Why Doesn't God Answer My Prayer?

"**Into the Word**," a Bible Study by Anne Graham Lotz, is designed to draw you into God's Word. Although the study-question format may be more challenging than one might find in an article that provides all the answers, we believe that this format will help you to discover a treasure of truths and insights from God.

by Anne Graham Lotz

Do you have an unanswered prayer? Not just a small, daily request but a major, heartbreaking, soul-wrenching, tear-soaking prayer that God has not answered? I do. And as I have wrestled with it my thoughts have been in turmoil at times: "Does God really love me? Has He heard me? Does He care? If He cares, is He unable to answer? Have I done something to displease Him? Why doesn't God answer my prayer?" And I have been confronted with the temptation to blame God, to resent God, to turn away from God—to just stop praying, because He doesn't seem to be answering anyway.

As I have struggled with my "Whys?" I have sought answers in God's Word. With loving patience and gentle wisdom, He has led me to John 11 and the story of Martha's "unanswered prayer" in order to teach me to trust Him when I just don't understand ...

Read John 11:1-44

UNANSWERED PRAYER DEVELOPS OUR FAITH—John 11:1-27

For This We Need Jesus—John 11:1-16

- From verses 1-2, describe the family in Bethany and the crisis that arose.
- In verses 1-5, what attitude of Jesus toward this family is specifically stated twice? Give the phrases.
- Who or what is your "Lazarus"?
- From verse 3, put into your own words Mary and Martha's implied "prayer."
- How did Jesus answer?
- What did He do?
- After bringing their request to Jesus, did Mary and Martha's situation improve?
- How long has Jesus delayed after you have brought your request to Him?
- Read verses14-15. What is astounding about Jesus' attitude toward Lazarus' death?
- What insight does His attitude give us about our suffering?
- From the following verses, what are some of His purposes for us in our suffering? 1 Peter 1:6-7; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Hebrews 12:2; Revelation 1:9-13.

For This We Have Jesus—John 11:17-27

- According to verses 17-20, what did Martha have in the midst of her suffering that the three Hebrew young men from Daniel 3:19-25 had in the midst of their trial?
- Relate this to God's promise to us from Isaiah 43:1-4 and Psalm 23:4-5.
- How did Martha greet Jesus in verse 21? Put it into your own words.
- What have been some of your "if onlys"?
- According to verse 23, what else did Martha have on which she could base her faith in the midst of her suffering?
- What promise has God given you in the midst of your suffering? Has your faith been based on "I hope so" or "He says so"?
- In verses 25-26, to what and to Whom did Jesus direct Martha's attention?
- Do you think Martha would have become this focused if she had not been desperate? How does this help answer why Jesus doesn't always give us what we want, when we want it?

UNANSWERED PRAYER DISPLAYS HIS GLORY—John 11:28-44

The Glory of His Love—John 11:28-38

- While similar, what is the difference between Martha's greeting of Jesus in verses 21-22 and Mary's greeting in verse 32? Put it into your own words.
- How did Jesus respond in verses 33-34?
- When have you invited Jesus to "come and see" your pain, your helplessness, your hopelessness, your despair?
- Knowing He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead within moments, why do you think Jesus wept? See Isaiah 63:9; Hebrews 4:15; Psalm 56:8.
- Why do you think we are told twice that Jesus was deeply moved? See verses 33 and 38.
- Do you think He saw a reflection of His own death and burial that would take place within the week? Relate this to Romans 5:8 and Hebrews 12:2.

The Glory of His Lordship—John 11:39-41

- What command did Jesus give Martha in verse 39?
- Why was obedience to this command unthinkable to Martha?
- What stone is God commanding you to remove that is keeping your "Lazarus" buried? An unforgiving spirit? Anger? Pride? _____? Fill in the blank.
- What was Martha's response to His command?
- Did her resistance and argument speed or delay the deliverance of her loved one?
- When Jesus seeks to do a miracle in the life of your loved one, what argument have you raised about His methods or His timing?
- Could you be delaying a blessing because you are arguing?
- What was Jesus' challenge to Martha in verse 40? Put it into your own words. Relate this to James 2:26; John 5:8-9; 9:7; Mark 3:5.
- If Martha truly believed, did she have any option but obedience?
- What reason to obey did Jesus give Martha in verse 40?
- What reason do you need before you obey?

The Glory of His Life-Giving Power—John 11:41-44

- Why did Jesus pray publicly before calling Lazarus forth from the tomb? See verses 41-42.
- When had that same voice been heard before? Compare John 1:1,14 with Genesis 1:3; Luke 8:24-25, 49-55 and Matthew 8:28-32.
- What was the response to His voice in verses 43-44?
- Do you think His power has lessened or weakened over time? See Hebrews 13:6.
- Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. What was the Apostle Paul's "unanswered prayer"? How did it develop his faith and display God's glory?
- Based on your brief study of John 11:1-44, write out your own answer to "Why?"

Remember ... trust Him when you don't understand and nothing makes sense—after the cross come the resurrection and the glory and the crown. Keep your focus on the big picture and the ultimate goal: to live by faith in Jesus alone that you and I might display His glory to an increasingly skeptical, cynical, hostile world!

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