



The Gospel Coalition published an interesting blog post on Tuesday past.

Tim Keller on the Church Crisis That He Never Had to Face as a Pastor—But You Do

[JUSTIN TAYLOR](#) | JANUARY 4, 2022

Tim Keller:

“I’d say that the culture is definitely more polarized than it ever has been, and I’ve never seen the kind of conflicts in churches in the past that we see today. In virtually every church there is a smaller or larger body of Christians who have been radicalized to the Left or to the Right by extremely effective and completely immersive internet and social media loops, newsfeeds, and communities.

People are bombarded 12 hours a day with pieces that present a particular political point of view, and the main way it seeks to persuade is not through argument but through outrage.

People are being shaped by this immersive form of public discourse—far more than they are being formed by the Church. This is creating a crisis.”

When asked if he had faced anything like this, Keller answered, “No, I haven’t.” And then he added,

“However, the way to navigate [the times in which we are living] is still to follow the book of Proverbs’ prescription for your words.

**“[Our words] must be
honest, few,
extremely well-crafted,
usually calm,
always aimed to edify
(even when critical)
and they must be accompanied
with lots of silent listening.”**

At the end of the interview, Keller was asked:

**Looking back, is there anything
you wish you had done differently
in ministry?**

**Tim Keller:
Absolutely. I should have prayed
more. No question.**

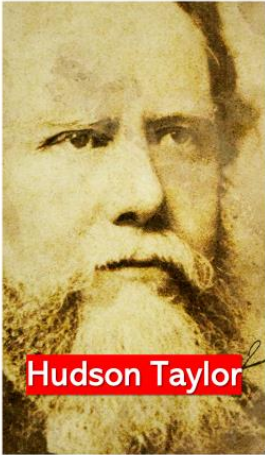
This coming June I will have been a pastor for 44 years.

If someone were to ask me... is there anything you would have done differently?

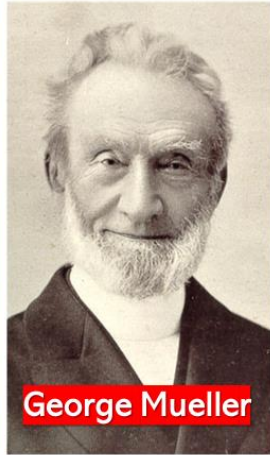
...I would answer the same as Tim Keller – I wish I’d have prayed more.

I have always believed it is important to pray.

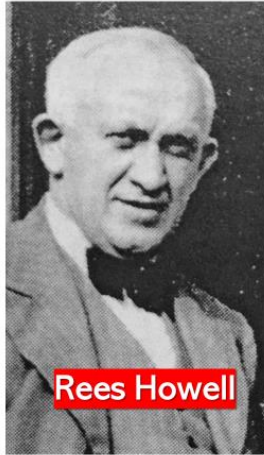
I have several books that I have read a number of times... that always motivate me and remind me that God listens and responds to his people.



Hudson Taylor



George Mueller



Rees Howell

But that said, it is an ongoing challenge for me to pray consistently and effectively.

When we think of our questions about prayer from last week...let's start with a question, asked by those who don't yet follow Jesus, as well as by those who do –

1. Why bother praying?

2. How are we to understand unanswered prayer?
3. When God says no.
4. Is there a right way to pray?
5. Who do we pray to?
6. Am I praying about the right thing?
7. Is there a difference between prayer and talking?

I'm going to answer this question from the perspective of Jesus' followers.

If God is sovereign...and we believe he is...
...and if he is good and does all things right...and we believe he is and he does...
why does God ask you and me to pray?

Let me remind you of Elijah.

James 5:17-18

Elijah was a man just like us.
He prayed earnestly that it would not rain,
and it did not rain on the land
for three and a half years.
Again, he prayed,
and the heavens gave rain,
and the earth produced its crops.

Could God have sent drought without Elijah's prayers?
Of course, he could have.

Could God have ended the drought without Elijah's prayers?
Absolutely.

And yet... God chose to involve Elijah and use his prayers.
The sentence...

James 5:17-18

Elijah was a man just like us.

He prayed earnestly that it would not rain,
and it did not rain on the land
for three and a half years.
Again, he prayed,
and the heavens gave rain,
and the earth produced its crops.

...tell us that God purposes to do similar things with you and me...
...to use our prayers in his work of rescuing people not yet in relationship with
him... and in the building of his church.

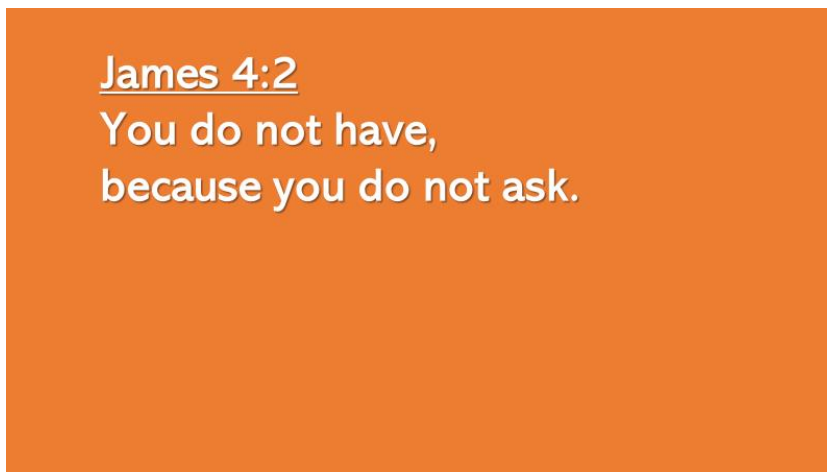
William Temple wrote:



Why bother praying?

Because our prayers invite God to be active in this world... and that's how God wants it to be.

In the book of James God makes a remarkable statement:



Why bother praying?

Because God has chosen in this present time to teach his people dependence upon him through our prayers.

Look at what James 1:17 says...

James 1:17
Every good and perfect gift
is from above,
coming down from the Father of lights,
who does not change
like shifting shadows.

In addition to being good, God is generous... and he will always be so...
...he does not change... nor is he fickle.
But God says that if we do not pray, we will not have.

Why is this?

God wants us to pray... and he utilizes our need and the needs of others to
motivate us to do so.

Look at James 5:16...

James 5:16
The prayer of a righteous person
is powerful and effective.

Why bother praying?

We need to carefully clarify some things regarding what this verse is saying.
First...how does a person become righteous?

Romans 3:21-22

...the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify...

...and is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

The righteousness of God is given... to a person through faith in Jesus Christ. Based on what Romans 3 says, why are the prayers of those who believe in Jesus powerful and effective?

Is it because of something in them or something they have done?

The prayers of Jesus' followers are powerful and effective because of WHO they pray to.

Jesus has been exalted to the highest place.

At the Father's right hand, Jesus rules over heaven and earth, the unseen and seen realms.

There is no authority greater than that of Jesus.

Let me state it again...the prayers of Jesus' followers are powerful and effective because of who Jesus is.

But there is something else to consider.

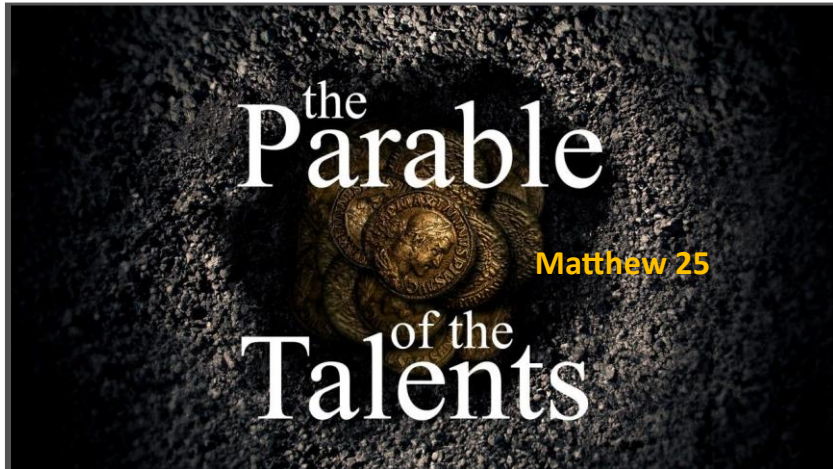
So I ask again... **why bother praying?**

When God created Adam and Eve, they were given the responsibility to be stewards upon the earth – to rule over the creation like God would if he were them.

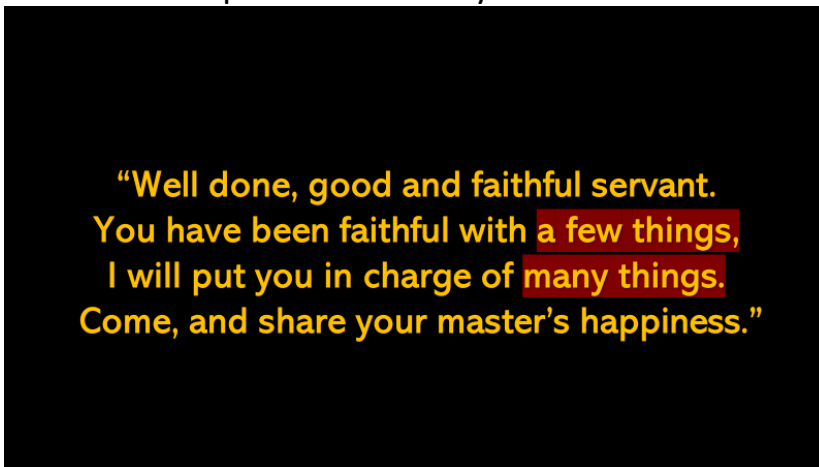
The devil usurped that role and enslaved humanity.
But Jesus overcame him.

When a person believes in Jesus and their dead soul is made alive, in addition to, transforming our characters, day by day, throughout our lifetime the Spirit of God is training us for the task which we will be entrusted with when Jesus returns.

This is what Jesus taught in the parable of the talents.



What was the point of this story?



Our faithfulness now is making us ready for our responsibility then.

There is another piece we need to put alongside of this truth emphasis.
What will God do at the return of Jesus.

Then the One seated on the throne said,
“Look, I am making everything new.”

He also said,
“Write, because these words
are faithful and true.”

Revelation 21:5

What task will be given to Jesus’ followers when the One who is on the throne makes everything new?

He will restore to us the task entrusted to our first parents.

We will be stewards of the new creation.

It will be a responsibility which the redeemed will carry out together... on God’s behalf.

Why bother praying?

Because prayer, along with serving out of our natural and spiritual giftings...is training us for this responsibility... that will be ours in the new heaven and the new earth.

Prayer trains us to keep in step with the Spirit and keeps us focused on God’s priorities.



Are there further questions about the question – why bother praying?

Let's interact now with the next question.

1. Why bother praying?
2. How are we to understand unanswered prayer?
3. When God says no.
4. Is there a right way to pray?
5. Is there a right way to pray?
6. Am I praying about the right thing?
7. Is there a difference between prayer and talking?

There are several truth statements that we need to make regarding God.
God is a speaking, self-revealing God.
God created all things, out of nothing, simply by speaking them into existence.
In Genesis 1 we repeatedly read –

And God said...

And there was...

What God has created reveals who he is, Romans 1:20...

Romans 1:20

For since the creation of the world
God's invisible qualities –
his eternal power and divine nature –

**have been clearly seen,
being understood
from what has been made,
so that humankind is without excuse.**

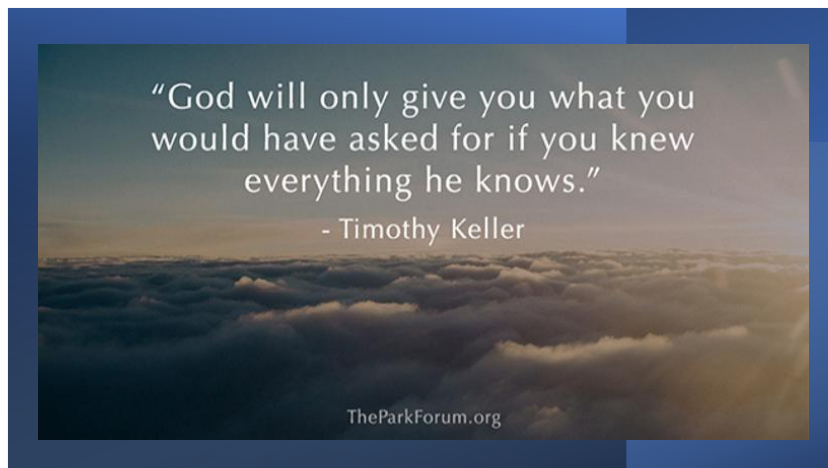
The Creator God says that the evidence of his existence and who he is... is clearly seen...everywhere one looks.

Let me say it again... God is a speaking, self-revealing God.

When God created human beings... Genesis 1 says that he made us in his likeness. He created us with the capacity to hear him, and with the ability to respond to his spoken words, and in turn to speak to him.. and with him.

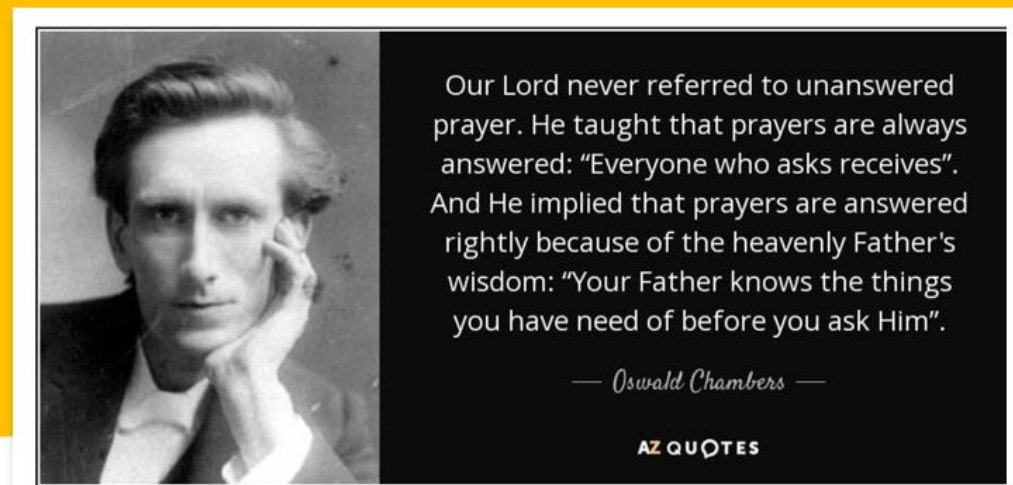
As we grapple with the question of unanswered prayer, it is important to state that according to the Bible, unanswered prayer does not mean God can't communicate.... or that he is too busy to listen or to answer... or that our concerns are too miniscule for his attention.

Tim Keller writes...



At all times and in all circumstances, God is at work in us for his glory and for our good... and this includes our communication with him.

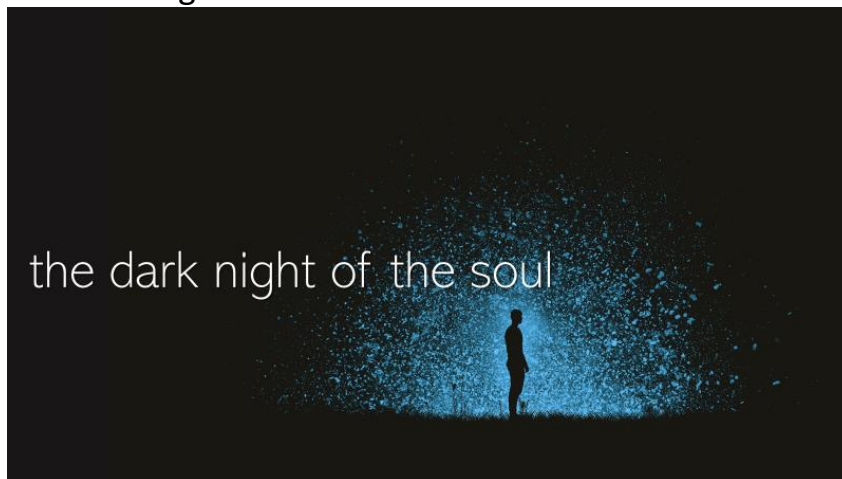
Oswald Chambers addressed this question, writing...



When we speak of unanswered prayer, we are usually, if not always speaking of God not answering our stated requests.

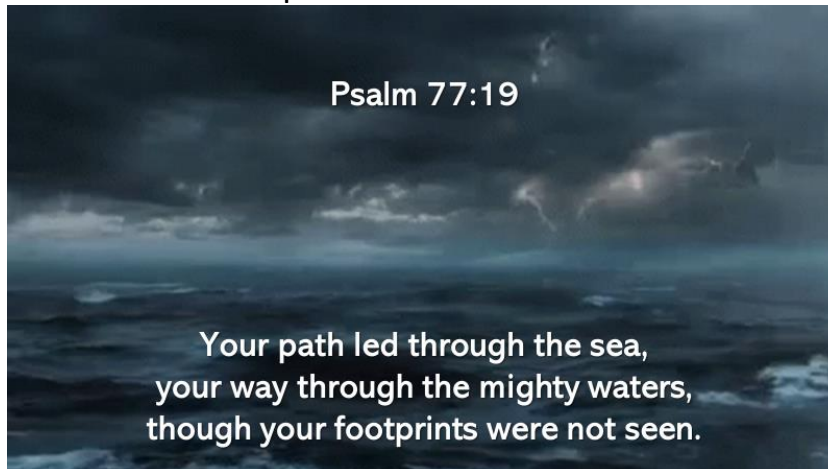
Sometimes when God doesn't answer... he may be disciplining us. It may be that our request is from wrong motives or just plain wrong. It may be that he is teaching us the value of waiting on him. We will come back to these possibilities next week.

And sometimes, in order to grow our faith, our good Father may be silent because he is leading us into a season that those who walked with Jesus before us called...

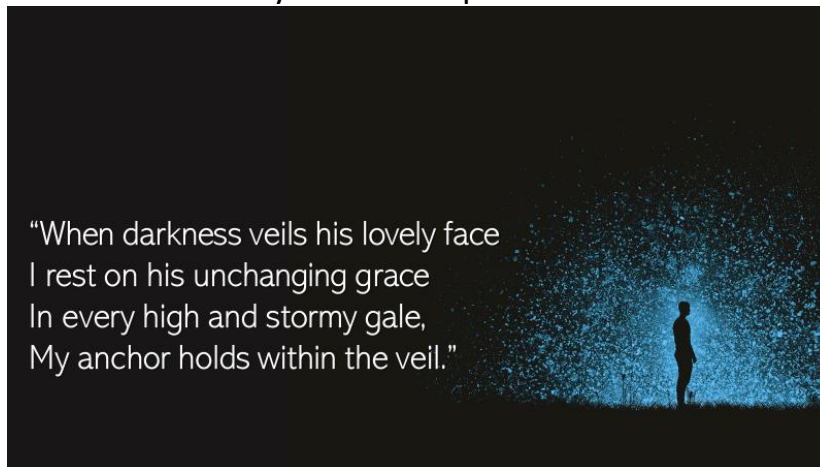


This was what Job experienced.

It is also what the psalmist described...



This is what the hymn writer spoke of...



There are seasons in our life when God grows our faith by choosing to be quiet, or by making us wait for him.

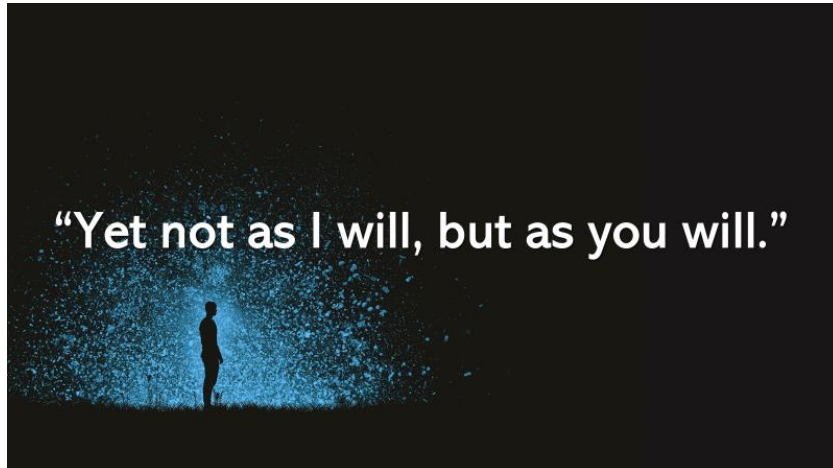
Why does God do this?

Not because he doesn't care, or has forgotten about us.

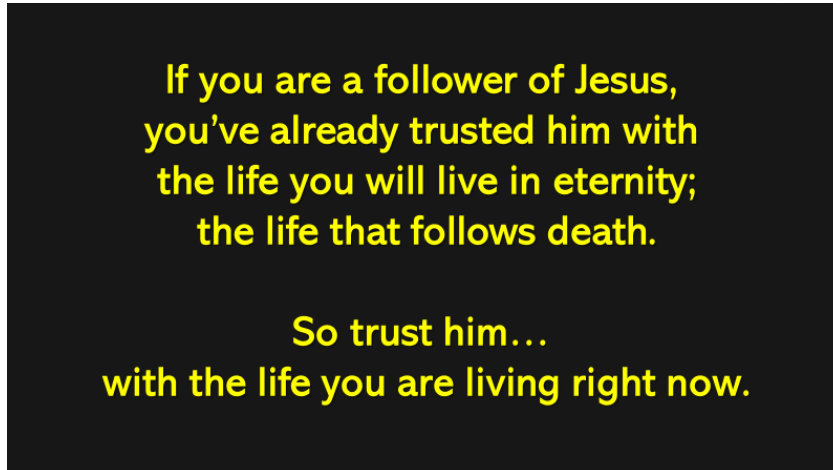
The Scripture teaches us that God loves us extravagantly.

The Bible teaches us that God has committed himself to complete in us what he began when he saved us from our sin and brought our dead souls back to life.

The response of Jesus in his dark night of the soul encourages us to trust the Father as he did –



The Father's will for your life, my life, our lives... is good; it is perfect.



I believe that what Jesus taught in Luke 11 and 18 – to be persistent in prayer... is meant to encourage us... when we find ourselves in a place where God hasn't yet come to our rescue, or hasn't yet broken in or broken through.

When God is silent or he delays, it is his desire... that by faith we hold on to the truth that he is good... and refuse to entertain the mutterings of our adversary Satan who insinuates that God is not worthy of our trust.

Take courage.... and wait for God.

I would encourage myself... and all of you to memorize and mediate upon the testimony of the psalmist...

Psalm 37:25
**...I have never seen
the righteous forsaken.**

God is never late.

God is never careless with his children.

God is not neglectful.

He will not forsake his own.



Are there any further questions about the question – how are we to understand unanswered prayer?

Blessing

Psalm 37:25

**...I have never seen
the righteous forsaken.**