

TEACH US TO PRAY

Week 4 Discussion Questions

When God Says No

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Icebreaker:

Last week we looked at the Parable of the Persistent Widow, God's heart for justice, and our response of persistent prayer and action. Share how persistent prayer for justice has shaped you this week.

If you participated in any aspect of the 6:8 project weekend, share your experience and how you saw God working in you or the community.

Read this week's passage (2 Corinthians 12:1-10).

What stands out to you from the passage or sermon this week?

Recap: What is the purpose of prayer (especially considering what we've learned over the past three weeks in this series)?

The goal of prayer is connection. Prayer is our way of connecting to God, to strengthen our relationship with him, in order to grow in his likeness and image. We have union with God through Christ, and prayer is how we have *communion* with God. We speak with God, listen to God, and even sit in silence. It is not simply requests to God, but recognition of his Character, his work, and his presence with us. Prayer is praise, confession, adoration, supplication, lament, thanksgiving, etc.

In this passage, Paul contrasts two spiritual experiences—a high-high and a low-low. Paul's many spiritual and leadership experiences could lead him into a sense of pride and boasting, as if he has some kind of special status before God. In what areas of your life are you tempted to find special status or boast in your own strength?

Paul tells us that he is dealing with a "thorn in the flesh" How does Paul describe the effects of this thorn in his life.

It is unclear whether this "thorn" is physical or spiritual, but either way its effect is weakness. Paul is experiencing insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. It causes him to "plead" for its removal—it is a significant hardship for him.

Paul prays three times for God to take away the "thorn." What is God's answer and what does he mean when he says, "my grace is sufficient for you"?

It appears God's answer is "no"—he does not remove this thorn for Paul. Through our weakness, God's power and grace are magnified. If every prayer we prayed was answered in "yes" we would be shaped into our own image instead of God's. When the answer to our prayers is "no," it is not because God does not listen or does not care,

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but because we are being shaped into his image, and not our own. God's grace, his will, and his plan is sufficient—and greater than anything we could ever imagine.

Discuss what is meant by the statement: "There is no such thing as unanswered prayers."

God's response to our prayers is not dependent on the quality or quantity of our prayers. If you have a prayer that seems "unanswered" it is not a lack of faith or a lack from God. Sometimes the answer to the prayer is "no" or "not yet" and sometimes the answer is something we did not expect or fathom.

When the answer to our prayers is "no" or "not yet" there is always a reason. Discuss the ways God might use our weakness or suffering to shape us to be more like him. Prayer is not simply a means to an end where everything we ask for will be answered with a "Yes", but prayer is connection to God with the aim to grow in his image and likeness. Sometimes a "no" is because he has something different or better. Sometimes a "no" is meant to shape your heart in patience, humility, gratitude, and faith.

Share a time when you prayed for something for a while and the answer was ultimately "no." How has God shaped you through that experience?

In what ways does this passage shape your understanding of prayer and how it functions in your relationship with God?