

Revival & REFORMATION

The Official "United in Prayer" Weekly Blog and Prayer Requests
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The Reality of Unanswered Prayers

By Mark Finley

I recently woke up on Sabbath morning with intense back pain. I looked at my wife and half-jokingly said, "If I can make it to the pulpit, I think I can hang on tight enough to preach."

We prayed together that God would somehow provide the help I needed to make it through my three preaching appointments that day at camp meeting. Providentially a friend shared that there was a professional sports trainer on campus who would be willing to treat me. After three days of treatments I felt much better.

Looking back on that experience, my wife and I are convinced that it was a direct answer to prayer. God set up a chain of circumstances for me to get the specific help I needed from a qualified professional. What if God had not answered my prayers in such a dramatic way? What if I had to suffer through the back pain, as I've sometimes had to do? Would I have trusted Him any less? Would that mean that some unconfessed sin in my life was blocking His ability to answer my requests? Could it indicate that my faith was too meager to receive His special blessing? Not necessarily.

This leads to some deeper questions. How should I relate to unanswered prayer? What is the real purpose of prayer?

The purpose of prayer is to come into contact with the Almighty. Prayer is fellowship with God. It is placing ourselves in the atmosphere of His grace where His Spirit can speak to our hearts. The function of prayer is not to get what we want from God—it is to enter into fellowship with Him. Through prayer we experience His presence, discover His will, and learn to trust Him more.

Ellen White clarifies the issue this way: "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 93)

Prayer lifts us into the glory of His presence. There are times when apparently unanswered prayers lead us to a deeper trust experience in God. Unanswered prayers may lead us to persistence in prayer, deeper faith, and stronger reliance upon Jesus. It is faith inspiring to trust God so much that you persist when He appears to be silent.

My Christian experience is not dependent on immediate answers to my prayers. It is the result of an ongoing relationship with God. He answers my prayers enough to let me know He personally

cares for me, but not so much that I become spiritually arrogant. Looking back over my life, I see those mountain peaks of spiritual experience, those places where He acted dramatically, and I also recognize those times where my prayers seemed to go unanswered. I rejoice that “in the future life the mysteries that here have annoyed and disappointed us will be made plain. We shall see that our seemingly unanswered prayers and disappointed hopes have been among our greatest blessings.” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 174)

I’m thankful that my seemingly unanswered prayers are answered in the way heaven deems best. I praise Him that He heals aching backs, but I also praise Him for teaching me to trust Him when my back still aches.

Mark Finley is assistant to the president of the General Conference.

World Church Prayer Requests

September 15-22, 2019

- **PRAYER REQUEST:** Please pray for the new East Central Africa Division Adventist School of Medicine, scheduled to officially open this month. Pray that the school would be a unique witness for Christ and His timeless plan for all to have physical and spiritual health. Pray that the school would be used to provide powerful Christian medical leadership, service, and witness around the world.
- **PRAYER REQUEST:** Please continue to pray for our church members in the Central African country of Burundi. Pray that God will provide wisdom to meet challenges, and for peace and prosperity for the leaders and members.
- **PRAYER REQUEST:** Pray for the Middle East and North Africa Union (MENA), and the cities that have no Adventist presence—that God will raise up laborers for the harvest. There are 48 cities of 1 million or more people in this territory alone, some of which a Seventh-day Adventist has never set foot in.
- **PRAYER REQUEST:** The 10/40 window is home to 236 cities of a million or more residents. Please pray for committed missionaries willing to minister to the unreached people of these cities.
- **PRAYER REQUEST:** Pray for the General Conference session held June 25th – July 4, 2020. Pray that God would prepare His church and leaders for the Holy Spirit outpouring to come.
- **PRAYER REQUEST:** The World Church fourth quarter Day of Prayer and Fasting is scheduled this coming October 5, 2019. The theme is “World-Changing Prayer Warriors: Prayers that Change Us.” Pray that many will discover the joy of being a prayer warrior for the Lord. (For more information, visit: <https://www.revivalandreformation.org/resources/all/prayer-and-fasting-days>)