

# PRAYER

4 week series on prayer

## **Prayer – Lesson 3**

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## **Prayer**

### **Lesson 3: Unanswered Prayers**

**Bible: Proverbs 3:5-6**

**Description:** It can be frustrating when we feel like our prayers are not answered the way we want them to be. However, God sees the big picture and knows what's best for us. He answers our prayers exactly the way they should be answered. Even if we don't understand it at the time, we can trust His answers because we trust Him.

#### **Supplies**

- A child's t-shirt with a cartoon character or something childish on it
- Two puzzles
- A sharpie
- A \$10 bill
- A curtain or something similar that can be used to hide the prizes
- A "prize pack" of cool things. For example: a candy bar, a gift card, a t-shirt, etc.
  - Have this "prize pack" set up behind the curtain where no one else can see it.

## **Game: The Big Picture**

Before the game begins, pick several pieces from each puzzle and black them out with a sharpie, so that students cannot see what is on the puzzle piece.

Split the group into two teams. Give them each a set of puzzle pieces but not the box, so that they cannot see what they should be putting together.

They will have to figure out how to put the puzzle together without knowing what it is a picture of, all while working around the pieces that are unrecognizable to them.

The first team to complete the puzzle wins!

## Teach

Have you ever prayed a prayer that you just knew God was going to answer? And not only that, but you just knew He was going to answer it exactly how you thought it should be answered because you knew what was best?

Now, have you ever thought that and then had it not happen? We all have.

First things first: there is no such thing as an unanswered prayer. That would mean that God didn't hear your prayer, or that He just didn't want to talk to you. Neither one of those things are true.

It's important to realize that just because God does not answer our prayers in the way that we want Him to answer them does not mean they are unanswered prayers.

If you pray for a new car, and God doesn't give you a new car, is that an unanswered prayer? No, it's not. It is just a prayer that was answered differently than you wanted it to be answered.

When prayers are answered differently than you wanted them to be, or differently than you feel like they should be, it can be frustrating. It can even feel like God is ignoring you! But I promise, that is not the case.

**I love the Lord, for He heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy. Because He turned His ear to me, I will call on Him as long as I live. – Psalm 116:1-2**

See? That's who you're praying to. God doesn't just sit up in heaven, dodging your prayers. He hears your prayers, and turns His ear toward you to listen!

So if you can be confident that God hears your prayers, it should be easy, right? But it's not. Because there are times when God doesn't answer your prayers like you want Him to. And when that happens, no matter how much you love Him or how much you pray, it's just hard.

So how are you supposed to deal with that?

The answer is a simple, short word: trust.

You have to trust that God will answer your prayers, and if He answers them differently than you had hoped, you have to trust it's because He knows what is best for you and He wants the best for you.

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight. – Proverbs 3:5-6**

This verse says that we should trust in God. Not only that, but we should also avoid leaning on our own understanding.

So what does this verse have to do with prayers that we feel are unanswered?

Everything.

If you truly trust God with all your heart, then you will trust that the way He answers your prayers are best, no matter what you think. And if you know that you should not lean on your own understanding of things, you will be able to remember that your understanding of life is short-term while God's is not.

Let me ask you guys a question. Does anyone remember what their favorite t-shirt was ten years ago? What did it look like?

*Allow a few students to answer this.*

I'm sure you loved your shirt. And it was probably very appropriate for the age you were at the time. I bet it looked a lot like this!

*Hold up childish t-shirt.*

Now, is there anything wrong with this shirt? No! It's a perfectly good shirt, and there are probably a lot of five year olds who would call something like this their favorite shirt. It's a cool shirt for a five year old, right?

But let me ask you another question: Would you wear this shirt today? Better yet: Would you call this your favorite shirt today?

Of course not! Why? Because ten years is a long time, and things change! You grow physically and mentally, your tastes change, your style changes - and this shirt doesn't fit you anymore!

But if I had asked you ten years ago if you thought that would be your favorite shirt forever, you probably would have said yes. Because we can't see ten years into the future, and we have no idea how much things are going to change.

Now, if something as simple as your favorite shirt changes, imagine how many more things change over ten years. But here's the cool part: God knows about every single one of those changes.

So the next time you pray and ask God for something and He doesn't answer you the way you wanted, I want you to think about your favorite shirt from ten years ago.

What you're asking for right now may not be what's best for you. It may not be the best thing for the next ten years of your life, which are a total mystery for you. God's looking out for you, and He wants the best for you.

Had your parents let you pre-buy your wardrobe for the next ten years, there would probably be a bunch of you walking around here in Sesame Street and super-hero t-shirts. But they didn't do that because they knew how much you would grow and change.

God knows how much growth and change will happen over the years. He knows exactly what's in store for you. And when He answers your prayers, He doesn't just want the best thing for you today. He wants the best thing for you forever.

**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. – Romans 8:28**

Let me ask you a question. How many of you believe this verse? Now, it's in the Bible, so I know you're going to say you believe it. But how many of you really believe it? How many of you actually believe that God works for your good in all things?

It's much easier said than done. Because here's the deal...if we really believed that God worked all things together for our good, "unanswered" prayers wouldn't bother us at all because we'd know that He was working for our good and that it was the best good we could ever get.

So why is it so hard to feel that way sometimes?

Okay, I need a volunteer.

*Have the volunteer come stand near the curtain that's hiding the prizes.*

Alright, so if I asked you if you wanted ten dollars, what would your answer be? Of course it would be yes!

*Give the student the ten-dollar bill.*

Now, what if I told you that if you give that money back to me, you could have what's behind this curtain? The catch is that you don't get to look at what's behind it first. And if you don't like it, it doesn't matter. You still can't have the money back.

What would your reaction be to that?

*Allow student to answer.*

Who is someone here that you trust?

What if we let them look behind the curtain, and then they can tell you if they think you should trade or not?

*Let another student look behind the curtain and then tell the other student they should trade. Then reveal the prizes behind the curtain to the group.*

So, what just happened there?

Well, you had a choice. You could trust in what you could see and thought was good, or you could trust in what you couldn't see and what may be good. So what helped you make that decision?

Someone you trusted! You knew that they would tell you what the best option to take was, and that made it easier, right?

God cares about you more than you could ever imagine. He wants what is best for you way more than anyone you love on this earth ever could. So if He doesn't answer a prayer the way you want it to be answered, then you can be confident it's because there's something better for you!

Just like your friend could see what was behind that curtain while you couldn't, God sees what you can't. He wants the very best for you; you just have to trust Him!

In the game tonight, you had to put together a puzzle. That sounds pretty simple, right? But it wasn't because you had no idea what it was that you were putting together. And not only that, but there were blacked out pieces that you couldn't even see enough to tell where they went. So something that sounds simple was actually pretty difficult.

God sees the whole big picture. In life, we only see pieces here and there, and there are some pieces we can't see at all. We don't know what exactly we should be doing or what we need next because we don't know what the final picture of our life is going to be. But God does!

## **Small Group Questions:**

1. Have you ever felt like God wasn't answering your prayers?
2. After this lesson, do you really think that those prayers were unanswered, or that they were just answered in a different way than you wanted them to be?
3. Is it hard for you to trust that God knows better than you do? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever prayed for something that you thought you really wanted, but then were glad that God answered your prayers differently?
5. Do you believe that God works everything together for our good? Does that make it easier to trust Him?
6. Have you ever thought that when God says no to a prayer it's because there's something better for you?
7. Do you believe that God hears you when you pray?
8. If it were up to you to choose between what you want right now or what's best in the long run, what would you choose?
9. Is it comforting to know that God sees the big picture of things?
10. Do you have a hard time praying when you don't know what God's answer is going to be?

## Teach Close

Trusting in God can be difficult at times, but it is life changing. Especially when it comes to praying.

When you feel like your prayers aren't being answered the way you wanted them to be, you have two options.

One, you can react by not trusting God. You can get mad that He didn't do what you wanted, you can worry about what that means for your life, and you can feel like He's not answering your prayers at all.

Or, you can go with the second option: To trust God.

If you trust God, then a prayer that isn't answered the way you hoped isn't an unanswered prayer at all. In fact, it's a prayer that was answered better than you hoped because God sees the big picture and knows what you need.

When you trust in God, you know that prayers that seem unanswered are really just God doing something even better for you. Whether or not it feels like that in the moment, you can be sure that God hears your prayers, that He's working all things together for your good, and that He is worth trusting in far more than your own understanding.

When you trust God, there is no such thing as unanswered prayers.