

## When You Pray and God is on Mute

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Series: Teach us to Pray

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Discipleship, Prayer

And one of the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. And Jesus teaches them what is now called the Lord's prayer.

We have been spending some of the weeks learning about prayer and then learning to pray. My sincere hope is that bot alone and together with your family and the small group you have. Last week, my encouragement was for you to be bold, confident and even shameless in praying. Because our father does care for us. So ask for your needs confidently.

Whoever asks receives, whoever seeks finds and whoever knocks, the door is open. James the brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem said that we have not because we ask not.

Jesus on multiple occasions said that the father would answer our prayers.

***And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."***

Matthew 21:22

***Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received<sup>1</sup> it, and it will be yours.***

Mark 11:24

***Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.***

John 14:13

***You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.***

John 15:16

***On that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.***

John 16:24

So with all this confidence in Jesus' teaching? Do we not need to talk about unanswered prayers? Do we not need to talk about when you pray and God is on mute, or so it seems.

What happens when you pray for work and you remain unemployed for a long season? What happens when you pray for marriage and remain single for ages? What happens when you pray for healing and your child dies?

Sadly we sometimes have simple easy answers from people we trust. It is hurt breaking when some people reduce all unanswered prayer to a lack of enough faith. When you pray for someone to get well and they don't and you hear a pastor or a trusted leader reduce the whole issue to a lack of enough faith, it is so heartbreaking and oversimplification of a complex thing.

The other sad answer I hear in the case of suffering is that, well it is God's will. Why would God will the brutal murder of a young child or the chaos that has overtaken nations and thrown so many into suffering?

Or some say, you just did not pray in the name of Jesus. So many of us think that just by tagging the phrase, "in the name of Jesus" after a prayer that we have then prayed in his name. It has become an inescapable ritual. But praying in the name of Jesus is really about praying in his nature. Because someone's name in that culture represented who they are.

When Moses asks God to reveal his name to him, he asks, "What are you called, because names reveal the nature and character of someone. So indeed sometimes we make selfish prayers and just about building our Kingdom and are not in the nature of Jesus even though we tag his name at the end.

But what do you do about prayer for healing? Is it not in his nature to heal? So what then?

I want to also say that what we will talk about today is not to discourage us or not to provide easy answers neither a way around unanswered prayers. It's more to invite us further into the arms of a loving father. To get us more aware of the complexity of

the issue and to make us more ready to sit in the tension of the Now and the Not Yet of the Kingdom of God.

So I will share some thoughts I heard that were shared by a UK pastor in his book, "God on mute" written after he and his wife had struggled with unanswered prayer for healing for such a long time. I pray that his thoughts would provide encouragement for any of us today who feel God is on mute.

So Pete divides the reasons for unanswered as seen in scripture prayers into 3 categories:

1. God's world
2. God's will
3. God's war

So why do some prayers go unanswered?

## A. God's world

### 1. Common sense

For example, if you miss the tax deadline and you are praying not to be fined, what are you really asking God? That overnight he would gather Parliament get them to pass a law to change tax law for you. Maybe this is why KRA fined you after all.

### 2. Contradictory prayers

All of God's children are praying and the father is listening. There are over 8 Billion of us and God loves each of us. Some of the prayers we make are contradictory and mutually exclusive. A yes to one prayer is a no to another.

If 2 of you applied for a job, one person has to get it and so it means that one prayer was not answered as expected.

As I was praying for our church property this week, I stopped to acknowledge that if I am asking God to enable us to purchase this property I am also praying that others don't get it.

One person is praying for a revolution in South Africa while another is praying for the safety of their property and lives.

It was funny in the last election cycle when after the results were announced the first time, one group of people went on the streets shouting: It's not witchcraft, but prayer. Then of course the Supreme Court overturned the elections and the other

group then went on the streets shouting the same chant: It is not witchcraft but prayer. What was God up to?

### 3. The Laws of Nature

Some prayers are not answered simply because they disobey the laws of nature and would even be detrimental to the world and the lives of others. Now, not that God couldn't and he does from time to time intervene in nature to change things. But the reason we call them miracles is because they are rare.

If you are leaving Nairobi at 9 and hoping to get to Nakuru before curfew, you are asking that time stops moving and that means the world stops rotating and that may cause a lot of trouble everywhere else.

Can God do these things? Yeah. We have stories in scripture where the Sun stood still and time went back and a sea was split in two. Yet these are miracles and you even see that you have only one account of them. Or that splitting of the sea thing was a whole night affair.

***That God can and does, on occasions, modify the behaviour of matter and produce what we call miracles, is part of Christian faith; but the very conception of a common, and therefore stable, world, demands that these occasions should be extremely rare.***

-C.S Lewis

The laws and principles of nature were created by God to make life work, and for all of us. And most times, they work quite well. So sometimes our prayers are unanswered because we are asking God to override those laws and principles.

### 4. Life in this age is hard

Jesus taught: In this world, you will have trouble. Paul his letter to the Romans

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We are still living in the age where things are not yet set right completely and so life will be hard. Things go wrong, some things do not work out. People lose jobs, people die, relationships break, nations fail. We are still in the Not Yet of the Kingdom.

## 5. Bad Teachings/Theology/Doctrine

Some prayers are not answered as we think they should simply because what we think about God is wrong. How many people have fallen to the falsehood of property gospel and it is from that premise that they pray?

How many people have fallen to the idea that knowing Jesus means they will just become wealthy and never suffer? All this bad theology. Especially for a faith whose centre is a man who had no home and was brutally murdered before the glorious liberation. Every believer needs a proper theology of suffering. Things are tough and they may even get tougher precisely because of your faith in Jesus.

So we need to learn like 3 Jewish boys who were being put into a fire for not turning from worshipping God. Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego said: We are confident that our God will deliver us, but even if he does not... Because that is always a possibility.

## B. God's Will

Second Category, God's will. In the Lord's prayer Jesus says teaches us to pray: Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus is building into the prayer three realisations

1. Heaven is the place God's will is done all the time
2. Earth is the place God's will is done some of the time
3. Prayer is who we lean into the tension

As I have been saying there are always so many wills around. Somehow, God in His wisdom gave me free will and all 8 billion of us and each of us have a body to enforce our wills.

Then there are other spiritual beings; angels, demons, spirits, the devil, all with wills of their own too.

Then there is nature with its set laws and principles giving creation a will of its own.

## 6. Free Will

All these wills are constantly interacting. And God's will is supreme, yet the idea of a loving God means he doesn't force himself of His creation. What Kind of God is one who bends people's wills just to achieve his outcomes? It is the devil that is controlling and imposing.

God is love and love demands freedom. And this very nature of our father means He really will interfere with people's will. Just like Love, God is patient, He woos, He romances, He influences and waits. H gives freedom and free will, and this free will is the source of great potential but also the source of great trouble.

## 7. Slow process or Slow Kingdom Coming

Some of your prayers have been answered it is just that they are taking time. Because God prefers to influence rather than force. Some prayers work gradually as God is influencing the people we are praying for. As the Holy Spirit works on our own hearts. Even psychologists recognise that influence yields better results than force

Often times we are the answers to the prayers we are making and so God is influencing us, gradually getting us to where we should be. Or using us in the lives of the ones we are praying for. It is frustrating for some, but sometimes it is a slow Kingdom coming but it's coming.

## 8. God's best

Some prayers are not answered because God has something better in store for us. Thank God He does not always give us everything we pray for. The father in His mercy and compassion sometimes says no to our prayers.

There are so many things looking back I thank God he did not say yes because I would not have said the yeses I have said up until this point or even worse still I would have messed my life up.

Sometimes it is about what is best for the world around that God says no. I have some friends who have adopted kids who know that if God had answered their prayers and given them biological kids their children would not have gotten parents and a family.

## 9. Motive

James the brother of Jesus, and leader in the Jerusalem Church:

***You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.***

James 4:2-3

## 10. Relationship seeking father

Some prayers have not been answered because God's presence and friendship is the greater answer. Yet some of us would not pray if there was not something in our lives to contend with God about.

For all of us if God answered all our prayers we would reduce God to an ATM kind of relationship where we go only to withdraw answers. As a father who delights in us there could be some things withheld just so that we learn to abide in him, delight in him to love the father more than the gifts he gives.

## C. God's War

Last category of resins, God's war. We are on a battlefield. There is spiritual warfare all around. There is not a single neutral space on earth. It is all spoken for.

There is a guy called Daniel in the Bible, he had been fasting and praying for 3 weeks. For all that time it seemed like God had delayed or said no. Then the angel of the Lord appears to Him and said that God had sent him with the answer to His prayer but he had been held back by an evil spiritual being that was over Persia, the prince of Persia.

Sometimes the problem is not God at all and it is not people but other spiritual beings opposed to God. There is a war going on.

***For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.***

Ephesians 6:12

In some circles, there is an over-spiritualisation of everything. Heck, even demonisation of everything. When I was younger I thought the devil was behind every bad thing. So I would start to curse him out even when there was a blackout. Turns out that was just an issue with Kenya Power.

Sadly for some people, they swing to the other polar end of assuming there is no evil in the world and that there are no monovalent and evil spirits and the devil.

### 11. Satanic oppression

The devil is real. There is indeed a personification of evil and is waging war against God and his people. And if he is not in your worldview, sadly people become the object of your frustration and anger at the evil in the world.

So what do we do in this case? Paul says in the same scripture we have read above:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

Don't go out mapping your city or town. Don't seek demons out. Don't see demons everywhere and don't pick fights with them. Simply put on the full armour of God and stand firm. Trust me, they will wage war.

Jesus when he faced temptation from the devil on a head to head warfare, what does he do? He prays, quotes scripture and says no. Over and over again. Even when he had encountered people oppressed by evil spirits, he does not seek them out. If anything, it is the evil spirits that try to get his attention and cannot stand him.

So put on the full armour of God and stand firm. Pray.

#### 12. A lack of faith

There are places in the Bible where Jesus says that the hindrance was a lack of faith or teaches that we would receive if we believe.

Like in Matthew 21:12

***“And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”***

***Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.***

#### 13. We Give Up

Unless you know that God has actually said no to your prayer, keep praying. It could be a wait, it could be any of the things we have talked about. So do not give up.

#### 14. Sin

Sometimes our prayers are not answered as our attentions is being drawn to areas of disobedience in our lives.

***Come and hear, all you who fear God;  
let me tell you what he has done for me.  
I cried out to him with my mouth;  
his praise was on my tongue.  
If I had cherished sin in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened;  
To draw our attention to injustice***

Psalm 66:16-18



## 15. Injustice

Sometimes our prayers are not answered because we have simply disregarded or even caused injustice around us. We pay no attention to the needs and plights of the poor, the hungry, the weary, the stranger and the weak in our own families, in our neighbourhood, in our nation and even in the world.

***“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to lose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?  
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.***

Isaiah 58:6-9

So what is the point of this whole conversation? To bring us to the awareness that when prayers go unanswered and it seems like God is on mute, there is a whole lot of things going on and God being unkind is definitely not one of them. For those who have lost faith because of unanswered prayers, the father’s heart is for you.

Yet another reason why Jesus was keen to teach is that we should always come to prayer knowing that God is our father. He really does care for you. He loves you. Even when we do not get what we want or pray for, his mercy, compassion and love towards us do not waiver.

So one of the things that can be helpful is to learn to lament. The father wants to hear about your frustrations. Some of your morning prayers may need to look like the psalm we just read: How long Lord!!

Or the need to look like Jesus’ own prayer: My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?

Yet even in lament, prayer needs to be part of our lifestyle.

