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What do you do when God doesn't answer your prayer?

I confess that I usually take the standard two-step approach:

- 1) I convince myself that it must not be God's will
- 2) I stop praying about it.

I normally don't stress about it too much and go on with life.

But there was one particular prayer that was different.

It started five years ago in 2014, when my wife and I were praying more than usual for our three girls. For reasons we didn't know at the time, we kept asking *where* we should raise them. While there were many good reasons to stay in Southern California—family, close friends, pleasant year-round weather, and a house we really liked—we were strongly impressed to ask if that's where *God* wanted us.

It didn't take long for His answer to become clear.

In fact, the conviction was so strong my wife and I put our house up for sale *before* we knew where we were going. I know, that sounds crazy—almost reckless. But we figured if God wanted us to do this, we should be ready so that when He said “go” we wouldn't be tied down by a home that needed to sell.

Then, when our house sold almost immediately, we found ourselves asking: “Now what?” So, we decided to rent while we waited on God.

I mean really, how long could He possibly take to give us an answer?

All of these prayers and changes were happening coincidentally—perhaps divinely—as I was about to make one of the biggest decisions of my life. I had received a call to serve as a lay pastor at a church in Los Angeles. While it was completely unexpected, it wasn't all that surprising when you consider that I first felt the call to pastoral ministry when I was just 6 years old. But somewhere during my high school/teen years, I decided to run away from that call. As I got older, I found myself running faster and farther away.

Now, some 40+ years later I faced the fact that I can't outrun God's convictions. That voice was still there—stronger than ever.

So, I continued to do a lot of praying. But, if I were to be perfectly honest, I think my decision to pray was not as noble or admirable as it may sound. The same reasons I ran away from God's call for so many years were still driving my decisions. Rather than humbly surrendering, my prayers felt more like a wrestling match with God about giving up what I had worked so hard to attain.

My accomplishments were modest, but in my own little world my life was coming together quite nicely. After about eight years as a television news reporter, I transitioned to healthcare

communication and marketing—quickly moving up the management ladder, initially in a hospital setting. University of Southern California (USC) then recruited me to lead a significant marketing assignment as its executive director. Eventually I landed at Loma Linda University Health, where I served as assistant vice president of public affairs for the system of schools, hospitals and physician group.

That's where I was when I came to a crossroads. I had to figure out whether I should keep going—stay on a successful career path. Or, should I and my family take a sharp turn—start a new path that includes ministry?

All the rational arguments in my head were loud and compelling: *Be practical. You've worked hard. It'd be a waste to change now. Besides, you can do ministry when you retire.*

But that other voice in my head and heart—more of a quiet whisper, really—was equally strong: *You've been running away for too long. Isn't it about time? If you're going to do this, you've got to do it while you have some years left in you if you're going to make a meaningful impact.*

I discovered that these thoughts were swirling around in my head, kicking up so much dust that I could no longer see clearly anymore. At that point, God directed me to a book that cut straight through the cloud of confusion. This book used sports as an analogy to point out that most of us spend the first half of our lives seeking success. But by the time we reach our second half, many of us begin to desire significance over success.

Yeah, that's me!

I found out I had entered my life's halftime, which happens to be the exact title of the book—“Halftime.”

The book suggested that many people panic during this stage of life, which often leads to poor choices in the form of some sort of a mid-life crisis. But with careful planning and strategizing, combined with prayer and dependence on God, this book suggested that we can be very intentional during our halftime for an exciting and truly meaningful second half of our lives.

So, I found myself still at a crossroads, but now I was able to see clearly the names of the two roads in front of me: Success and Significance.

I decided it was time to change course.

I accepted the pastoral call. To make room in my life, I made some adjustments in my professional life by switching to a less demanding position. It was initially tough on my ego and my pocketbook, but God pulled me through by showing me an even more clear path toward my second half.

The reality is that this book, these prayers, these plans all took about three years to sort through. But during that time I never stopped praying about our initial question: where should my family

and I live? In fact, I prayed every single day about it. In retrospect, I realize that God wanted to work on a few things in my life before answering our prayer.

It was after I had surrendered it all to Him—three long years later—very suddenly multiple signs clearly pointed to Michigan, including a job offer from Andrews University. As a California guy, I have to admit that I asked God—even as we were driving out here—*Michigan? Are you sure, God?*

But after being here for nearly two years now, God is faithfully showing me significant reasons why we are here. Our children are thriving at Ruth Murdoch Elementary School and Andrews Academy and immersing themselves in the community.

As for my path from success to significance, I have the privilege of serving as an associate vice president, chief marketing officer and world changer at Andrews University. I also have the blessing of serving as the pastor of Living Springs Fellowship, the English-speaking congregation at Andrews Korean SDA Church. Because the group is almost entirely college students, my job at Andrews University is the perfect complement. And I even have the convenience of walking from my office to the classroom to pursue my MDiv at the Seminary. Now, my entire life is my ministry.

As I reflect on all these prayers and decisions inspired by God, I realize that I couldn't have planned it better myself. Good thing I didn't have to.

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).



Tony Yang