."* (NLT)

This is one prayer that the Father didn't answer. If you are suffering, Christ knows suffering more than you and can be with you in it. No other god has suffered like that.

John 17:20-22. ²⁰ *"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. ²² I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one."* (NLT)

Jesus prayed that His people might all be one. But at the moment there are estimates of between 27,000 and 34,000 distinct denominations. Is the church one? It doesn't look like it! There are splits in the church. It hasn't been answered...yet!

What about Paul? Did God answer all his prayers.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9. *...even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. ⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.* (NLT)

Paul asked God three times to remove his "thorn in the flesh". God's answer was, No!

Deuteronomy 3:23-27. God would not let Moses to go into the Promised Land when Moses asked Him. God would only let Moses see it from a mountain top. But eventually He did answer Moses' prayer, on the Mount of Transfiguration, possibly Mount Hermon, in the Promised Land of Israel.

Matthew 17:2-3. *As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light. ³ Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus.* (NLT)

Another reason that God does not answer prayer is because of the time in which we live. Jesus did not establish His kingdom rule, but will do so at His second coming. We live in the Church Age. We live in an age of tension, between the present and future of Jesus' rule. Sometimes it is not God's time.

How do we deal with all this? We need to learn to be like the Psalmist.

Psalm 40:1-3.

¹ *I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.*
² *He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,
Out of the miry clay,
And set my feet upon a rock,
And established my steps. (NKJV)*

It doesn't cut well with this present age. Patience is not something we do in this society. The microwave meal society is an instant, impatient society. When God is silent, we are to wait patiently for the Lord. For He knows you far better than you can know yourself. The Psalmist's deliverance from the pit was probably not instant. We are not to ask why we are in the pit, but better to ask three other questions:-

1. What is God doing in my life?
2. What is God teaching me in this place?
3. How does God want me to respond to Him?

We have a church. We support each other. Lean on friends. Share your heart. Bring your requests to the prayer meeting. Bring them to your connect group. Share it with a church leader or home group leader.

John 4:7-8. ⁷ *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.* ⁸ *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (NKJV)*

Draw near to God. We tend to run away from God in times of trouble. There is no time parameter in that promise. If you feel a lack of God's presence in your life, what about your presence in God's life? Pursue Him; give Him your time!

Does prayer work? In the Soviet Union, Stalin and Lenin sought to abolish God. Khrushchev said he would show the last Christian on television. Lenin said electricity will replace God. But the might of the Soviet Union has crumbled as Christians have given their lives and prayed. László Tőkés was pastor of an ethnic Hungarian church within Romania that grew to 5000. This drew the attention of the Communist authorities. His congregation and the local people gathered to protect him, and this escalated until it led shortly afterwards to the downfall of the Romanian government. Glen has also experienced immediate answers to prayer, such as when he experienced difficulties with his work, and arriving home was unexpectedly telephoned about another kind of job, that he does to this day.

God is not indifferent to your needs. But let us look at our motives and our lifestyles.