

DELAY IS NOT DENIAL

SUBJECT: Why doesn't the Lord always immediately answer prayer?

TEXT ***John 11:6: When He had heard therefore that he [Lazarus] was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.***

CONTEXT ***Isaiah 30:18: And therefore will the LORD wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of Judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him.***

INTRODUCTION One of the greatest weaknesses in human nature is our impatience. We want what we want, when we want it. Any delay upsets us and we become angry and frustrated. Impatience shows a lack of faith. Jesus said:



Luke 21:19: In your patience possess ye your souls.

Isaiah 28:16: Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious Corner Stone, a sure Foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

James 1:3-4:

³ Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

⁴ But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could get to that place where we, like Job, could patiently wait until the answer came?

James 5:11: Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

Our Lord has His reasons for sometimes keeping us waiting for an answer to prayer. He knows our weaknesses of faith. Only after it is tried is it purified of all fear, doubt, and unbelief.

Hebrews 10:35-36:

³⁵ Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

³⁶ For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the Will of God, ye might receive the promise.

1 Peter 1:6-7:

⁶ Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

⁷ That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

ILLUSTRATION

John 9:3: Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

2 Corinthians 12:8: For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

Galatians 4:13: Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the Gospel unto you at the first.

Jeremiah 29:10-12:

¹⁰ For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.

¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

¹² Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you.



There are also times when the Lord's delay to our call for help will bring more glory to His Name, as in the case before us of Lazarus. The delay here was not denial. It was for the profit and good of all who knew of his illness. The Lord was planning a greater miracle than they could imagine. Paul's thorn in the flesh was finally removed after a temporary delay. Our capacity will be enlarged when our faith becomes stronger.

When we see the greater miracle, we will know that the Lord can do exceedingly abundant things above all we could ask or think.

Ephesians 3:19-20:

¹⁹ And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now unto Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

According to the power that works in us: If there is only a little power working in us, then we will only receive a little. When the faith is enlarged for us to believe for the greater things than these you shall do, because you go to Your Father, we will receive just what Jesus said we would.

Sometimes the delayed answer causes us to learn how to become more submissive to the Will of God and more humble. It happened one day when we prayed for a boy who was screaming with an earache. His dad was very upset and nothing they tried seemed to work. I paid a visit to the home in answer to their call for help. When I prayed nothing happened.

Then I grabbed my coat and hurried out telling them I was going to get some reinforcements in prayer. I went to get a brother that also really knew God, and who could pray the prayer of faith.

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When we got back, Mrs. Ward said: "As soon as you walked out the door the pain stopped and he has been alright ever since. We called to you as you were getting into your car, but you didn't hear us." I felt so humbled having to call on others for strength. But God honored it and answered immediately. I learned the meaning of:

1 Peter 5:6: Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty Hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.

No, delay is not denial, for this was the very way that Jesus tested the woman who came to Him for the healing of her daughter who was grievously vexed by a demon.

Matthew 15:22-28:

²² And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David;

my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

²³ But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

²⁴ But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

²⁵ Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me.

²⁶ But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

²⁷ And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

²⁸ Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

This woman's faith was repulsed five times, but she kept coming back for help and got it in a greater miracle.

Like Daniel, there are some things we had to battle in prayer before God. He wrestled in prayer for 21 days, not knowing the delay in obtaining an answer was caused by satanic interference. We appreciated the answer much more when it came. Anything hard fought seems to be the more welcomed and valued. Our earnestness is tested in prayer that's delayed. So is our faith tested, for if it is weak, we could decide to go somewhere else rather than to God for help.

The delayed answer is sometimes caused by a hindrance in our life that needs to be removed. We may be just saying prayers when things are going up to par. But when real troubles come and we must have help from The Lord, and it does not come when we expect, we start digging and searching our hearts for the reasons why. There may be some secret sin, or fault, or some little idol in our heart which no one knows about. We may not realize how serious things are until we have a desperate need.

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When people are in serious need of the Lord's help, they get dead in earnest, as we used to say. Often, the very best of saints become lax and careless, and are guilty of the sins of omission as well as commission. Then, God has to wait until our hearts become broken and we humble ourselves before Him, asking Him to search our hearts and see if there is any evil way in us.

We are sometimes leaning more on the arm of flesh rather than on the Everlasting Arms of the Lord for help.

The sins of ingratitude or pride sometimes envy or jealousy and covetousness, can steal our hearts away from the Lord. The sin of prayerlessness and neglect of Bible study and idleness can cool us to a point of lukewarmness. We may become guilty also of peevishness, bad temper, self-confidence, or self-pity, selfishness, and sins of the tongue, such as murmuring and complaining or gossiping. This

was the case of Moses' prayer for Miriam who had sinned with her tongue. Moses, a righteous man, could not get a prayer through to God for her healing until she repented and made restitution.

We are sometimes leaning more on the arm of flesh rather than on the Everlasting Arms of the Lord for help. God has to wean us away from people that we might trust more completely and directly than Him. The following are very powerful words I had to learn and still have to review over and over again.

Jeremiah 17:5-8:

⁵ Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.

⁶ For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

⁷ Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is.

⁸ For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

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Sometimes the silence to our call and cry are due to the sole fact we are not ripe and ready for all we have asked from God. We have to get ready, at times, for the answer. God could have brought Israel into the Promised Land in forty days, but they were not ready for it. The carnal and disobedient people had to be purged out of the camp before the triumphant crossing. The Lord had to teach them some lessons on trust and dependence upon Him. They saw His miracles even in their shoes and clothes which did not wear out for forty years. They saw how He provided *bread from Heaven*, healing for their bodies, and how they needed no drug stores or doctors, just Him.

Elijah's prayer for God to kill him under the Juniper tree went unanswered, for God had a better plan. Elijah wanted God to take him Home right then and there, but God delayed the answer to take him triumphantly up in a fiery chariot without dying. He had some more work for this man of God to do before departing; namely, to anoint a successor; to anoint another man as king over Israel. The opening text in **Isaiah 30:18** says: ***"Therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you."***

Let us see how this worked out in the lives of Mary and Martha.

The Lord Jesus purposely delayed His coming in response to the request of Mary and Martha. It was not to be interpreted as a rejection of their plea, nor to disregard their confidence and faith in Him. He delayed to perform a greater miracle which would have far-reaching results. They did not understand Jesus' motives, and they were deeply hurt. They even scolded our Lord and chided with Him for being so dilatory (slow or late) in coming. "**Lord**", said they, "**If Thou hadst been here** (when we sent for you) our brother would not have died". John 11:21

Our Lord did not reprove them for their criticism, but meekly asked them, "**Where have ye laid him?**" John 11:34

They told Jesus to come and see and led Him to the place of burial. After an earnest prayer, our Lord speaks to the dead man, whom He secretly had commissioned His spirit to return to the body and make it alive again, "Lazarus, COME FORTH":



John 11:43: And when He thus had spoken, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth."

He that was dead came floating through the air, because his body was bound with grave clothes which were wrapped around and around him from head to toe. Jesus then commanded those who accompanied Him to loosen Lazarus and let him go free from this physical handicap.

John 11:44: And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, loose him, and let him go.

This great miracle caused many to believe on the Lord Jesus. As a result, the religious leaders were minded not only to put Jesus to death, but also Lazarus, for his testimony also won many of the Jews to Jesus. Thus, you can now see that our Lord's delays are not always denials.

John 11:45: Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on Him.

ILLUSTRATION

Luke 18:7: And shall not God avenge His Own elect, which cry day

and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?

How can we tell if an unanswered prayer is a delay or denial?

PRAYING and TIME PAYMENT PLAN

A member of the congregation was calling on the minister for reassurance. “I’ve been praying for something I want badly for a long time, and my prayers have not been answered yet”, he said. “Did you pray earnestly and reverently?” the minister asked. “Oh yes, I even added promises of what I would do if my prayers were granted.” The minister gravely suggested: “Perhaps then, you should carry out your promises first. I don’t believe the Lord operates on the time-payment plan.”

Remember, PATIENCE is a virtue that does not give up easily if you should begin to waver or begin to doubt when satan comes in like a flood.



Psalms 37:7: Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

Psalms 40:1: I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry.

Romans 15:4: For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Hebrews 6:12: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the Promises.

Hebrews 6:15: And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the Promise.

Hebrews 10:36: For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the Will of God, ye might receive the Promise.

Shall we grow faint and give up if we fail to get a quick answer after a brief and half-hearted effort in bombarding The Throne of Grace? Daniel didn't, but kept prevailing in prayer until his expectant faith obtained the NOW ANSWER. So, don't allow your heart to become discouraged. Remember, DELAY is not always a DENIAL.

John 11:21: Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

Daniel 10:12-13:

¹² Then said he [the Angel Gabriel] unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

¹³ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

Some prayers are not immediately answered because of a spiritual conflict that is in progress with the powers of satan. When we are seeking the Lord for answers to prayer, more goes on than appears on the surface. The forces of evil try to hinder or even block the answers to prayer from coming your way.

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The above passage of scripture in **Daniel 10** reveals — from behind the scenes — some of the conflicts that take place when we pray. Combating satanic armies were determined to stop God's answer to Daniel's prayers. The demon spirit, called the prince of Persia, is the one whom Gabriel points to as the hindering factor. Though his prayer was delayed, it was not denied.



These demonic forces are still active in the world today to interfere with God's will from being done. God will defeat the counsels of satan's armies, but it remains for us to hold on in prayer until the answer comes. Remember Daniel's experience,

and you will not lose heart, nor faint in the day of adversity.

Often we picture prayer as communication between finite man and his sovereign God. To some extent this is true. However, don't forget a third party involved in prayer, that old deceiver, satan. The **tenth chapter** of the ***Book of Daniel*** impresses this fact upon our minds and hearts.

Daniel prayed a stirring prayer and waited for an answer. One day passed and no answer came. Five days passed and still no answer. This was most unusual, for prayer was usually answered when Daniel prayed. He might have concluded that his faith was shallow.

Fifteen days passed, and Daniel faced the supreme tests of persistent prayer. Why had the answer been delayed? What hindered his desired request? Once again, day dawned, as it had for twenty days, but still no answer. Sunrise met Daniel on his knees persisting, perhaps discouraged, but never giving up.

Then it happened. On that glorious twenty-first day, an angel of the Lord arrived with his prayer's answer. Before Daniel had an opportunity to question, God's answer had been sent the first day prayer was offered. While journeying with God's answer, however, this heavenly courier met a hindering spirit from hell. They became engaged in prolonged battle, lasting more than twenty days.



Had Daniel not been persistent in his prayer, the battle would have ended and his prayer would have been unanswered. But prayer continued, day by day, and the hindering spirit was removed.

The lesson from Daniel's life is simple. Satan is a real being, possessing awesome power to fight prayer. Contrary to some modern theologians, Lucifer is not a thought of mind to be discarded as a childish myth. The devil is a real being, doing very real damage.

In truth, the number involved in prayer is three, not two. Man seeks God, but in prayer's battle comes another party, one seeking to block the road to God. One author describes it as follows: "The purpose of prayer is not to persuade or influence God, but to join with Him against the enemy. Not towards God, but with God against satan; that is the main thing to keep in mind in prayer."

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