

Joke: Larry goes to the revival and listens to the preacher. After awhile the preacher asks anyone with needs to be prayed over to come forward to the front at the altar.

Larry gets in line, and when it's his turn, the preacher asks: "Larry, what do you want me to pray about for you?"

Larry replies: "Preacher, I need you to pray for my hearing."

The preacher puts one finger in Larry's ear, and he places the other hand on top of Larry's head and prays and prays and prays.

After a few minutes, the preacher removes his hands, stands back and asks Larry: "Larry, how is your hearing now?"

Larry says, "I don't know, Reverend, it's not until next Wednesday"

How many of you believe in the power of prayer?

I'm incredibly thankful for those who have been joining me on Wednesday nights. If you haven't been I want to encourage you to do so. Corporate prayer when you and I are united for a purpose on purpose can really shift atmospheres.

Truth is I know with God all things are possible. Prayer is powerful. Amen. I have seen God miraculously answer so many prayers over the years. So why is that for so many of us it also seems like one of the most difficult things to stay consistent with?

I mentioned already that prayer is powerful, but prayer can also be quite puzzling.

If I'm being honest I have seen God answer some prayers where I have said yeah, go God, Because He showed up and showed off.

And then there has been other times I've prayed for a similar circumstance, with the same expectancy and faith, believing in the same God, and He didn't do what I thought He should do and knew He could do, and that can be puzzling.

You see God do something, knowing nothing with Him is impossible, you read about how He answered some prayers in the Scriptures and then you see God not answer how you think He should and you question, why should I even pray.

And let me pause here to say this, never stop believing God can, never stop praying believing He will. If the enemy can get you to think God doesn't hear you or no longer cares then you will stop praying and seeing God move like He wants to move.

Your prayer, my prayer has the power to move mountains. I love reading the stories in the Bible where God showed up and showed off.

For example, in Joshua 10, Joshua had just won a battle and now was being attacked and so Joshua prayed that the sun would stand still, and God caused the sun to stand still.

Look at it, it is so cool. . .

Joshua 10:12–14 (NIV): On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." 13 So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book

of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. 14 There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a human being. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!

The sun stood still ya all. They had a day with more than 24 hours. And then I have prayed for someone that wanted a little more time with a loved one, but didn't get it.

How about this one in 1 Kings 18. Elijah challenges 800 false prophets tells them sacrifice to their God. Lets them go first, they pray, nothing. Elijah teases them a bit. . .

Check this out it's so funny. . .

1 Kings 18:27–29 (NIV): At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” 28 So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. 29 Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

Then it's Elijah's turn he has people, rebuild the sacrifice with 12 stones to represent the twelve tribes, soak the sacrifice with water not once, not twice but three times. . .

Let's read what happened. . .

1 Kings 18:33–39 (NIV): He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.” 34 “Do it again,” he said, and they did it again. “Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. 35 The water ran down

around the altar and even filled the trench. 36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. 37 Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” 38 Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. 39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!”

Incredible prayer. . .incredible response from God and the people.

And then I have gone to bedsides to pray, pleaded on behalf of the family and they never got out of the bed.

Daniel, chapter six. Daniel in the lion's den prayed, and God took starving lions and duct taped their mouths shut. And Daniel walks out in one piece. And then there's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who gets thrown in a fiery furnace and walks out unharmed without even the smell of smoke.

And I think go God. And then I prayer for someones back and it doesn't get better.

Prayer can be powerful but occasionally, it's also puzzling.

And when you look at the words of Jesus, He says something that builds my faith. But at the same time gets me wondering.

In John's gospel, chapter 14, verses 13 and 14, Jesus said,

John 14:13–14 (NIV): And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Jesus said that. . .so why is it, that sometimes I ask Him to do something, in His name and believed that He would do it, but He doesn't?

Have you ever prayed for something and you knew God could do it, and you thought He would, but He didn't do it?

It's in those moments you start to wonder and ask yourself, did I do something wrong? Is God not listening? Is He mad at me? Does He not care?

With that foundation, remember we are in the series Ever wonder and so today I want to talk about ever wonder why God didn't answer my prayer?

What I hope to do today is help build an understanding of the nature of God and the purpose of prayer.

Let me start off today saying something you may not want to hear, can I just be really honest with you a minute.

In our very self-centered culture, we like everything to be about us.

But when we look through the scriptures, we find out rather quickly, it's not all about you.

You are not, I am not the main character in the story.

God is the main character and we need to embrace the reality that God does not exist to serve us. The truth is that we exist to serve and glorify Him.

And when we recognize that He doesn't exist for us, but that we exist for Him, it helps us to understand the purpose and the meaning behind why it is that we pray.

So, let's build a foundation of understanding today, and then look at some scriptures together.

Let's define what the purpose of prayer is not, I think that will help us understand what the purpose of prayer is.

Here's what the purpose of prayer isn't, and this may shock you, the purpose of prayer is not to get God to do our will.

The purpose of prayer is to know God, know God's heart, so we can do His will.

The purpose of prayer is to get to know Him intimately, God so wants a relationship with His kids.

And we are here to serve Him, He is not here to serve us. God isn't our spiritual Santa Claus or genie in the lamp that we just rub to release Him to grant us our wishes.

That's not God.

He's not your drive through God, where you pull talk to the box say, "I've got a need," pull around to the next window and an angel comes out and says, "My pleasure, here's your, whatever you asked for."

We need to understand that God is not a button to be pushed, a lamp to be rubbed. . .but He is rather a relationship to be pursued.

He wants relationship. He is love. He created us so that He could love us and that we would choose to love Him in return.

So, the purpose of prayer, is not to get God to do our will. The purpose of prayer is for us to know Him and be conformed to His will and then in knowing His, do His will.

But then we read that verse in John and that can be really puzzling, because Jesus said, "If you ask anything in My name, I will give it to you."

And yet, so often, that's not the way it goes. Was Jesus lying? Does He not care? In case your not sure the answer is no on both questions.

And what is really important for us to understand as followers of Jesus, as we study God's Word, when we read God's Word, we need to accurately interpret what's in the Word.

You can never build a theology around one verse. Especially one that take out of context.

You need to look at who was it that was writing this? To whom was it written? What were the historical ideas going on at the time?

And so, instead of building a theology off just one Scripture we look at other Scriptures as well to interpret the Scriptures.

Hear this church if your belief, your thought, is contrary to what Scripture has said. It is the wrong belief system. God, The Holy Spirit, Jesus, will never contradict the Scriptures. So, if you are

plucking out one or two to justify the way you live, or think, and the context is not inline with the rest of Scripture you need to think about the way your living.

So if we have this one verse on prayer, we could say, "Okay, I've got some questions about this," because our experience has been different from what Jesus said.

So, we're going to look at some other verses on prayer, we'll look at what Paul said in the epistles and what Jesus said in the gospels. We're going to use some Scripture to interpret the Scripture.

That will help us see the total narrative of what God is trying to say under the umbrella of His goodness.

This message today is one that honestly has caused some people to walk away from their faith.

Maybe you have heard the stories of people that once sat in a place like this but no longer do and you've heard them say, I prayed for my grandma and she died. I prayed for my best friend and he took his life. I prayed for whatever, and God didn't answer. Why did God not answer my prayer? And they lost their belief in the God they once served.

Maybe you're the one saying, "I prayed and I believed, and I thought I did everything right, and God didn't do what I knew He could do. Why didn't God answer my prayer?"

Let me answer that as clearly as I can, I don't know.

(Talk about praying for someone's bladder and arthritis as mine was still not working at the conference)

I don't know, why God chooses to do what I know He can, but doesn't but might have for someone else at a different time with a similar situation.

But what I can do is show you in the Bible, at least four possible reasons why God didn't do what you asked Him to do. This is by know means exhaustive and I've learned that when God answers I give Him the glory and when He doesn't, at least not in the way I think is best, because often times it is answered just not like I thought I should have it, and in those moments, I leave it with God.

I have prayed and seen God heal miraculously. I've also prayed and felt like nothing happened.

So, four possibilities. The first possibility is this. Maybe you have a broken relationship that's hindering your intimacy with God, and perhaps that might be a reason He didn't answer a prayer.

In Mark chapter 11, Jesus was talking to His disciples. He was giving them a lesson on faith. And He was saying basically, "Hey, if you really have faith, you can ask something as crazy as for a mountain to be moved, and if you don't doubt in your heart, I'll do what you asked to do." And Jesus said this in verse 24. . .

Mark 11:24 (NIV): Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

That sounds a lot like the verse we read in John doesn't it?

Jesus continues. . .

Mark 11:25 (NIV): And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Wait what, it seems like Jesus is adding a little bit to His teaching about faith. It seems that Jesus is implying that our relationship with other people might matter when we pray to God.

Do you know why it sounds like that, because He is.

Let me try to explain it this way. Your kids are fighting and they come in screaming bloody murder, he did this and she did that, and I just. And then they come up to you and ask, "Can we have a friend over tonight?" What's your answer? No, you can't. Can we go to a movie? Again no.. Can we stay up late? No, you can't. Why?

Is it because your mean? No it's because they were fighting.

These are your children, and you love them dearly, but at this point, your not going to give them what they're asking for when their not doing what you told them to do. The relationship between your kids and you was not in harmony in the moment.

So perhaps, Jesus is implying that your relationship with people could impact your relationship with God. In case you're not sure. . .

In Matthew chapter five, Jesus was talking about going to give your gift and Verse 23 He says. . .

Matthew 5:23 (NIV): "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,

If you remember someone is mad at you what do you do?

Matthew 5:24 (NIV): leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Your kids go to each other come make it right, apologize, do what you asked them to do in the first place. Now maybe a movie when they come back. Because they worked on those relationships.

It could just be me, but it seems like Jesus is saying that your relationship with other people could impact your relationship with God.

If that's not enough, guys, specifically you husbands here's a verse that you probably will wish I kept out of the message.

It can probably apply to both husbands and wife's, but men, this is directly to you. Let me give you the King George's version "If thou art being a jerketh, God might not answereth your prayers."

Actually here is what it says. . .

1 Peter 3:7 (NLT): 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.

So what? Your prayers will not be hindered.

It seems that, when we let Scripture interpret the Scripture, scripture seems to imply that your relationship with other people might impact your relationship with God.

So, why did God not answer your prayer? Again, I don't know, but perhaps, you have a broken relationship that could be impacting your intimacy with God.

Second reason that God might not have answered your prayers is maybe you have the wrong motives.

Now, I don't know about you, because you're probably more spiritual than me but I have prayed some selfish prayers.

I wish I could say all my prayers were in the fear of the Lord, and with the right motive of the heart but I can't. And truth is it's not uncommon to see people pray self-centered prayers with the wrong motives.

The Pharisees did it a lot. You can read about it in the gospels.

They would go out in their robes and stand on the street corners and pray these long elaborate prayers. Not because they really loved God, but because they loved the applause of people who said, "Oh, you're so spiritual when you pray that way."

And I don't know how it might apply in your life, but it might be the person in business who says, "God bless my business," but they're not willing to give any money to the local body that they attend on Sunday. Bless my business, but there's no generosity to help anybody in need.

Why did God not answer a prayer? Maybe it's because you have a broken relationship. Maybe you had the wrong motives.

Third possible reason is, maybe when you prayed, you didn't believe God would actually do it.

Maybe you don't believe God will, you're lacking faith. You have no expectancy. Let me just say this before we look at a verse or two. Never lower your expectancy to what you have seen. Raise it to what God has said He will do.

So many times we think well I've never seen God really heal anyone so He must not do that anymore. Don't lower your bar, raise it to the things you've read and heard.

Mark chapter nine. There was a dad who had a son and his boy was possessed by an evil spirit. The evil spirit throws him to the ground, he's foaming at the mouth, the evil spirit even tried to kill the boy, tried to throw him into the fire and the water. And so the dad, as you can imagine, he is beside himself. He's asking, "Can anyone help my boy?" And so, he goes up to the disciples and says, "Hey, you're the guys with Jesus, you guys have power. Can you cast this demon out?" And the disciples couldn't do it.

And as Jesus looked on and you could almost sense, He was kind of concerned or maybe even disappointed with His disciples that didn't understand the authority that they had, "Don't you guys have faith? He asks.

And in Mark chapter nine, beginning with verse 21. . .

Mark 9:21–23 (NIV): 21 Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. 22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." 23 " 'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

I love the honesty of this dad as he says to Jesus. "But if You can do anything!"

I can imagine Jesus thinking, "Really you haven't seen or heard what I've been doing. What do you mean, If you can,"

So Jesus says, "Everything is possible for the one who believes."

Again I love the honesty of verse 24. . .

Mark 9:24 (NIV): Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

I kinda have faith, but I'm not sure it's the faith that You're looking for. It's a kind of, sort of faith.

And I love the honesty, because I don't know about you, but I'll tell you, even as a pastor and someone who has walked with Jesus for over 40 years, there are moments when my faith has not been as strong as other times.

And you need to hear me when I tell you, I have seen God do miraculous things. I've seen God heal diseases, restore backs from needing surgery, I've seen God miraculously provide for people when there was no other way. And it was obviously the hand of God. He's done that for me as well. I've seen God show up and show off.

I've seen God take people that others had given up on and God completely transformed lives.

I have seen God answer prayer after prayer, after prayer. But the truth is I have had moments that I just couldn't muster the faith. I knew God could heal, but in the moment I just didn't have the faith for it.

And what we need to understand is that our faith really matters to God.

Scripture tells us. . .

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV): And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

"Without faith, it's impossible to please God."

The way that you're made right with God is by faith. It's faith in a God you can't see. It's faith in a God you may not feel. Faith honors God.

Over and over again in scripture Jesus said, "According to your," what? "According to your faith, may it be done unto you."

Your faith matters so much to God.

Let me give you three examples of this. . . There was a woman she was bleeding for 12 years, and she touched the hem of the garment of Jesus. And Jesus said to her, "Your faith has healed you."

There was an immoral woman who knelt down and worshiped at the feet of Jesus, poured expensive perfume or oil over Him, and Jesus looked at her and said, "Your faith has saved you."

There were two blind men who couldn't see and they said, "Heal us." And Jesus said, "Do you believe that I can?" They said, "Yes, we do believe that You can." And Jesus said, "According to your faith, let it be done unto you," and their sight was restored.

Your faith matters to God.

But at the same time, we have to remember, God is still God, period. And He will do what He wants, how He wants, when He wants.

Listen I'm telling you never stop praying for healing, never stop praying for your children, never stop praying for people to come to church to encounter Jesus. Never stop praying period. Pray believing, pray with expectancy. Because I still believe He is the same yesterday today and forever.

But I want you to realize that there are some that have given what I believe to be a distorted view of the gospel.

And that is, if you have enough faith, then God has to do what you want. God has to heal you and God has to bless you. And everyone's is going to be rich if you have enough faith.

Truth is God doesn't owe us anything. I do believe God wants to bless His children. What father doesn't. So, and I've mentioned this before, God may bless you with millions, but He might not.

But, ultimately church you need to understand that your faith matters to God. So keep praying, keep believing, keep trusting. Because He is still faithful.

So, maybe your thinking, well, my relationships are good. I can't think of anybody I need to make things right with. I have the right motives. I believe that my motives are pure, and I really do have faith, but God still hasn't answered my prayer.

Why didn't God answer my prayer?

And the last reason I see in scripture that God may not have answered your prayer, is it may be simply because God has something different, something maybe even better.

Maybe in your case, even though you really want it and really think it's best, and all logic tells you it's best, maybe God has something different.

Look at 1 John 5 it has an amazing promise. . .

1 John 5:14–15 (NIV): This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

You can have confidence in this, that if we ask anything, according to our wisdom, according to what we want, according to our desires. That's not what it says. . .

"If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of Him."

Maybe, as much as you want what you want, and as right, as you think it is, maybe God has something different in His overall plan and His will, not just for you, but for the people around you.

Consider the apostle Paul who had what he described as a thorn in his flesh. We don't know what the thorn was, but what we know is that three times, and I don't believe it was three prayers like, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but rather three seasons of prayer, where Paul pleaded with God, "Would you take this away?"

I've seen you do the miraculous. I know you can do this. This is slowing me down, hurting me, whatever it is, it's tormenting me," he says, "it's tormenting me day and night. Please God, I know You can, take it away."

This is Paul. The guy that preached the gospel for 30 years in every major city in the Mediterranean Region. Paul, the same one who encountered the risen Christ and served Him so

faithfully, enduring an incredibly high price, shipwrecked and beaten, stoned and imprisoned.

Paul that wrote almost half of the New Testament, he prayed and he pleaded and his relationships were probably good. His motives were pure. His faith was strong, and God didn't do it.

And God revealed to Paul when he said that. . .

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV): But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

My God showed me that His grace is sufficient, it's enough, and His power is made perfect in my weakness, my brokenness, so I'll boast all the more in my weakness because His strength, His goodness, His glory is made perfect when I don't get what I want or even when I don't understand.

So, I don't know what it would be for you. We have to have that house or that job. I have to marry this person.

And so, you pray and you pray and it doesn't happen. And in the moment, you may not understand. You may not like it. You may ask some very legitimate questions, which I think God is ok with.

Why didn't you remove that thorn? And God may, in His own way, in His own time show you that He is still sufficient. His grace is still what you need, it's all that you need.

So you asked and you believed and you didn't get it. And one day you just recognized, God had something different. Something better.

So, that raises the very important question. Why even bother praying?

And let me try to close this thing out by saying this, and I said it earlier, you have to understand that the purpose of prayer is not to get God to do what we want. The purpose of prayer is more relational than that, it's to get to know God.

It's to know Him intimately, so that we can do His will. And what I've found in my own life, if nothing else. And there's always something else, but if there were nothing else, prayer, it reminds me all the time, I am not in control, and it keeps me close to the one who is.

The purpose is to know Him and to do His will.

And listen church this is important, there has been times where I have been in a prayer slump.

I don't know if you've ever been a prayer slump. But it's not the best season to be in.

It's like an athlete who gets in a slump and they can't hit the ball to save their life.

I felt like I was in a prayer slump. I would pray and the would go no further than my ceiling. Bounce back and felt like God wasn't listening.

Hear me, I never doubted the power of prayer, but I just didn't feel like God's was answering my prayers.

And then something miraculous takes place, a prayer that even when I didn't feel like it, the situation turns around and God steps in.

And I just have to remember, God, isn't here to serve me, I'm here to serve Him.

And the purpose of prayer isn't to get Him to do my will. The purpose of prayer is for me to know Him and to know His will.

So with everything in me, when I pray, I always believe God can, and I always believe that God will. And even if He doesn't, the good news is, I came to tell somebody, I still believe. I still believe with everything in me, with every fiber in my body, because my faith is not based on what I see, my faith is based on who God is. It's not in a what, it's always in a who. It's in the goodness, the glory, the nature of God.

And so, if you find yourself in a little prayer slump, you just keep on praying, because the ultimate purpose of prayer is not to get God to do what you want, but to know Him and His goodness and be conformed to His will.

So, when you pray, believe He can, believe He will, and if He doesn't, still believe, because without faith, it is impossible to please God.