

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-26 Christian Life: Unanswered Prayers

A second issue of living the Christian life is prayers that seem to go unanswered. Too often the people we counsel focus on the trouble they are facing. They might say, "This is more than I can stand" or "God does not hear me when I pray!" They can even condemn themselves by believing this statement, "I know I had it coming to me." If one takes this attitude when praying, the question becomes, "Who are they praying to?" Are they placing more faith in the problem than in the One they are praying to? When a person prays only about their woes or fears, their answer is often more woes and more fear. This can lead to depression and even despair. Hope seems lost.

We know that God can calm people's fears, but the question is, "Where is their faith? On whom or what do they place their confidence?" When counseling such a person, you might ask, "Do you believe God has an answer for your problem? Do you have faith that whatever happens will be God's answer for your good? Do you think that praying longer or louder will somehow 'force' God to see things your way?" Remind the person of the promises of Scripture, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom 8:28).

An important story that helps you as a counselor to understand God's ways of dealing with people is found in John's Gospel. It concerns the request of Mary and Martha, two sisters who were friends of Jesus. They sent word to Jesus to come because their brother Lazarus was sick. When Christ finally arrived, Lazarus had been dead four days already. Notice how the two women dealt with their disappointment, their unanswered prayer. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Martha did not understand why this had happened, but she didn't give up her faith in Jesus. He told her that her brother would rise again.

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." Martha, because of her faith in Jesus, was given a new understanding of who Jesus really was. After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." These were the same words Martha had greeted Jesus with earlier. Each of them had faith for the past. They believed Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying. What they lacked was faith for the present situation. Hope seemed lost. Wasn't death final?

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” (John 11:21-36).

Another story will help you as a counselor to understand God’s ways of dealing with people and unanswered prayer. It is about two women who needed the touch of Jesus. A man named Jairus came and begged Jesus to come to his house. He had a 12-year-old daughter, his only child, who was dying. As Jesus began to move to the home of Jairus, the crowds of people almost crushed him. In this crowd was a woman who also had a great need for healing. For 12 years she had been bleeding, but no one could help her.

Seeing Jesus she came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. Immediately her bleeding stopped. “Who touched me?” Jesus asked. “Someone has touched me; I know that power has gone from me.” Because of the crowd pressing against him, no one knew who it was. Falling down before Jesus the trembling woman told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Jesus said, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

While Jesus was still speaking, someone came up from the house of Jairus and said, “Your daughter is dead; don’t bother the teacher anymore.”

But when Jesus heard it he told Jairus, “Don’t be afraid, just believe, and she will be healed.” Jesus arrived and entered the house with Peter, James, John, and the girl’s parents. Jesus said to the girl, “My child, get up!” Her spirit returned and at once she stood up (Luke 8:40-56).

In whom did Jairus put his confidence and faith? Who was the sick woman trying to touch? Do we place our confidence in the storms of life or in Jesus? To the sick women, Jesus said, “Your faith in me has made you whole”—not your struggle or your suffering. And to Jairus, Jesus said, “Don’t give in to fear; only believe and your daughter will live.”

People who come to you for advice sometimes think their prayers have to be answered a certain way. You can help them replace their despair with faith. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Faith in Christ Jesus will cause his power to flow to the person in need. God answers every prayer. Sometimes the answer is ‘yes,’ sometimes ‘no’ or ‘not yet.’

This lesson is **important** because people need to understand that God answers prayers in his time and in his way. We need to understand that God is sovereign. He answers in the way that is best for the person he loves and that loves him. He wants us “always to pray and not to faint” (Luke 18:1, KJV). Yet one cannot *earn* the desired answer by praying louder or longer.

The **main truth** of this story is that some people may pray for 12 years, some for 12 days, and others for only a few hours or minutes. God is sovereign. He wants people to love him and serve him and trust him completely. We can assure them that the Bible says God hears every prayer and sees every tear.

To **review** this lesson, answer the following questions:

1. How did Jesus know someone had touched him for healing? [Pause]
A. If you said Jesus knew because he felt power had left his body, you are correct.
2. How can we help a person who is filled with fear? [Pause]

A. If you responded that we can help such a person by pointing them to faith in Jesus instead of fear, you answered correctly.

3. What phrase did Martha and Mary both use to express their fear instead of faith to Jesus? [Pause]

A. If you said they told Jesus, “If you had been here, my brother would not have died,” you are right.

Your **assignment** is to memorize these two stories so you can tell them to someone in your own words. Share them with someone who may believe that God is not concerned about their needs. Each time you tell these stories remember how Christ encouraged people and declared it was their faith in him that made the difference. Memorize the following verse: “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28).