

Main Point: God's sovereignty determines the outcome of our prayers, not our pleas or fervency. It is we who are to subject ourselves to God's will, and not the other way around.

On Sunday we were confronted with two situations as a church which require prayer and perseverance. One involves Lukah, an 11 month old member of a family in our congregation who fights for her life in the hospital. The other involves a missionary couple, about to be deported from their country overseas, currently allowed to go "free" while their passports have been held back by the government. They currently wait with their emergency suitcases packed by the front door. This week's study will dive into God's peculiar (from our perspective) timing when it comes to answering urgent prayer.

Thinking Things Through

1. Have you ever had a prayer answered? What was it?
2. It is important to remember that God always answers prayer one of three ways. Yes, No, or Later. Does this line up with your life's experience and can you share a story or two about how hearing "no" or "later" from God has shaped your life story and faith?

Digging Deeper

Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

3. Paul petitioned God repeatedly and received an answer that did not align itself with Paul's own desires. Having gone through the entire experience, what lessons did Paul learn? How did the lack of an answer to prayer assist him in growing?
4. Why did God give Paul a "no" answer to his prayer? Can you think of a time when you heard a "no" from God yet it turned out to be the best answer?
5. Sometimes we hear "no" from God and no matter how hard we try, it doesn't seem fair, or even right. What does Paul's life lesson, demonstrated in vs. 9-10, tell us about how to embrace a "no" from God in a positive way, even when it doesn't make sense?

6. Why, for a Christian, is weakness a source of strength (vs. 10) and how did Jesus demonstrate this?

7. Sometimes when we pray the answer is “not yet”. Share a time when there was a long period of waiting between the start of that season of prayer and the answers to your requests. How were you different as a result of it?

Read Hebrews 12:4-11

8. In Heb. 12:5 we are reminded that suffering and hardship is a form of encouragement. How does he make the case that tough times and tough experiences ought to encourage us?

9. How have you learned to see delayed prayer requests as encouraging?

10. The term “chasten” in vs. 6 (NIV, KJV) is one our culture has lost the meaning of. It means to inflict suffering upon someone for purposes of moral improvement or to teach restraint. How does this apply to long seasons of suffering and seemingly unanswered prayer in your life?

11. What impact does the idea of parental discipline (growth) in Heb. 12:7- 8 have on our prayers and how God answers? How does this help you understand better the nature of prayer?

12. Review Hebrews 12:9 -10 how does God’s discipline lead us to a deeper respect for Him? What would happen to our respect for God if we had every prayer answered immediately?

Doing Life Together

13. If God disciplines us to help us share in His holiness (Heb. 12:10) and to produce a harvest of righteousness and peace in our lives, (Heb. 12:11) how are we to handle it when his permanent answer is “no” and we are left with the consequences of the discipline (ie. sickness, divorce, a failed business, etc) and there isn't any relief (Lazarus doesn't come back from the dead)?

14. How do other people, like the ones in this group, assist you in this process?