



"We know that in all this, God works for the good of those who love Him." (Romans 8:28)

“How do I help someone

... cope with ‘unanswered’ prayer?”

Many of us have talked about the answer to prayers on a number of occasions. There are three answers – Yes: God has responded by granting our requests. No – God has declined our request, and Wait – the answer, yes or no, will come eventually, in God’s good time.

This sounds all very reasonable but I have a major problem. I can recognise a ‘Yes’ answer, but I’m not sure whether, if ‘Yes’ doesn’t come quickly, whether God has answered ‘No’ or ‘Wait’. So how do we approach this difficulty? The answer is in one of Jesus’ parables - Luke 18:1-8. In this, Jesus told of a woman who persevered in requesting justice from a judge. His response eventually was that he would listen to her so she wouldn’t continue to ‘bother’ him. Jesus wanted the woman to keep bothering the judge. In our case, Jesus wants us to keep ‘bothering’ him and his Father. He actually *isn’t bothered* as the judge was. God never wears out (as this justice was scared of doing!) We need to ‘pray continually’ as Paul suggested in 1 Thessalonians 5:17. And to understand the parable fully, we need to pray in faith. Sometimes, depending on the circumstances, if we pray continually and God’s answer does not seem to be ‘Yes’, then maybe we can conclude that the answer is ‘No.’ The issue here is the circumstances. We have to judge for ourselves whether the outcome of our prayerful requests can come in the short to medium term, or whether the answers may come in a very long term.

Let’s look at a couple of examples. What might be a short to mid term prayer request. Maybe it’s a job we want. We pray continually for this job. We believe it is just right and the circumstances seem absolutely correct for us. But, the answer comes up ‘No’. We don’t get the job. Why? We cannot understand it. We have prayed continually and we find it hard to understand why God hasn’t agreed with us. The answer is, that God knows better than we do. Ultimately, what happens will be better for us! This is the faith part of our perseverance, not so much that we will get what we want but that God will give us or guide us in the way that is going to be better for us. We have faith that God will do this for us. While we may be temporarily disappointed that we

do not get what believed to be what was best for us, in the long term, we get God's better, infallible guidance.

What about an alternative scenario? That there is no answer for something we persevere with over a long period of time. Maybe we have a health issue that is long term and very distressing for us. We pray that God will help us but there does not seem to be an answer. We pray in faith that God will set us in the right direction. But, our health does not improve. To me, the answer to this is we may have to wait until the end of our life for the 'Yes' answer to a health, or another 'life' question. But, we persevere in faith that ultimately, God will provide 'the broad' justice mentioned in the parable. The Apostle Paul was a great example of this. He had a 'thorn in his flesh'. We have no idea what this was except that it was something that must have been difficult for him. There is no record that God ever took this thorn away from him. Paul believed he understood the reason for this – to stop him from becoming conceited (2 Cor 12:7). It may be that God has a reason for seemingly not answering our prayers, or the prayers of our friends, immediately.

So, what can we do to help someone who believes that their prayers are unanswered? Encourage them not to give up, and to have faith that God's answer will ultimately be what is best for them.

Ultimately? God answers prayer – “Yes”, “No” or “Wait”.

