



WASTED PRAYERS: “THE REASONS WHY GOD DOES NOT ANSWER PRAYER”

INTRODUCTION:

Cable television mogul, Ted Turner criticized Christianity and said, “Jesus probably would be sick at his stomach” over the way his ideas have been, “twisted,” the Atlanta Journal Constitution reported. Turner made his remarks Friday evening at a banquet in Orlando, Florida where he received an award by the American Humanist Association for his work on behalf of the environment and world peace. Turner had a strict Christian upbringing and at one time considered becoming a missionary. “I was saved seven or eight times,” the newspaper quoted him as saying. But he became disenchanted with Christianity after his sister died, despite his prayers. Turner said the more he strayed from his faith, “the better I felt” [Spokesman – Review, May 1, 1990]

What a sad ending to a good beginning.

It is very easy to give up praying, even give up the faith when prayers are not answered especially if the request is dear to our hearts. Nevertheless, I believe that instead of giving it up it would be better if we examine our hearts and learn why our prayers are not answered. Here are some reasons why God does not answer prayers.

I. Unconfessed Sins

- A. God ordered Jeremiah to stop praying for the people of Israel. He said he will no longer listen to his prayers for them because they insist of sinning.

Jeremiah 7:16 “So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you. 17 Do you not see what they are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? 18 The children gather wood, the fathers light the fire and the women knead the dough and make cakes of bread for the Queen of Heaven. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger.

- B. David is called a man after the heart of God in Acts 13:22 despite his gruesome sins in 2 Samuel 11. This is because he humbled himself confessed his sins, and repented in 2 Samuel 12. This was his prayer:

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”

David understood so well that unless he confesses his sins, all his prayers will just be wasted. That is why he said in Psalm 66:18, If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. 19 but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.

- C. If Adam and Eve confessed and repented after they sinned, I believe the punishment would not be that severe. They would have found favor. But they hid their sin and blamed it on others. So, they received death instead of grace, curse instead of mercy, defeat instead of victory, banishment instead of restoration, and poverty instead of provision. There is no forgiveness apart from confession. Proverbs 28:13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.
- D. Three steps to a sincere confession – 1 John 1:8-10

1. The **inward acknowledgement** you have sinned. You sincerely admit in your heart that you sinned and that you won't keep it or blame it on others.
2. The **outward confession** – You are taking responsibility of your sins and you are not running away from its consequences.
3. **Fill the space vacated by sin** with the word of God. After doing step one and step two, it is essential that the space in the heart vacated by the sin filled with the Word of Christ. Otherwise, sin will claim it back taking you to a vicious “sin confess sin” cycle.

Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Matthew 12: 43“When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. 44Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. 45Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

NOTE: God will not answer our prayers because we keep our sins not because we sin. We must be willing to confess our sins then live a repentant life. If confession is getting rid of sin, repentance is getting away from sin.

II. DOUBT

A. What is Doubt?

Doubt is uncertainty in the context of trust, action, decision or belief. In simple term, doubt is plain distrust or unbelief.

B. Salesman Story

There is a story of a smart salesman in the city of Bodoe, Norway, who lost the opportunity of selling sixteen cars. The story goes as follows. A young man in a sweater, overalls and rubber boots entered a car dealer's shop. He asked the smart salesman, have you got cars on hand? The salesman answered sure we have. He said, I want sixteen cars if I like the model. The smart salesman looked at him and said you know what; I have no time for jokes-
buzz off. The man left and cross the street to another dealer selling a different make of cars. He made similar inquiries and got full service. That same day, he bought sixteen cars and paid in cash. What the smart salesman didn't know was that the shabby looking customer belonged to a sixteen-man crew of a Norwegian fishing boat that caught record quantities of herring last season. He and his co-workers decided to buy new cars and to buy all sixteen at once to get the highest possible discount. The smart salesman lost probably the biggest sale of his life because he doubted the man's capability to buy sixteen cars. He doubted because he made his judgment by what he sees. To see is to believe is a belief system that always ends up in doubt.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

Doubters won't go far in life. They will criticize every opportunity as plain illusion. They will not take the effort to work and persevere to

pursue a desire, a dream, and a vision. They are stuck in their own world of negativity because doubters operate in distrust instead of trust.

C. The Withered Fig Tree

Mathew 21:18 Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. **19** Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered. **20** When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked. **21** Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. **22** If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

The Passage Highlights:

1. The importance of faith in prayer. He said, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." To believe is to be fully persuaded, hundred percent convinced that God has the absolute power to do and to fulfill what He promised to do. [Romans 4:21]
2. The danger of doubt. Jesus said to the fig tree "may you never bear fruit again and the fig tree dried quickly." Jesus is using the fig tree lesson to show us the devastating effect of doubt in prayer. Fig trees are designed to bear fruit in its season; if it does not, it is good for nothing. Its existence is a waste. Likewise, prayer is designed to be answered and if it is not answered because of doubt, it is a waste. Doubt renders our prayers useless and wasted. Jesus said, If you have faith and not doubt, you cannot only do what was done to the fig tree but you can even command this mountain to move and it will follow you.

D. Getting Rid of Doubt

1. Acknowledge your unbelief and ask God for help. Mark 9:17-27 tells us about the father who brought his demon possessed son to Jesus for deliverance. Jesus said in verse 23, 'If you can'? "Everything is possible for him who believes." V. 24 the father exclaimed, "I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief." This father acknowledged his doubt and asked God's help to overcome it and his son was delivered that very day.
2. Examine the evidence from the Word of God. Let your own eyes see the evidence in the same way Thomas saw the evidence in the hands of Jesus, bringing him to his knees saying, "My Lord and my God." If we examine the evidence of God's power as recorded in the Bible, we cannot help but be on our knees declaring, "O Lord my God, How Great Thou Art, How Great Thou Art."

III. WRONG MOTIVES

- A. Wrong motive is when the heart and the requests are not in line with the will of God. Motive goes wrong when the intention is solely for selfish end or personal pleasure. Under this circumstance, prayer will only be wasted because God will not answer it.

James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

1 John 5:14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.

- B. The will of God in the Bible. Our motives can't go wrong if we pray in accordance with the will of God. Therefore, it is essential that we should know His will by taking every opportunity to learn from His Word so that our knowledge of the will of God will continue to grow and expand making our prayers more meaningful and productive because they will not be denied.

TWO SCRIPTURES THAT WILL HELP US LINK OURSELVES WITH THE WILL OF GOD:

- *1 Thessalonians 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*
- *Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer you bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to rest and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

IV. UNFORGIVENESS – Matthew 18:21-35

A. Scripture Reference

Mark 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

B. A Friend's Experience

Over ten years ago, a friend came to us for counseling. Her problem started when she went to Palau to work leaving her boyfriend behind who never communicated with her despite her effort for years to connect with him. Thinking their relationship was over, she moved on with a new guy. One day, there was a need for her to go home for a few weeks. Before she left, her current boyfriend told her that if she will get back with her former boyfriend, he would commit suicide. When she arrived home, her former boyfriend visited her and told her that they should get married. She refused because to her their relationship is over. She also told him, she now have a new boyfriend. The ex-boyfriend got mad and threatened to kill her and the new guy if they get married. That's where she came to us for advice. Upon learning the situation I said, in your case, you don't need a boyfriend or a husband. What you need is a funeral parlor because whichever way you go somebody is going to die. But on a serious note, I told her, the best thing for you to do is to drop them both, then pray and wait which way the Lord will lead you. The advice seemed good to her and she left. After a month, somebody told us she married her former boyfriend and went back to Palau.

Six months later, she got back to the Philippines and called us asking desperately for prayers. When my wife and I went to see her that day, she showed us about twenty ultrasound photos of the seven clusters of cyst in her liver. It was taken in Palau. Because of this, her employer had to let her go so she could seek medical help.

I asked her, what happened? She told us her story. According to her, when she left our house after the counseling, right after she arrived home, her former boyfriend against her will took her to the mayor's office to marry her. Few days later she went back to Palau. She started sending large amount of her income to her husband with the agreement that he would use the money to buy a farm for their future. However, the husband never acknowledged

the receipt of the money and never communicated with her. One day, she received a letter from her mother telling her that her husband tore their marriage certificate and ran off with a woman who had two kids. That horrible news completely destroyed her. Her health deteriorated rapidly. She lost her job, no money, no husband in a foreign land. The only thing she has was the ultra sound that reminds her of the existence of seven clusters of cyst in her liver.

We were stunned as we sat there listening to her story. We didn't know what to say. However, in my heart, I could sense the Holy Spirit urging me to challenge her with the issue of forgiveness before we pray. I could see the pain and frustration in her eyes the moment she heard the word forgiveness. Her heart is filled with pain and hatred. How could she forgive the people who caused her misery? I know that she expected me to pray for her healing and not to talk about forgiveness. But, on the other hand, the Word of God is clear there is no healing apart from forgiveness. I shared with her the passage that forgiveness is God's indispensable requirement and condition for answered prayer.

I said when you forgive them you are doing yourself a favor not them. Your forgiveness does not remove the consequences of their sins it removes the hindrance to your healing. You forgive them not because they deserve to be forgiven, but because God deserves to be obeyed. It's not easy, it is hard and painful, but it's the only way out. She understood and said I'm ready to forgive.

As we prayed, I could feel in her voice the pain and the anguish as she released forgiveness for her husband and his mistress. In that moment, I haven't seen it with my eyes but I could strongly sense that God was right there holding her hand giving her peace in place of fear, love in place of hatred and comfort in place of anguish. I have never felt God's presence so strong. After we prayed, the first thing she said was "I am healed".

A week later, she had two ultra sounds from two different hospitals. Both results showed the clusters of cysts were gone. However in those exams, the doctor discovered that her gall bladder needed immediate surgery. God's favor was upon her, she received the best treatment from one of the best surgeon in a very expensive hospital (**St. Luke's Hospital**) spending 3,000 pesos (\$80) instead of 50,000 pesos (\$1,250).

Few months later, she was back to Palau. The last time we heard of her, she was made co-owner of the business by her employer.

- Miracles happen and abound to everyone who is willing to forgive.

V. **CONCLUSION:** Psalm 139:23-24

In his book Why Prayers are Unanswered, John Lavender told a story about Norman Vincent Peale, the author of "The Power of Positive Thinking".

When Peale was a boy, he found a big, black cigar. He slipped into an alley and lit the cigar. It didn't taste good, but it made him feel very grown up. Suddenly, he saw his father coming towards him. He quickly put the cigar behind his back and tried to be casual. Desperate to divert his father's attention, Norman pointed to the billboard advertising the circus. He said, "Can I go, Dad? Please, let's go when it comes to town." His father's reply taught Norman a lesson he never forgets. "Son," he answered quietly but firmly, "never makes a petition while at the same time trying to hide a smoldering disobedience."

Partial obedience is still disobedience.

1 Samuel 15:22 But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

Remember, God will reject our prayers

- if we insist of keeping our sins instead of confessing them,
- if we keep on doubting instead of believing,
- if our motives remain selfish,
- If we continue to refuse to forgive.

The choice is ours. Remember, God has also His choice and one of them is to reject our prayers if we do not listen to Him.