



Condensed Milk

Theme - Reasons for Denied Prayers

An Introduction to Reasons for Denied Prayers

One of the greatest disappointments Christians experience with God is the experience of unanswered, or denied, prayers. We ask for something that seems legitimate, perhaps urgent, but the worst happens anyway. He does not intervene. Our longing goes unfulfilled and he seems silent and distant.

What makes the disappointment greater is that it seems to fly in the face of Jesus' promises that if we ask, we will receive. This repeated promise seems simple and generous. For example, Jesus said, "*Whatever* you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son," (John 14:13). And again, "Therefore I tell you, *whatever* you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24). This promise is breath-taking. The One who made everything, who governs everything, who can do anything, promises to give me *whatever* I ask for! But it doesn't take long in our experience to realize that we are not, in fact, getting what we ask for. Not only do we not get "*whatever*," we don't even get what's important.

There are reasons for denied prayers -- eight that I can find. In this series of devotionals, we will explore five reasons in us for denied prayers and three that are found in God. We can do something to remove the obstacles that are in us. And we can learn to trust God and be at peace when the obstacle is in God himself. Before we explore those topics let's consider one encouragement and one basic principle that undergirds everything.

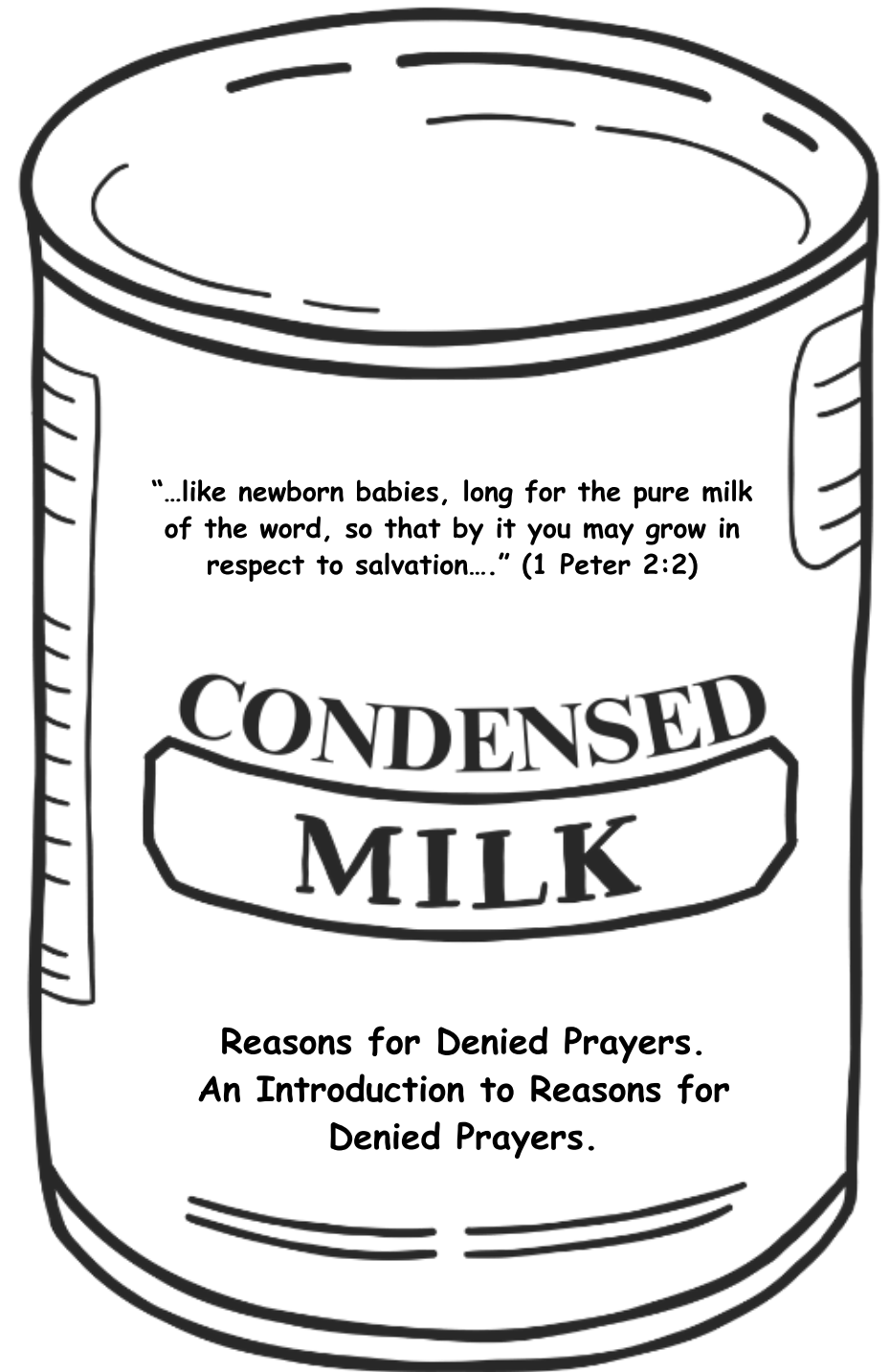
The encouragement is an obvious one. Jesus repeats the promise of answered prayers so frequently it is very, very obvious that he wants us to experience answers to prayer. He wants us to ask and receive so that our joy will be full (John 16:24). He's on our side in this. He's rooting for us. That's why he repeats himself, saying, for example, "Again, *truly* (the word makes what follows emphatic) I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:19). And, again, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer" (Matthew 21:22). Jesus wants you to experience wonderful, joy-giving, answers to prayer. You can experience this.

That is the encouragement and this is the basic principle: Prayer is not magic.

Magic might be defined as the ability to cause spiritual powers to do our will by means of words and/or rituals. Unfortunately, many people treat prayer that way. They think that prayer is bending God's will to ours. And so, for example, some have the idea that if enough of us pray long enough and hard enough "God will just have to do something." Or they look at faith as a tool they can simply muster up by the force of their wills and then God must act on their behalf. Faith, however, is a grace from God. It is not merely something we psyche up. And fortunately, our prayers will never force God to do what he is not otherwise willing to do. More crassly, some think that if they say enough "Our Fathers" or if they simply add the words, "in Jesus' name" God will have to do what they want. Praying in Jesus' name is to pray something that is consistent with his name, with who he is. It is not simply three words we add to our petition to secure God's "yes".

Through prayer our hearts and minds come into alignment with God and his will, as the themes of the Lord's Prayer indicate. In other words, those who receive answers to prayer most often are those who have learned to walk in step with God, and whose desires have matured enough to be in alignment with what God is willing to do. And he is willing to do a lot.

This means something important. God wants us to receive answers to our prayers. But in order for this to happen we must be people who are learning to walk humbly, obediently, and earnestly with God. God will not cheapen himself. He is God and he demands all of us if we are to have all of him.



"...like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation...." (1 Peter 2:2)

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