

“Unanswered Prayers?”

Dear Antwort Mann,

There are many Bible passages about prayer that say things like “Whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you (John 16:23),” or “Ask and you shall receive (Luke 11:9),” yet so many times it seems that our prayers are not answered. For example, parents pray, and maybe the whole church prays for a child to be healed, yet the child still dies. Why? How can these writings be true? What’s the deal here?

Signed, “Don’t Understand”

Dear “Don’t Understand,”

First off, all the writings in the Bible are true. That doesn’t mean that our understanding of certain passages is always true as well. If we take passages out of their context, or simply cherry-pick individual passages, we can come to a false understanding, which gives the devil an opening to cause discouragement and, in some cases, unbelief and rejection of God’s Word.

The Prosperity Preachers, also known as the “Name It and Claim It” preachers do this all the time with these passages. Their claim is that, if you have “enough faith,” God has to give you whatever you’re asking for. This is false doctrine, and destructive to faith. God doesn’t *have* to grant any of our prayers. That He chooses to do so is purely out of His mercy and grace for the sake of Christ.

It is important that you understand the difference between “answers” and “grants.” Many people think these passages promise that everything we ask of God will be *granted* to us, i.e. that we will get what we ask for, no matter what. But the reality for the Christian is, God hears and *answers* our prayers. Sometimes the answer is “Yes,” sometimes “No.” Our prayers don’t just go into dead space and are lost. He hears and answers them according to His will, not necessarily according to ours, because “we do not always know what we should pray for as we ought (Rom. 8:26).”

Often, people pray competing prayers, that is, prayers diametrically opposed to each other. For example: One person prays for sunshine for a picnic or ballgame, while the farmer prays for rain to water his crops. Both are Christians; both have strong faith in Christ; but both prayers can’t be *granted* as the petitioners are requesting. But they are both *answered*, according to God’s perfect knowledge and will for what He wants to accomplish in the lives of His people.

These various passages on prayer that you refer to are meant to encourage us to come to our heavenly Father with faith and confidence, not in doubt or unbelief (“*Well, nothing else has worked; might as well pray!*”). We can come, not only with requests for ourselves, and others, but with thanksgiving and praise for who He is and what He does for us, especially through Christ.

But, some things are still difficult to understand (like the child that is prayed for still dying). There are no easy, or definitive answers as to “Why” God took the child instead of healing it, in spite of our prayers. In this life, some things are known only to Him. If we see prayer only as a “transactional” thing (I ask, God grants what I ask), then we will suffer much disappointment and disillusionment. But if we approach prayer through faith in Christ, and His finished work on the cross for us, then we are simply entrusting ourselves to Him, bringing to Him our requests, etc., with confidence that He knows what is best, and is working it all out for our ultimate good, no matter how dark it may seem at the present.

[Jesus prayed] “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Thy will be done.” Matthew 26:39

Best regards,
Der Antwort Mann