

Connections

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What God Is Doing While You Wait for Your Prayer to Be Answered by Courtney Reissig

If you've been around long enough, you probably remember the popular Garth Brooks song "Unanswered Prayers." It's a catchy song, and one we're tempted to cling to when we experience the opposite of what we pray for.

Brooks runs through the things he thought he wanted in his youth that didn't turn out, leaving him to wonder if his prayers had gone unanswered. As he looks back on his life and where he is today, he concludes that God actually gives good gifts in those unanswered prayers. What we pray for in our youth might not be the thing we want in maturity and old age.

But is it true that God leaves prayers unanswered? In the Old Testament, God's refusal to listen to his people's prayers was a sign of judgment. But in the New Testament, we see a constant refrain of God delighting in the prayers of his people—and delighting in answering them. In Matthew 6:10, we're given clarity on our prayers and how God answers. He might not answer the way we want him to, but he always gives us his best. And he always answers; it just may not be the one we asked for.

While Brooks is no theologian, Charles Spurgeon is. In his devotional *Morning and Evening*, he writes this about "unanswered prayers":

Unanswered petitions are not unheard. God keeps a file for our prayers—they are not blown away by the wind, they are treasured in the King's archives. This is a registry in the court of heaven wherein every prayer is recorded. Tested believer, your Lord has a tear bottle in which the costly drops of sacred grief are put away, and a book in which your holy groanings are numbered. Before long, your suit shall prevail. Can't you be content to wait a little while? Won't your Lord's time be better than yours? Before long He will comfortably appear, to your soul's joy, and make you put away the sackcloth and ashes of lengthy waiting, and put on the scarlet and fine linen of full fruition.

Spurgeon is unpacking a truth often repeated in Scripture. God doesn't keep time like we keep time. His ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:8). What is unanswered to us is simply moving right on his timetable for him. There is no unanswered prayer, but there are times when, as Dale Ralph Davis says, "God has the slows." So we're in a pos-

ture of waiting far longer than we'd want or feel comfortable with.

What do we do while we wait? If we believe Brooks was wrong, how do we reconcile the gap between our prayers and God's deliverance?

The Psalms are the prayer book of waiting Christians. If you're waiting, you could open to a psalm and find a balm for your waiting heart. But let's look at one to guide us as we wait for prayers to be answered.

Pray Without Ceasing

Praying continually is a biblical concept, but it's hard to practice (1 Thess. 5:17). We have jobs. We have lives. Nonstop praying is inefficient and impractical. But the Bible gives examples of how to make prayer a constant in our lives.

Look at Psalm 5:3: "In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you and watch expectantly" (CSB).

On waking, the psalmist cries out to the Lord. My default when I'm waiting on God to act is to act myself. When I feel out of control, I start to grasp for more control. But what would happen to my heart in waiting if before my feet hit the floor—or my hands grabbed the phone—I prayed?

The promise in verse 3 is that when we pray, God hears. The psalmist knows God hears his voice, and he trusts God will act, so he prays. And because he prays, he can watch expectantly, knowing God will move.

Stay Near Community

When a woman is waiting for her baby to be born, every day feels like an eternity. At the grocery store, people ask when she's due. At church, people ask her, "How long?" But along with that, women share their stories of waiting with her. Whether it's a horror story of carrying long past their due date or a commiseration with the discomfort of waiting, the community of fellow mothers helps a waiting mom get by on those final days that feel like years.

The same is true for us in our waiting on God to answer. The psalmist doesn't wait alone. Look at verse 7: "But I enter your house by the abundance of your faithful love" (CSB).

In the Old Testament, "your house" is universally understood as the temple, the place where God dwelled and his people heard from him. In their waiting, they prayed before they acted, but they also gathered with God's people.

There's comfort in a shared sorrow. We weren't meant to wait alone. Others can bear with or empathize with the sorrow and waiting we endure.

Take Refuge in God While You Wait

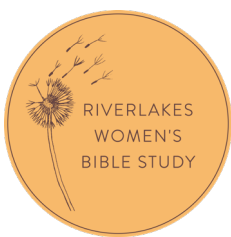
The psalmist often goes through his prayers and complaints before he comes to a place of resolution. He's honest about his struggles, but then he must come to terms with them and rest. The same is true in this psalm: "Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them shout for

joy forever" (v. 11, CSB).

We can be tempted to find our refuge in things or people we can see. Waiting is hard. We don't know when it'll end. But anxiety builds when we find refuge in anything but the Lord. Everything else will fail us, but he'll be a constant protective force as we wait on him to move in our requests.

I'm living with the ache of unanswered prayers. Maybe, like me, you want to settle for the quick fix or illusion of control, and you come up empty. Let the psalms be your guide and the Lord be your refuge as you live with prayers that haven't yet been answered. There's no prayer he doesn't hear or compassionately respond to.

Women's Bible Study is Coming Soon



Draw close to the Lord and other women, find support and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ in a small group environment. You may choose Thursday mornings or Tuesday evenings for fellowship, discussion, prayer, and encouragement. Groups begin

this Fall. Look for more information in next month's Connections Newsletter!

Counseling Available



People Encouraging People (PEP) is a ministry of trained Biblical Lay Pastoral Counselors to hurting people. PEP counselors draw upon the comfort they have received from God to help others move closer to Jesus in the midst of their problems. When life challenges get tough, are you strong enough to ask for help?

Referrals to Christian professional counselors are available as well. Don't let your spiritual and emotional health be threatened. Call (661) 589-9733 x222 for assistance, appointments or referrals.

Passionate Hearts Ministry

Hope, Help, and Healing for Women. Were you wounded by childhood sexual abuse? Are you wanting to defeat disordered eating? Do you long for emotional health and wish for heart-connections? Have you wondered how to overcome the bondage of dysfunctional relationships? Come and discover a better understanding of who God created you to be.

Passionate Hearts:

For women who experienced childhood sexual abuse.

Courageous Hearts:

For women struggling with anorexia, bulimia or compulsive overeating and body image issues.

Feeling Hearts:

For women wanting to learn more about the appropriate role of life's emotions.

Loving Hearts:

For women striving to overcome dysfunctional and co-dependent relationships.

Invisible Hearts:

For women recovering from multiple past issues. Prior group participation preferred.

Passionate Heart Ministry offers these support groups this fall. If interested call (661) 331-3392 and leave a confidential voice message. Preregistration is required by August 30. These groups are Christ-centered, curriculum-based, highly confidential for women 18 years or older. Space is limited. Materials fee \$50. Childcare is offered by prior arrangement only.

