

ers will always be answered in the ways you want. Why? Because you know God so well that you aren't asking for anything YOU want. How do we get into that happy position? Much prayer, much Bible study – and much activity with God.

If you aren't getting all of your prayers answered in the way YOU want – then simply respond in faith and know God is answering in the best way.

If your loved one is in pain, or in other need – then simply look more to that person's needs than yours.

Our grand-daughter is called Sofia. We have been praying for her recently and our prayers haven't been answered in the way we want. We want the child to live in England. We don't want her to live in China.

Our prayer has been for God's will to be done. We are good people. We pray. We do God's will. However our prayers haven't been answered.

It's not that we are not deserving.

It's not that we aren't good enough to have our prayers heard.

It's simply that what we want simply hasn't happened.

What are we doing? We keep praying, we keep in contact with the child praying that one day we will see little Sofia.

Are your prayers not answered? Don't blame yourself and any of your apparent failings. Don't blame anyone. Just keep praying, take your mind onto Jesus and His love, keep worshiping God, keep caring – and perhaps the great opportunity and great blessing will arrive for you, just as it did for Zechariah and Elisabeth.

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Why Wasn't my Prayer Answered?



One of the issues we face as Christians is the issue of world-wide suffering. We see suffering all around us. People we love die. Children starve. Illness proliferates. Earthquakes still devastate the planet. Dictators still walk the earth. Politicians still philander. One person grows rich at the expense of others.

Suffering is all around us and a major component of discussions between Christians and non-Christians.

Actually the point is not suffering but God's reaction to suffering. We talk of a good God, an Almighty God, a Creator God with unlimited power at His disposal – and yet suffering still exists.

People we love die. Children starve. Illness proliferates. Earthquakes still devastate the planet. Dictators still walk the earth. Politicians still philander. One person grows rich at the expense of others.

The church has books and booklets, sermons and resources designed to help us help people who ask the question – why does a good God allow suffering?

But when all is said and done what do we say to our members who ask the question, "I prayed", "I live a good life", "I witness". "Why, after all this did my friend still suffer?"

Three issues

There are three issues to look at. How powerful is God? What is God's world-view? How much do we understand?

Can we turn to an unusual passage to explore these three issues? The Gospel of Luke – the first few verses of the first chapter.

"In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elisabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly. But they had no children, because Elisabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years. Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest be-

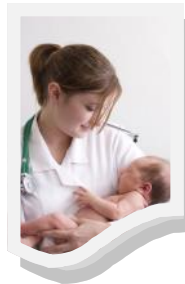
fore God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.”

Luke 1:5-10

Zechariah the Priest

The little issues first. Zechariah is an active priest though well advanced in years – he still has not retired. Do you know what that actually means? Zechariah is less than 50 years old. Priests retired at 50.

He could still have children at the age of 50 – but unfortunately that joy had never happened. You can guess that Zechariah and his wife had spoken often about what was missing in their life.



They wanted a child. How wife dreamed of a little one. She dreamed of nappies and colic, worship with baby every morning, Sabbath school songs and Sabbath School teachers. She might have dreamed of teething and summer colds and perhaps flu – and knowing all the time that God would protect her precious little one.

But the reality had never happened. Baby still had not come – after all those prayers.

I love what the record says about Zechariah and his wife,

“Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.”

Luke's Gospel

Back up a bit. Luke is the writer of the Gospel. He's set out to provide an accurate account for his friend Theophilus. To get the accurate account Luke takes his laptop and interviews people years after the event. He gets the stories down and sifts through the accounts to make sure that he gets it right.

Who does he talk to? Mary. Which Mary? Mary the Mother of Jesus.

“Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

Luke 13:4f

Jesus doesn't offer a reason – but He does let us know that even if there are no reasons for all events there are possibilities that arise out of all events.

Our world-view is limited



Our limited world-view is to say there is a reason for all things. God's world-view is different and far better. God simply says, “whatever happens I can be at work.”

Think this through. We say there is a reason for all things – and then we are placing God at the heart of all events – both good and bad. We would be effectively saying that God is the cause behind both good and bad – and He is the cause why all prayers aren't answered as we want.

I have to close now, you are probably praying for dinner – and it will come. That is one prayer that will be answered.

How do we cope when our Prayers aren't answered?

Know that God is not behind all events. Satan is behind some, we are responsible for some events. If the prayer is not answered it MAY not be God who is stopping the prayer from being answered – but keep praying.

Sometimes we think that our prayer is not answered because we are in the wrong. We consider that God isn't listening because we have done something wrong. The issue in this case MAY be you and your self-understanding. Are you a Christian? Have you prayed for God to forgive you? Have you accepted Jesus into your life? Then recognise that God is listening to you. He is not rejecting your prayer because of your failures. God is simply no answering in the way that you want. God is answering the prayer in the better way.

You really CAN have all of your prayers answered the way that YOU want. If you really pray for God's will to be done – and you know God's will perfectly then pray-

one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the LORD, the God of Israel, has found anything good.”

1 Kings 14:12,13

Here is the short background to explain what is going on. Mum and Dad are rulers in Judah— not good and godly rulers. Life has become hard and their son is ill.

What do they do? They pray and they seek the advice of the prophet. The prophet says that the child will die.

This has nothing to do with the evil of the parents. God is acting for the sake of the nation – and for the child. The prayers are answered because God has a different world view to ours.

God sees what is needed. He sees what is best for us. God has a world view. We have a small view.

How much do we understand?

There is a third issue we are looking at – how much do we understand?

Can you guess what I’m going to say? We understand very little. We don’t know the end from the beginning. We only know what we know when we seek God’s guidance and act within His will.

An example? Our understanding is that everything happens for a reason. That shows how little we understand.

Some things happen without reason. Some things just happen. Good things happen, bad things happen – sometimes there is a reason, sometimes not.

An example. People came to Jesus looking for guidance in life. They wanted to know they could fit into the world. They wanted to work out how the world works.

One issue that Jesus addressed was personal responsibility for suffering.

A recent incident had been reported in the news. A tower had collapsed killing 18 people. The report went around that the 18 people were killed in the collapse were sinners. The reason for the event was that the people were punished for sin.

What does Jesus say?



Mary tells him exactly what went on – about herself – and about what happened to her relative Elisabeth, the wife of Zechariah.

It is that idea that Zechariah and his wife are upright in the sight of God.

This is a big issue. The record, approved by the Holy Spirit, lets us know that the couple weren’t just upright – they were upright in God’s eyes.

We can say of a good Christian, “he, or she, is an upright person”

We look at their actions and their lifestyle, do a quick measurement and say, “upright”.

Interesting – we have been judgemental. Go ahead. We are allowed to judge people like that. We are allowed to work out if a person is walking with God.

Luke does it. Zechariah and his wife are upright in the sight of God. Actually it is the idea that they are upright in the sight of God that matters.

God has given his approval – they aren’t just upright, they are upright in God’s sight.

I don’t know how Luke knows. Perhaps God has had a word with Luke. Perhaps there is the strong impression given by a person who has the spiritual gift of discernment. Perhaps Luke assesses uprightness based on the birth of the child.

Family life

You can imagine family life in the Zechariah household. Early morning worship, prayers for the wider family and the community. A prayer for guidance in the days work. Intercession for someone else’s needs. Breakfast is healthy and the days work is done well and all to the glory of God.

There may be temptation during the day but Zechariah has not fallen.

Then comes the Sabbath – he and his wife don’t even think of watching TV on the Sabbath.

Do you get the idea? This man and his wife really are God’s people. They pray, they witness and they serve.

They also yearn for a child.

Zechariah’s suggestion that he loves Elisabeth is well meant – but it’s not enough – especially when the teaching of the day is that a couple with no children are not blessed of God.

When Zechariah gives his wife presents as often as he can – the effort is appreciated – but it doesn't compensate for the occasional remarks that Elisabeth overhears in the market.

“There goes Elisabeth, she's barren”

Have they lived the Godly life? Do they deserve a child? Haven't they prayed faithfully?

They are old and well advanced in years, they have given up hope – and then God acts.

We leave it there, for we know what happens next. Baby John arrives and is the most spoiled, most prayed for, most loved child in the whole area. He gets every advantage – but all the way through is drawn to love God – his second Father. That's the way we know that Zechariah and his Godly wife are highly esteemed by God.

We have four questions

How powerful is God? When does God answer prayers? What is God's world-view? How much do we understand?

God is SO powerful. God can act to help even this childless couple have their much prayed for child. Why has God given the child? Is it because the couple are that upright? Has God given the child out of His great power because God has listened to prayer?

One of the things we learn in our Bible Studies is that not all prayers are answered.

What kind of prayers are answered? The prayers of a righteous man. Prayers offered according to God's will.

Zechariah and Elisabeth fit the first condition. In this case they also fit the second condition – they are praying according to God's will. However the answer has arrived in God's time. God wants this special child, John, to be born just before Jesus arrives. John is to pave the way, he is to be the fore-runner of Jesus.

It would be no good for the prayer to be answered when Zechariah and Elisabeth were in their twenties – the child is needed for a later date.

The prayer is answered when God says, “this is the best time.” It has little to do with Zechariah and Elisabeth. They are blessed but it is not because of their goodness or their prayers.

We could quote a relevant Scripture –

“Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

2 Peter 1:2,3

When does God answer Prayers?

God is all powerful – but He answers prayers when He decides. It has nothing to do with the person doing the prayer.

When you pray – God listens and God intercedes, but acts for the best good of the person doing the praying.

How powerful is God? God is all powerful! God all powerful and GOOD.

A story. I was a Pastor in the Sheffield area a few years ago. Eric Shaw was a man of prayer, a man of prayer who had a sick wife. She had been well prayed for, in Chesterfield, in Sheffield and over in Sutton-in-Ashfield. Eric's wife died the day after she was anointed for healing.

Where was God?

Why didn't a powerful God listen to the earnest prayers of believers?

Eric Shaw's words are instructive, “I miss my wife, but I thank God that He did what was best for my wife. I wanted her to live, but she wouldn't have had much of a life. God made the best decision.”

What is God's world-view?

There are two more questions

What is God's world-view? How much do we understand?

God's world view is that He knows what is best. Another Bible story illustrates God's world view,

“As for you, go back home. When you set foot in your city, the boy will die. All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only