



BRASS HEAVENS

Cruciform Press

REASONS FOR UNANSWERED PRAYER

Paul Tautges

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Cruciform Press | January, 2013

For Karen,
the most loving, supportive, and patient wife
any husband could ever hope to receive
from the Lord.

“Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
‘Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.’”

(Proverbs 31:28-29)

- Paul Tautges

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“Some things in the Scriptures are conveniently ignored—such as the reality that there might be things in our lives that would cause a breakdown in our prayers being heard and answered by God. But this book will not let us continue to bury Scripture’s clear teaching, or continue to ignore the ongoing rebellions, unrelinquished resentments, and unconfessed sins in our lives that may be hindering our prayers.”

Nancy Guthrie, author, *Seeing Jesus in the Old Testament* series

“Few things vex the Christian more than unanswered prayer. Paul Tautges scatters the darkness of our doubts with six reasons for unanswered prayer. He blends biblical teaching with many practical illustrations to challenge and comfort us when the heavens seem as brass. Read this to revive your prayers, to melt the heavens, and to increase your answers.”

David Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Paul Tautges has a lucid and practical style that helps the believer to deal thoughtfully with his prayer life. Both motivating and convicting, here is a very useful and biblical probe for examining and excising those sins that are hindrances to believing prayer. Read and obey for the sake of your future, your family, and the work of God in the world.”

Jim Elliff, founder, Christian Communicators Worldwide

“In *Brass Heavens*, pastor-shepherd-author Paul Tautges addresses the age-old question: Why do some prayers go unanswered? Wisely, Pastor Tautges grounds his answer in the character of our Triune God whose very nature is to share generously his good gifts. Tautges builds a biblical structure upon that foundation, explaining scriptural reasons for unanswered prayer. Some of these are not easy to hear—because they call us to accountability—but all are important to understand. Like the Scriptures, Tautges does not leave us in the pit of despair, but shows that where sin abounds, grace superabounds—there are biblical pathways for dealing with

our role in unanswered prayers and for responding humbly to God's affectionate sovereignty in response to our prayers."

Dr. Bob Kellemen, Exec. Dir., Biblical Counseling Coalition

"One of the most painful things about the Christian life is waiting. What do we do while anguish piles up and God remains silent to our prayers? We don't need platitudes or shrugs of theological ignorance. When we walk in darkness we need to cling to our God. Paul Tautges searches the Scriptures to unveil the character and purposes of the God who is always drawing the praying Christian deeper into faith and repentance. This book shows that unanswered prayer is an opportunity for rich spiritual growth—even when the heavens are as brass."

Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

"For over two decades I have been blessed to have Paul Tautges as my friend. His love for and dependency upon the Word of God, and his confessional way of applying its principles to the present realities of life, have given countless people encouragement and help. In my own life, I have come to the conclusion that the greatest work we do is on our knees. This book gives us practical ways of understanding and working through the things that hinder that indispensable work. You will be blessed as you read."

Dr. Matt Olson, President, Northland International University

"Paul Tautges opens our eyes to the mystery of talking and listening to God as he clearly communicates the reason God hears our prayers—and the reason(s) he is (or seems) silent. This short book is deeply saturated with Bible, gospel, and graceful application. It serves as a wonderful 'hearing-aid' of clarity, hope and understanding for all who have encountered brass heavens in the silence of God and have wondered, 'Is God listening?'"

Greg Lucas, author, *Wrestling With an Angel: A Story of Love, Disability, and the Lessons of Grace*

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INTRODUCTION

Right or wrong, God-centered or self-centered, there are many reasons we pray. Some pray because we view it as a means of relieving guilty feelings, or as a mystical pathway to inner peace. Others pray out of religious duty, believing that the quantity or quality of our prayers will earn God's favor and thus the attention of his ear. Still others pray from godly motives, as the fruit of a living relationship with God.

But there is another, more foundational reason we pray. We desire to be heard.

This is part of our make-up, part of our design as relational beings made in the image of God. We talk to other people because we want them to actually listen to us; we dare to open our hearts in the hope that our deepest thoughts might be verbalized, heard, and understood. The longing is so persistent that we keep trying, even when others repeatedly fail to listen.

So it is with prayer. We cry out to God because we expect him to listen. At least, we hope he will.

Sometimes our faith is feeble, and all we can scrape up is a thin hope that God *might* listen. Like the writers of certain Psalms; we cry out to God with more desperation

than expectation. “Hear a just cause, O LORD; attend to my cry! Give ear to my prayer” (Psalm 17:1). “Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy! Attend to me, and answer me” (Psalm 55:1-2). The psalmist, distressed at the prospect of God’s absence, begs him to be present, attentive, and responsive. A shred of faith keeps him praying, but deep down he fears that God will not hear him—perhaps even that God cannot hear him.

The Sound of Rain

Deafness is a trial our family knows something about. Four of our ten children are hearing-impaired. For three of them the impairment was diagnosed within a few weeks after birth. But for our first son, born before the advent of mandatory newborn screening, a medical diagnosis took more than two years. Well before then, as his parents, we knew he could not hear, and it deeply pained us. But when countless tests failed to uncover a cause for the impairment, our pain grew worse. Without an obvious medical condition there was nothing to treat, and some professionals even doubted our son was actually deaf. We wanted to do everything in our power to help our son—to make it possible for him to hear the Word of God and succeed in a hearing world, but what more could we do to make the professionals understand?

Finally, the providential hand of God led us to an audiologist who diagnosed our son’s sensorineural hearing loss, producing our first real glimmer of medical hope. Having identified a cause there was now a blessed solution in view. Our son needed hearing aids.

It sounds simple enough but our meager medical coverage, combined with my status then as a full-time college student and part-time hardware store manager, put the expense well out of our reach. But God is faithful even when we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13). Graciously, our heavenly Father provided for that first pair of hearing aids through the generous giving of the fellow believers at our local church. Our two-year old son was fitted for his first ear molds within a month.

We will never forget those early days when our son began to hear.

On the way home from the audiologist's office, our son's first pair of aids resting nicely on his ears, we stopped at a humongous toy store to get him something to help celebrate this moment. We walked across the parking lot through a gentle but steady rain, entered the store, and sat our son in a shopping cart as an aid to regulating his zeal. My wife and I didn't even notice the sound of rain on the metal roof.

Our son did. As we walked up one aisle and down another, it was almost as if there were no toys on the shelves clamoring for his attention. From his perch in the shopping cart, he kept looking at the ceiling, then at me, then back at the ceiling. Finally I got it. I had been completely missing the sign language that so obviously said, "Dad, what is that amazing *noise*?"

A few days later my wife watched our little guy walk around the kitchen, clearly on some kind of mission. He went from cabinet to cabinet, to the dishwasher, to the stove, stopping briefly to touch each one, wait a moment,

and move on. Finally, his face glowing with satisfaction, his hands found the source of the faint hum he could hear but hadn't been able to locate. The vibration of the refrigerator. Our son could hear!

The Heavens as Brass

Sometimes we're tempted to wonder if God can hear. After months or even years of praying over a particular person or situation, we look for evidence God is getting our message or even paying attention, and we can't find much. Why is that? Why do the heavens sometimes seem like brass? Doesn't God love us and care for us? Isn't he all-powerful?

The phrase *brass heavens* has its origins in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. It was part of God's warning to his chosen people Israel, a promised consequence of neglecting to obey his commands. As the nation prepared to enter the Promised Land, we find this among the curses for disobedience given by Moses: "And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron" (Deuteronomy 28:23; KJV). Most recent translations use "bronze" instead of "brass," but the meaning is the same.

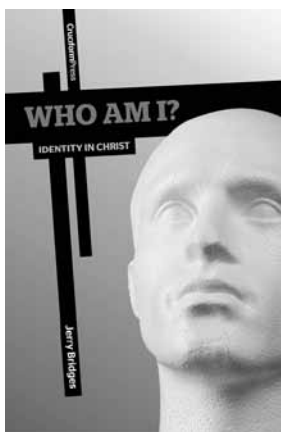
Admittedly, this verse in its context has nothing to do with prayer. Rather, it is a warning from God that periods of drought would be one of the many consequences of Israel's rebellion. The skies would appear promising, but the heavy layer of clouds would bring forth no rain. As a result, the ground would dry up and become like iron, impossible to cultivate. For a society that survived largely by agriculture, this was nothing short of a disaster.

So while the verse is not about prayer, *brass heavens* nevertheless became a common expression among Christians because it describes so well the silence of God—the drought of unanswered prayer and the famine-like spiritual unfruitfulness that believers sometimes experience. Like the people who originally adapted the phrase, I'm just using it in this book as an analogy.

The subtitle of this book reveals its larger purpose. We want to search the Scriptures for some of the reasons God appears to go silent. As we examine some causes of unanswered prayer, we will also discover the biblical means by which we may open God's ears to our voice once again.

God has a good and holy purpose for these periods of silence. He wants to test our faith that we might see for ourselves just how weak and dependent we are on him for all good things. His goal is nothing less than to heighten our spiritual sensitivities in order to draw us into more intimate fellowship and faithful obedience with him.

Prayer goes unanswered because God knows our needs far better than we understand our desires. So it is only appropriate that we spend the first two chapters of *Brass Heavens* thinking about the nature of this God to whom we pray.



Who Am I? Identity in Christ

by Jerry Bridges

Jerry Bridges unpacks Scripture to give the Christian eight clear, simple, interlocking answers to one of the most essential questions of life.

“Jerry Bridges’ gift for simple but deep spiritual communication is fully displayed in this warm-hearted, biblical spelling out of the Christian’s true identity in Christ.”

J.I. Packer, Theological Editor, ESV Study Bible; author, Knowing God, A Quest for Godliness, Concise Theology

“I know of no one better prepared than Jerry Bridges to write *Who Am I?* He is a man who knows who he is in Christ and he helps us to see succinctly and clearly who we are to be. Thank you for another gift to the Church of your wisdom and insight in this book.”

R.C. Sproul, founder, chairman, president, Ligonier Ministries; executive editor, Tabletalk magazine; general editor, The Reformation Study Bible

“*Who Am I?* answers one of the most pressing questions of our time in clear gospel categories straight from the Bible. This little book is a great resource to ground new believers and remind all of us of what God has made us through faith in Jesus. Thank the Lord for Jerry Bridges, who continues to provide the warm, clear, and biblically balanced teaching that has made him so beloved to this generation of Christians.”

Richard D. Phillips, Senior Minister, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC



JOY!

A Bible Study on Philippians for Women

by Keri Folmar

One of the few truly inductive Bible studies intended for use by women.

“This study points the way into the biblical text, offering a clear and effective guide in studying Paul’s letter to the Philippian church. Keri Folmar encourages her readers first and foremost to listen well to God’s inspired Word.”

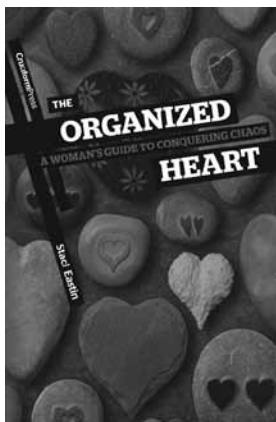
Kathleen Nielson, author of the Living Word Bible Studies; Director of Women’s Initiatives, The Gospel Coalition

“Keri’s Bible study will not only bring the truths of Philippians to bear upon your life, but will also train you up for better, more effective study of any book of the Bible with her consistent use of the three questions needed in all good Bible study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application.”

Connie Dever, author of The Praise Factory children’s ministry curriculum and wife of Pastor Mark Dever, President of 9 Marks Ministries

“Keri lets the Scriptures do the talking! No cleverly invented stories, ancillary anecdotes, or emotional manipulation here. Keri takes us deeper into the text, deeper into the heart of Paul, deeper into the mind of Christ, and deeper into our own hearts as we pursue Christ for joy in all things. I highly commend this study for your pursuit of joy.”

Kristie Anyabwile is a graduate of NC State University and wife of Thabiti, a Gospel Coalition Council Member



The Organized Heart A Woman's Guide to Conquering Chaos

by Staci Eastin

Disorganized?

You don't need more rules, the latest technique, or a new gadget.

This book will show you a different, better way. A way grounded in the grace of God.

"Staci Eastin packs a gracious punch, full of insights about our disorganized hearts and lives, immediately followed by the balm of gospel-shaped hopes. This book is ideal for accountability partners and small groups."

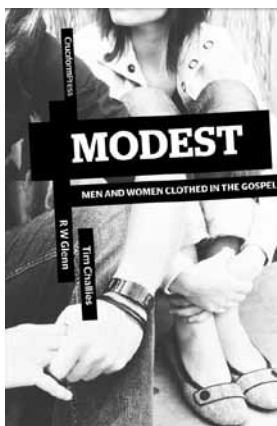
Carolyn McCulley, blogger, filmmaker, author of Radical Womanhood and Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye?

"Unless we understand the spiritual dimension of productivity, our techniques will ultimately backfire. Find that dimension here. Encouraging and uplifting rather than guilt-driven, this book can help women who want to be more organized but know that adding a new method is not enough."

Matt Perman, Director of Strategy at Desiring God, blogger, author of the forthcoming book, What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done

"Organizing a home can be an insurmountable challenge for a woman. The Organized Heart makes a unique connection between idols of the heart and the ability to run a well-managed home. This is not a how-to. Eastin looks at sin as the root problem of disorganization. She offers a fresh new approach and one I recommend, especially to those of us who have tried all the other self-help models and failed."

Aileen Challies, mom of three, and wife of blogger, author, and pastor Tim Challies



Modest

Men and Women Clothed in the Gospel

by R W Glenn, Tim Challies

Modesty is about freedom, not rules.

What you say or do or wear is not really the point. The point is your heart.

True modesty flows from a solid grasp of the gospel.

“It is so refreshing to have a book on modesty that is a useful resource and not a legalistic, culture-bound list that leaves you a bit paranoid and guilty. No, this book is different. Its counsel on modesty is not rooted in rules, but in the grace of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That grace alone is able to get at the heart of the problem of modesty, which is the heart. In a culture where immodesty is the accepted norm, Glenn and Challies have given us help that every Christian desperately needs.”

Paul Tripp, pastor, conference speaker, and author

“How short is too short? How tight is too tight? Glenn and Challies don’t say. But they do provide a thoughtful framework to help us come to a grace-based, gospel-grounded understanding of modesty that extends beyond mere clothing. They uphold a vision for modesty that’s both beautiful and desirable – and not only for gals, but for guys too! This book is a great tool to help you wrestle with the practical question of what and what not to wear.”

Mary A. Kassian, Author, Girls Gone Wise

“The authors of Modest break new ground in their treatment of this difficult subject. It is a healthy antidote to the prevailing views, which tend toward either legalism or antinomianism, by grounding the whole subject in the gospel. I heartily recommend this book.”

Jerry Bridges, Author, The Pursuit of Holiness