

Why Do Big Prayers Often Go Unanswered?

For many years I have been carrying a small blue box containing my favorite cufflinks. I don't leave home without it. I have literally taken this little box all over the world. Last week when my wife and I returned from Africa, I couldn't find it anywhere. I was positive of two things: 1) I took it 2) I brought it home. But where was it? Maybe I just thought I brought it home. Perhaps those who checked my luggage lost it. When all else fails, human nature has a tendency to blame someone else. By the way, it is very rare that I have lost something because of someone else. Almost always, it was I who lost it. I looked everywhere; I just couldn't find it.

A few mornings ago as I lay in the twilight state of waking up, I was prompted by the Lord, "Why don't you ask Me where your little blue box is?" I had to say, "Forgive me, Lord; I forgot." If things are worth talking about, they are worth praying about. I prayed and very calmly whispered, "Lord, I know it's little and in the great scheme of things, this doesn't even cause the slightest blip on life's radar. I have plenty of cufflinks and little blue boxes are a dime a dozen, but I like it. Would You let me find it?" Immediately my mind went to a small brown plastic bag where Barbara and I were storing our granola bars we had taken to Africa for those times when we might be skipping a meal in our travels. Then I said to the Lord, "That's not where I keep my cufflinks." Do you think our Lord has a sense of humor? I do, because here is the next piece of information that I believe my Lord brought to my attention, "Well, son if you know where you always keep your things, if you are never careless, you would have it in your possession right now." Yes, Lord, I replied, "I shall look in that little brown bag." Guess what I found in there? I found a little blue box with my cufflinks inside!

I don't remember putting them in there. I suppose in my haste to pack I just threw it in there without thinking. I gave my thanks to the Lord and then pondered for a moment. I wasn't complaining, but I became most contemplative about how God often answers so many little prayers, yet some of the biggest prayers I pray, the most important prayers I pray, often go unanswered. Why? Well, that has become the impetus of this writing today.

1. God doesn't spoil us.

What is the one glaring attribute of a brat? They are spoiled. A little kid who gets every candy he screams for, every toy he cries for and every privilege he demands is more than difficult to live with; they often grow up as blight to society. There is virtue in a child who learns the values of things, who has to work for privileges and who knows how much toys or candy cost. The spoiled kid cuts in line, cheats on taxes and doesn't care who he or she hurts as long as they have their own way.

I remember well the first bicycle Mom and Dad bought me. I was about six years of age. I could never done enough work to have earned enough money to buy it -- it did however, make for a great Christmas. By far and away, my favorite bicycle was when I was older and saved enough money from being a paper-boy to buy a Schwinn American. It was blue with large whitewall tires, equipped with antler handlebars and a banana seat. It had a special feature of two speeds

changed by a slight pedal backwards. It was a beauty. I remember when my brother and I would go by the bike shop, we would look at one, touch it and sit on it. All we could do was window shop until we had saved enough money to buy one. David, my brother got his first, and then I purchased mine. I had to throw a lot of papers to earn it, but I finally accomplished my goal and received the desire of my heart. There was something special about learning the value of that bike that made me cherish it even more than my first two-wheeler.

Perhaps God is saying, put some “feet” to your prayers. Labor in my vineyard and I’ll take care of your needs and desires of your heart. *“For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly”* (Psalm 84:11). God may be saying, “I want to help you but I also want you to appreciate what I’ll give you if you will be patient and press toward the mark.”

2. What’s important to you is important to God.

In contemplating why would God answer such an insignificant prayer, this thought came to me. Although the little blue box of cufflinks was not of much monetary value, God knew I liked it and what was in it. Then it hit me! I gave our Lord praise, by saying, “Lord, you are wonderful! You reminded me again of how special I am to You by reminding me that what was special to me, is special to You.” Our Lord promises, *“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”* (I Peter 5:7).

3. Little answers to prayer build faith for the greater answers to prayer.

I was still a bit mystified. Okay, I could understand that God doesn’t want to spoil us and what is important to us, is important to Him. But why does He not answer my big requests, those things that are most important to us. As I was celebrating my blue box find, I rejoiced, by saying, “God really answers prayer!” As my spirit was soaring, it was like the Lord spoke to me and said, “Yes, I do answer prayer, so ask Me for those big items...I’ll answer in time...My time.” I felt like the starving Ruth who was following behind the young men who worked for Boaz. You remember the story: Boaz said to his employees, *“...And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not”* (Ruth 2:16). Naomi was elated when Ruth brought the reward home, because it meant, the wealthiest man in Israel who happens to be of near kin to Ruth’s late husband was now showing interest in her. Those handfuls of purpose were saying that there is more where this came from! This is just a sampling of what I am able to give you.

Sometimes those smaller answers to prayer are your “handfuls of purpose” to remind you that God has moved your molehill today, but He shall move your mountain tomorrow!

4. God desires fellowship with you.

Has this ever occurred to you? If we immediately received everything we wanted from God the day we ask, we may not be talking to Him except when we only wanted something from Him. God longs to be loved for Himself, not for just

what we can get from Him. Can you not feel the breaking heart of our Lord while He says to His people, *“But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel”* (Isaiah 43:22). God is saying, you have become tired of Me; you have stopped praying to Me. Let us take this rebuke and continue in fervent prayer until He answers. If God never answered another prayer, it would still be worth it all to have that sweet communion with Him. The truth is, that’s not the way God is going to leave it, because He promises, *“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive”* (Matthew 21:22). Don’t be surprised when God sees the sincerity of your love to Him that He rewards you magnificently with a mighty answer to your prayer. *“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not”* (Jeremiah 33:3).

-Pastor Pope-