



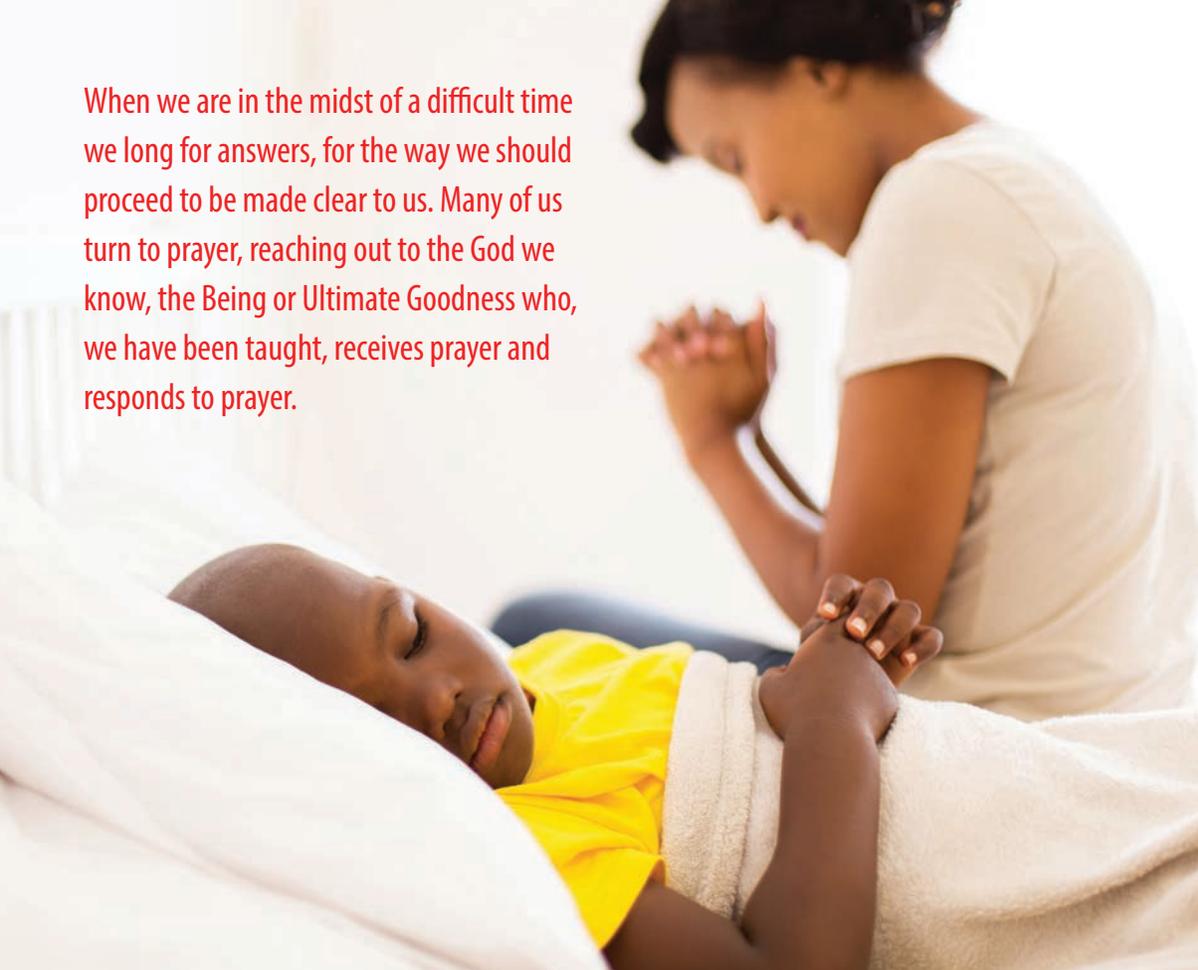
Children's National™

Chaplaincy Services

When Prayers Go Unanswered



When we are in the midst of a difficult time we long for answers, for the way we should proceed to be made clear to us. Many of us turn to prayer, reaching out to the God we know, the Being or Ultimate Goodness who, we have been taught, receives prayer and responds to prayer.



And yet, it seems that there are many times when our prayers are not heard, when our course continues to be shadowy, and we feel alone and bereft.

What do we do when we pray for healing for ourselves or someone we love and no healing comes? How do we continue to trust when we ask for a miracle, but the miracle for which we ask does not appear? Where do we go for the strength to get through one more moment when all we've prayed for is strength, yet we continue to feel weak and helpless? And how do we live with hopefulness, if the One in whom we hope ignores us?

Ordinary, everyday people of faith, and great theologians have puzzled over the ways to understand the "silence of God" for generations. All of our explanations may be right – or wrong. What matters is to find the one explanation that gives you peace and holds you in relationship to your God.

Is God **mute**?



Is God mute, or is it that I cannot quiet my own voice so that I can hear God's? You might try a breath prayer: sit still, close your eyes, pay attention to your breathing, try to clear your mind. As distractions come, acknowledge them and purposefully set them aside for later. Let your heart be open to receive whatever God may send.

When I pray for healing, how open am I to God's healing and not just the healing I want? Consider the ways you are already whole and good and blessed. Look for the ways God is changing you, strengthening you, which are expressions of health.

Most major faith communities have a concept of miracle, of the in-breaking

of God's power to make things right. When I want a miracle, however, it is that specific miracle that I believe is right, is fair and just. It is so hard to leave the decision about what sort of miracle is needed up to God.

Years ago there was a movie called Bruce Almighty in which God goes on vacation and leaves God's work up

to Bruce (who has been complaining that God doesn't do a very good job!). Bruce decides to receive all prayers as email, and when he sees the billions of prayers in his inbox he is overwhelmed and chooses to "reply all" – YES. And the whole world goes haywire. Unfortunately, people pray for mutually exclusive things. It's God's job to figure out how to care for each one of us, and all of us, in the best possible way.

One of the most distressing prayer experiences for us is when we pray for wisdom to make good decisions, for strength to do a good thing - to endure a hard thing, for faith to trust in God, and then our decisions feel wrong or lead to consequences we wanted to avoid; or we continue to feel helpless and hopeless.

There is not an easy response. This is often a lonely and bitter experience.

Most of us have lived it.

In the Christian Scripture there is a story of Jesus' disciples crossing a stormy body of water in a small boat. They see Jesus walking toward them on the water, but he passes them by and goes on toward the land. They must have been devastated! And frightened! But could it be that Jesus knew they were going to be all right, that they had the wisdom, the skill, the faith that was needed – and trusted them?

Some of our most important prayers are the simplest: "God – I can't do this alone. I need you." "Help." "Thank you." And some of them are for the specific needs of this moment – a day with less pain, an hour of patience, a lower vent setting...

If you feel prayer-less, ask for a chaplain to talk with, pray with.

Most chaplains have struggles with the same questions/feelings you have. Together, sometimes prayer is louder, silence is deeper, God is nearer.





**For more information, contact your chaplains
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