

# God's Better Way

## Benefits of Unanswered Prayer

It's probably never good to start with a disclaimer. But let me just say that I do not endorse or recommend this movie because it is fraught with impossibilities and theological issues. And I may or may not have firsthand knowledge of the gist of this movie. Popcorn may or may not have been involved.

But there is a scene in *Bruce Almighty* that illustrates the benefits of unanswered prayer. Bruce, the main character, is momentarily given a sample of God's power to demonstrate how truly powerful God is. One of his assignments is to answer all the prayers offered by everyone around the world. Of course, he is quickly overwhelmed with the sheer volume and decides the simplest solution is to give everyone what he or she wants by saying "yes" to every request.

Crazy things happen. One woman loses 47 pounds on the Krispy Kreme diet. The lottery goes bankrupt with all the winners. Riots break out as answers to competing prayers create chaos. The main character learns the hard way that there is an order to God's sovereignty.

The movie illustrates that we may long for and desire certain answers to prayer, but our limited understanding of God's plans and design puts us in a precarious position if we think all our prayers are spot-on and deserve the intended outcome.

## God's Deeper Work

Of course, we all know the saying that God answers prayer with a yes, no, or wait. But we also all have those times when we feel like God is silent in answering prayers that come from the depths of our souls. Those are hard moments. We're not

sure why He doesn't respond with affirmation to our deepest longings.

But it's often in the "unanswered" prayers where God begins to do a deeper work in us. We learn to trust. We learn about God's goodness and sovereignty in our lives. And we also learn to allow a deeper examination into our own hearts and motives.

In this issue, our authors examine the benefits of unanswered prayer—the ways that God intends for us to prosper and grow when He doesn't respond as we had hoped.

In our lead article, Jamie Overholser writes about the tension of pouring out our hearts before God while at the same time surrendering to His will. It's the same tension Jesus felt in Gethsemane as He pleaded with His Father just before His death.

Niko Peele describes how "prayer is not designed to be a transactional activity but rather a relational reality with the living God of the universe." Unanswered prayer is part of our journey of building the character of Christ within us.

And there are times and seasons when unanswered prayer should provoke honest questions in our lives. Elizabeth Schmus writes not from a place of shame, but from a heart of self-examination over unresolved issues that may hinder answers to our prayers.

I shudder at the thought of God doing a "reply yes" to all my prayers in exactly the ways I fervently prayed them. Some of those prayers were off target and best left unanswered. God knows. And I'm so grateful He always acts out of love and His greater purposes.

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