

# OpenTheo

## My Teenage Daughter Walked Away from God Because He Didn't Answer Her Prayers for Help

November 27, 2023



### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Question about how to respond to a teenage daughter who walked away from God because she cried out to him for years and he didn't answer, and because she didn't feel any different after accepting Christ as her Savior.

\* How should I respond to my teenage daughter who walked away from God because she cried out to him for years and he didn't answer, and because she didn't feel any different after accepting Christ as her Savior?

### Transcript

Welcome, listeners, to the hashtag SDRask Podcast from Stand to Reason. I'm Amy Hall and I'm here with Greg Koukl and we are here to respond to the questions that you send to us on Twitter with the hashtag SDRask. Right.

Or through our website. Right. In both cases.

Yes. Alright, Greg, let's start with a question from Michelle. How should I respond to my teen daughter who walked away from God because she believes she cried out to him for help for years and he didn't answer.

Also, she accepted Christ as her Savior at VBS and was expecting to feel different but didn't. So now she believes there is no Holy Spirit. Thank you.

Wow. The reason that this is difficult to deal with is because it's so, sorry, right word. It strikes at the heart of a lot of people.

A lot of people who expect something different. It isn't a so much kind of an issue of reason. It is a feeling like if God were there, he would have responded to my need and because he didn't answer the prayer or I didn't feel him, then he's not really there.

And I have answers to this because both of these things are true in my own life and just

about every other Christian's life. That's what I was going to say. And some more than others.

I think there are personality issues where there is a more of an affective relationship, if you will, or an affective awareness of God. We feel God more. There is an emotional element that is more heightened with some people.

But I think it's not unusual that as people get older in the Lord, ironically, and I've heard people say this and I certainly have noticed it in my own life, that things, I'm not even sure the best way to explain it because there are different aspects of growing older in the Lord. When I was first a Christian, there was a lot of activity of what appeared to be God's hand in my life and radical things happening in those first few years. And then as I grew, that seemed to calm down quite a bit.

And there has always been a challenge for me in the affect development and I've had to really work at nurturing that over the years. And I think that has improved, but it's still far short of what I would wish for and also what some people seem to have. Now, here's just an observation and a suspicion.

I think a lot of people, Christians are in a habit of talking about their relationship with God in a way that they think sounds appropriate to talk about God but doesn't always accurately reflect their internal life, their interior life. So they'll talk about joy and peace and all that other stuff when you get right down because that's the way other Christians talk about it. When you come into the service, you're jumping up and down and this is the music.

It's rah, rejoice in the Lord. It's all that kind of stuff. Most of the time, I don't feel like singing that kind of song when I come into church.

I like something more quiet, more reflective and more akin to my emotions, which aren't jumping around at the moment. All I'm saying here is that I think there is a way that Christians represent the emotional interior life of Christians that isn't entirely accurate, but they're socialized to talk and act this way because that's the right way to do it. And I've even noticed when I give the talk, no pixie dust and I address this in the beginning, I get so much positive response from the audience.

I'm watching them and they're nodding with me when I'm making this observation. Things aren't as wonderful subjectively as we often make them sound to other people. And so I think that's one problem that, you know, the more you talk to other people who are speaking candidly about their experience with God, sometimes it's a lot more subdued than they display during worship services, etc.

Now, I'm not saying people are dishonest at all. I'm just simply saying that there is a difference in that. The second thing is that there are different personalities.

I mentioned that. And there are different stages in our Christian life. Lewis famously talks in scoot tape letters through the mouth of scoot tape.

He talks about the law of undulation and how, because we have, as Lewis puts it, one foot in eternity and one foot in time, there's an up and there's a down and there's an up and there's a down. And our task, he communicates through this foil of the demon discipling another younger demon that we are to seek stability in our convictions in our commitment, even when there's not stability in our emotional experience. All right.

And so that's another factor here. The difficulty. And of course, that's the feeling side.

And what about the prayer side? There are prayers. People pray all of their lives on things that are really important to them that seem not to be answered. And there's other things that just seem to be answered overnight.

And why is that? I have no idea. This is what you might call the calculus of prayer, if there is such a thing. And I don't know what it is.

How many prayers do you have to pray with how much intensity and how many people for how long before God acts? And Lewis has pointed out rightly that we're not dealing with the machine. That requires a certain amount of input before you get the response you're dealing with a personal being who has his own mind about things and his own understanding. And sees the world the way it really is and the whole world and not just the little bitty part through the keyhole as Ozzganis puts it that we see.

Now, it takes some, I think, some personal maturity, not just spiritual maturity, but some personal maturity to be able to acknowledge that and accept that. That we're not always going to get what we want. Even when what we want is a good thing.

James says you have not because you asked not. Well, I asked and he said, well, you asked with wrong motives to spend it on your pleasures. But we look back on some of the things we asked for.

And he said, that wasn't what we were asking for. And I had a row with God the other day. And I said, this is your word, not my word.

You said this. I didn't say this. This is what you say it should be like.

It's not my idea. And so I'm trying to play consistent with what his word says is appropriate. And I think that's an appropriate way to pray and to struggle with God and wrestle with him.

But sometimes the thing that he may end up giving consistent with the way he wants the world may not happen right away because there are other things that he is seeking to accomplish. Or I should say, not seek. That sounds too much like try.

But he is accomplishing through the delay. That's more important than us getting what we're asking for. Even though at that moment it seems like a right thing.

The promise there in Romans chapter eight that's oft quoted partially. We know that God causes all things to work together for those who love him and are called according to his purpose. Keep reading for those whom he foreknew he predestined to become conformed to the image of his son.

Oh, now we know what that purpose is. Now we know the telos, the end, the goal that God is for which or to which God is using all of these things together to accomplish. That is to conform us to the image of Christ.

That's the purpose that God has promised to accomplish by using these hardships and difficulties. All those things, all things that God is using for good in our life. And so sometimes there's a delay in our answer to prayer and a good prayer because there is something else that the delay is meant to work in our life.

I don't know what that is, but I certainly have seen that in my own life as I look back on things. So that's the prayer side. So both of those are part of this.

For Michelle here, the difficulty is especially her daughter, I don't know how old her daughter is, but I do know that there's someone in my family whose wife refused to believe in God because she lost her grandfather when she was young. And she can't believe in a God that would take her grandfather away from her. Now, it's one thing to feel that way when you're a child.

It's another thing to feel that way when you're an adult because everybody knows that nobody lives forever, you know. So it's just kind of odd. This is part of the nature of the world.

I don't know what it was that she was praying about, but God says no to a lot of prayers. That doesn't mean there is no God. And there are lots of people that don't feel God very much.

And I've had close friends that told me, you know, the older I got in the Lord, the less I felt him, so to speak. And I just, I don't know why that's the case. Some people may be just exactly the opposite, but I have heard it from enough people to know that that this happens, which means then that our feelings, whatever they happen to be at any time, and or our unanswered prayer cannot be, in a certain sense, the litmus test of God's existence.

This is such a tough one to answer, not because there aren't explanations, but because in our culture, so many things are defined by our emotions. That's how we decide what's true. That's how we decide what's good.

It's all emotions based. So I think what you might want to do with this opportunity is to have a discussion about truth. How do we know what's true? How, how, you know, that would be the first question.

We don't determine what's true based on what we feel. We determine what's true based on other things. And so we need to look at those things to determine whether or not God's true.

And secondly, is there any sort of explanation as to why you didn't have your prayers answered that, as you were saying, Greg, that doesn't mean that he isn't real. And I think those are the two areas you need to have a conversation with. And I would also ask her, what does she mean by feel different? What was she expecting to feel? Now, I think one thing you should expect to feel is to feel differently about God.

Instead of being opposed to him and rebellion against him, you should be wanting to know him. And in fact, the fact that she's concerned about the fact that she doesn't feel like she's connecting him, you could point out, well, if you want to know God, well, that's a good sign. Go with that.

You know, the problem that that's an indication of your heart that you should be looking for, not whether or not you're happy or things are going well or you're getting what you want. Now, I don't know what she was praying for. It could have been something that is very serious.

And so I don't want to make light of that. It's harder to understand the serious prayers than it is to understand the frivolous ones, like a parking spot or something like that. Poor chef.

But if you can, if you could get across to her, the idea that truth is not determined by our feelings, and we don't always get what we want. Yes. And the idea you mentioned Greg about God not being a machine, that he's actually a person who makes decisions about what's best for us to make us like Christ.

And that's why we don't always know what to pray for. Luckily, Romans eight says that the Holy Spirit prays for us when we don't know how to pray. But if you can also help her look at the big picture, let's look at the big picture of what God's doing and who he is.

And I can't tell you why he's not answering your particular prayer this time, but I can't tell you there are two big goals. And you mentioned one already, Greg. One of the big goals is to make us like Christ.

The other big goal is his glory. And so every prayer that he answers or doesn't answer the way we want him to answer, he's doing one of those two things are both, probably both, because he's just that good multitasking. So if we don't get an answer, number one, we might not have the information to know how he's accomplishing those two

things.

Or we might have a lesser goal in mind. We might have a goal that he doesn't have. And so we can't understand why isn't he answering this request to ease my pain, because my goal is to get rid of the pain.

But that's not his goal. And that's something that's really hard for people to understand and can make people turn away from him and hate him. But that's just not his goal.

I think the way through these times is we have to trust his sovereignty that he could change things. We have to trust his specific love for us. And we can know that he loves us by looking at the cross.

And we have to increase our understanding of his love for us in his sovereignty by looking at the bigger picture and looking at the Bible and reading about who he is and learning about who he is. And I think that's the only way forward. And of course, if you don't think God is worth those things, if you think you're suffering is worse than that that should be fixed more than you should know God.

Well, now there's a problem. Now, now you can see that maybe you've been viewing God as a means to an end. And that is not what God wants for us.

And that's not the kind of followers he wants for us. Of course, we all deal with this. We were all nobody's perfect in this.

But think about this is exactly what the devil was trying to do with Job. He was trying to prove that Job was only using God as a means to an end. But Job did not curse God and die.

Yes, his wife seeked justice. He would still trust God, even if all those things were taken away. And I think about the verse in 1 Peter, where let's see here.

He says, now for a little while, if necessary, you've been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire, maybe found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. That's great. That's great.

I remember the movie, Bruce Almighty, the second movie, Jim Carrey was the guy in it. It was about Jim Carrey named Bruce and God. He was played by, I can't remember the actor, I can picture him, but in any event, Jim Carrey is given God's power for one day.

And so he's somehow using the computer to communicate all the prayer requests. And so he opens up this mail and says, you got mail and there's thousands of prayer requests that have come through that now he's receiving instead of God receiving them. And he selects the batch of them, everything, and he gives everybody everything that they're

asking for.

Well, this turns out to create all kinds of problems in those people's lives. And then later on, he gets to see the impact of it, that it's just not good for us to get everything we ask for. Even if the thing that we're asking for in itself and in the circumstances from our perspective seems like a very noble and appropriate thing, we don't know the long term consequences of getting what we want.

God does. And in this course, in case, rather the Bruce Almighty learned the hard way by seeing the destruction of people's lives of just answering everybody's prayer and realizing, well, he's not up to the task of being God, even though he has the power, he doesn't have the knowledge and the wisdom. And this is, of course, factors into our answer here.

So one last thing that you should point out to her, I would take her to this passage in 1 Peter 1, and I would just say, look, suffering is expected. This is expected. This is something that we are told is going to happen.

And for the purpose of God's glory, our good of showing that God is more valuable to us than anything else. And so you can look at, you can look at all sorts of people. Stephen was stoned to death.

John the Baptist was beheaded. Now, nobody wants to hear this, but the point is God is doing things and we can see what he's done. This is the advantage of having the Bible.

We can look back and see, look at the suffering these people went through and then what happened afterwards. So, an example of Stephen. Stephen is put to death and what happens.

Then it says they were spread throughout, you know, they spread outward from Jerusalem. The persecution in Jerusalem that was fomated by that execution then pushed everybody out of Jerusalem to Judea and Sumerian, ultimately to the other those parts of the earth. And there are all sorts of places in the Bible where you can, the cross.

I mean, what's worse than that? But we can see the purpose in that. So the more that you can see the purpose of suffering, see that it's expected, see that there are reasons for it, then when you come to a situation where you can't understand the reason for it in your specific situation, at least you have something to hang on to. So these are all different things, you know, how do we decide truth and, you know, the proper expectations.

And the proper expectations. Yeah. And I think, I think knowing the big picture of the Bible is really helpful.

Now, I don't know, she says she's a teen daughter. Oh, she is a teen. Okay.

Yeah. If you can get her to keep, you know, say, okay, I understand you've walked away, but, but let's, why don't you keep coming to church and just kind of soak it in and try and get an idea of what the big picture is here. Hopefully some of these things will help.

Ultimately, God has to change your heart because either you think God is worth it, is worth the suffering, or you don't. But what you could ask her is look, look at what Paul says. He considers all these other things that he had rubbish compared to Christ.

So do you want to know the God who is worth this? Do you want to know the God that is worth being shipwrecked and beaten and whipped and all these things that Paul went through? Do you want to know that God? And maybe you can just inspire a little interest in her into what kind of God would inspire someone to say that everything else is rubbish. There's something going on here and the suffering didn't stop Paul. Why? Let's find out who God is.

And incidentally, it's not all bad news about a lousy life of suffering. You know, just, there are all oftentimes where God does come through and answer the requests that we have of him, and we can give thanks for that. And sometimes it's very dramatic what he does.

It's just that he's not a circus animal that will jump through the hoop whenever we crack our whip, so to speak. Well, thank you, Greg. And thank you, Michelle.

Wow, we spent the whole time on that. And I actually had a couple more questions on suffering, so we'll have to save those for another time. It comes up so often because it's something we all have to deal with.

And like you said, Greg, sometimes churches ignore that and people force some kind of happy veneer. And it's better to be honest about this because otherwise, when people encounter suffering, it's a real slap in the face. All right, thanks a lot, Michelle.

If you'd like to send us your questions, send it on Twitter with the hashtag STRAsk or go through our website at STR.org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.