



GOSPEL *for* LIFE

Taking No for an Answer with Blake Long Season 4, Episode 6 Transcript

[00:00:01.850] - Announcer

Welcome to the Gospel For Life podcast. We help churches make disciples. And now here's your host, Darryl Dash.

Darryl Dash

Welcome back to the Gospel for Life podcast.

Everyone I know is struggling goals with prayer, and what's even harder is when you feel like your prayers aren't being answered.

And that's why I'm glad to talk to a previous guest that we've had on here. His name is Blake Long and he's written a new book called Taking No for an Answer. And Blake wants to help us learn how to respond when God says no to our prayers. Blake is a blogger and we're going to include the link to his blog in the show notes, and he likes to show how theology impacts our everyday lives. And he's married to Shale, who is a special ed teacher, and they have two daughters with fascinating names.

Maybe we'll begin there. And also a dog. Is your dog new, Blake, since the last time we talked?

[00:01:11.830] - Blake Long

No, we have them basically since we got married in 2017.

[00:01:16.160] - Darryl Dash

Well, we're going to get into that as well. They are members of Sovereign Grace Bible Church in Oklahoma and he is a small group leader.

So, Blake, so good to have you back on the podcast.

[00:01:26.670] - Blake Long

Yeah, I appreciate you having me on.

[00:01:28.330] - Darryl Dash

So what is it with you and fascinating names? Your daughters have names that have stories to them and your dog has a fascinating name.

[00:01:35.330] - Blake Long

A little bit. So the first one, Jovi, she's our oldest, she's three and a half. She was informally named after Bon Jovi. I guess John Bon Jovi is the guy's, the real name, not the band. But my wife has always been an 80s music person, even though she was not born in the 80s. So the only reason I applied is because I thought the name was cute by itself, so I said, okay.

And then our second one, she is a year, almost a year and a half. Her name is Piper Joy. She was informally named after John Piper. And then I always talk about how we put in Joy as a middle name as a little nod to Christian hedonism as well. And then Dundie is named after the office. So for any office fans, they have the Dundie Awards. That's where it's from. Any time somebody asks me, is it named after Crocodile Dundee? I always scoff.

[00:02:33.150] - Darryl Dash

That's great. I wonder when, baby. One day you'll get to meet John Piper and tell him that you named your daughter after him and then ask if he knows Bon Jovi, too.

[00:02:43.590] - Blake Long

Yeah, I mentioned it to him on Twitter, but I don't know why he didn't respond.

[00:02:47.850] - Darryl Dash

I don't know either. That's good.

Well, thank you for your new book on prayer, and I was glad to read it and glad to endorse it, and I think everybody struggles with prayer at times. I don't know, I think it was Lloyd Jones that says that everything in the Christian life is easier than prayer. And that made me feel good when Lloyd Jones said it, because if he could say that, then we're not alone. So you have some experiences with unanswered prayer. Could you tell us how that led to you thinking about this topic?

[00:03:20.800] - Blake Long

So the book starts out with two stories. I know from our previous book, one of the things I disliked about it was that it wasn't that personal. And so I really wanted to make the second one pretty personal. So in the introduction, I started out with two stories. The first one, our first pregnancy, which was in I don't know when that was. It's been a while back, but the first pregnancy, she was six weeks along, my wife. And we went to our local medical center for the first ultrasound, pulled up to parking spot, prayed, let this baby be healthy, but even if it's not, your will be done. And so, long story short is we couldn't find any baby in the ultrasound. And then they finally told us that it's either a fell pregnancy or she's just not as far along. We got a second opinion the next day, I think, from a different doctor who basically said she had a blighted ovum. So I was prepared to hear that she had a miscarriage, which this is a form of miscarriage still. There was never a baby, so it was kind of hard to wrap our minds around.

It wasn't as if a baby had been conceived and then passed away. There never was a baby. And so the first thing I thought of was the times where I would talk to her belly as if I was talking to the child, and there was no child there of her. So it's kind of a hard thing to wrap my mind around. And then at the end, we were talking about it and more through it, and I thought I specifically asked God to make this baby healthy, so and so

forth, and he said no, and that's okay. And that's why I wrote the book and want readers to say that's okay too.

And then the other stories with our youngest, Piper, when she was in October. So a month and a half, almost two months old, she started vomiting in daycare one day, went to the hospital. Long story short, we had a ten day stint in the hospital because she had a UTI, but the UTI was caused by E. Coli. Somehow she contracted that. And so we had to stay at the hospital for ten days for the antibiotics to take its course. And she's fine and healthy, and we just put her to bed 20 minutes ago, and she's just a crazy little girl, but it was a rough ten days.

It's not the worst thing anybody has ever gone through. So we don't pretend to think it's the worst trial in the world, but it was certainly a trial for us, and it certainly grows closer to the Lord in the process and kind of shapes the way we view unanswered prayer in the process.

[00:06:08.550] - Darryl Dash

I remember years ago wrestling with the question of we're commanded to pray. We're told that our prayers actually accomplish something. And yet I guess we're left with the question of what do our prayers actually do? If God doesn't answer our prayers, what are they good for? Are we actually changing something in how things would unfold? Or is it just an exercise to shape our hearts? And God's already decided what he's going to do, so help us understand that, solve it for us.

[00:06:39.280] - Blake Long

You take this very deep here.

Well, it's kind of a both and situation. I mean, at least in the book, I try to help people understand that God is sovereign and we believe that he has ordained all things and so he's in control. It's not as if our prayer will change his will or his sovereign will, so to speak, but he certainly uses prayer as a means as accomplishing his will. So that's the number one reason as to why we should pray, but also as a thing we don't really think about is God uses our prayers, even unanswered prayer, to mold us more and more

into the image of His Son. And that's really the message I try to hit home at the end of this book of unanswered prayer. In the end, though dreadful it might be, is used by God to make us more like a Son.

[00:07:41.090] - Darryl Dash

We like to think of God as being you say this in the book. We think of God sometimes as being a cosmic butler, like we need something and so put in your order with God. We don't believe a lot of us in prosperity theology, and yet, as you say in your book, we do have kind of a version of prosperity theology, at least functionally. Why is it actually good news that God doesn't always answer our prayers the way that we would like him to?

[00:08:08.440] - Blake Long

Yeah. So the reason why it's good news is that God does not always answer our prayers the way we want them to is honestly, it kind of comes down to, like, if we could see the future, we'd understand. Because there are many times, certainly in my life, where I've prayed for something and thought it was good and right that in the end, like, sitting here now, looking back, it would have been a complete disaster. And so it comes back to knowing and believing God's will for our life is much better than ours. And though unanswered prayer is hard to deal with sometimes, we at least will know that it's for our own good.

[00:08:52.650] - Darryl Dash

Sometimes we pray for things for a long time. I know I've been praying for the salvation of somebody that I love dearly, and there's just no evidence that God is answering that prayer at all. And yet we're committed to pray with patience and persistence. How could we do that? Because I talk to people, they're so discouraged. Maybe they've been praying for something for years and there seems to be no evidence that God is answering that prayer. So what encouragement would you give somebody like me or them who's struggling to be patient, persistent in prayer?

[00:09:24.910] - Blake Long

Yeah, myself, coming from a person who is perhaps the most impatient person in the universe, the remedy to that may sound cliché, but you just keep praying. You pray. It kind of comes back to the Spirit groans for us. I mean, just keep praying even when you don't feel like it, even when you think there's no hope, keep praying. Because in the end, it kind of comes down to believing God's promises.

Now, here's the thing. It is true that if we continue to pray for the salvation of a loved one, for example, he may still not save that person. And that comes down to us believing his will is good and right. So that's one aspect of this is that you could pray your whole life for that and he just not answer it and it'd be okay. But for those struggling with it and being discouraged by the lack of an answer, it's good and holy. And even in that unique prayer, he may not save that person in the end, but he's still making you more like Christ in the process.

[00:10:39.390] - Darryl Dash

I can hear somebody, if I were preaching this, saying, that's not what I want. That seems like second prize, right? My maturity seems like second prize to actually God answering prayer and giving me what I want. So paint a picture to me why that's actually not second prize. Obviously, God sees that as more valuable than necessarily dispensing whatever it is we want. So why do we tend to think it's like, man, that's a consolation prize?

[00:11:06.370] - Blake Long

I don't know. I mean, you can take it back to just our own sinfulness and thinking the world revolves around ourselves because even as Christians, even those as being bought by Christ, we still will struggle with that daily. So that's certainly a part of it, of being wrapped up in ourselves. And even as Christians still, it's kind of like we're Christian and we want certain things to happen before we pass. It's kind of the same thing with that is we want to do certain things before we pass away. So it's like hope the Lord doesn't come already, which is kind of a silly thought and comes back to understanding what God's ultimate good is for us.

We read the passage in Romans 8:28 and 29. He's working all things for good, for his glory and our good. Our good or that good is our sanctification. So we have to remember that ultimately this good is working to make me more like Jesus and one day I'm going to have a glorified body.

[00:12:11.370] - Darryl Dash

That's good. We have access to the God of the universe. And we're told in Scripture over and over that God cares for us. So when we take our birth, even our silly stuff to God, God actually cares for us. And yet a lot of us just feel like prayer is I don't know, it feels like we're speaking to ourselves sometimes or that our prayers are bouncing off the ceiling. Why is it so hard to actually believe what we know is true about prayer? Why is it that we seem to struggle and kind of muddle our way through prayer?

[00:12:47.870] - Blake Long

You're asking really good questions.

There's a lot of answers to that. Part of it is the struggle with sin that we still face daily. That's a big part of it. Because sometimes if we are in sin, don't realize it, that can certainly hinder our prayers. We're told that very clearly in James. I think I'll tell the listener what I do because as I've prayed the past year, whether formal or informal, I really have to sit here because I get distracted. I think everybody does. You start praying, then it's just like your left and right things are distracting. I have to sit there and intentionally think about the fact that God is listening to me. And I know for a lot of people, I've never really struggle all that much with believing it. I believe he hears it. I struggle so much with kind of what you said at first. I'm not being intentional about it. And so I think a big help would be for people to be very intentional when you pray. So when you start to pray, be intentional about God not only hearing your prayer, not only listening to your prayer, you've got his full attention.

He's wanting to hear you pray and also bring in the fact that the Spirit is interceding for you and that the Spirit is helping you with groanings. And so it really comes down to being very intentional in your prayer life.

[00:14:27.190] - Darryl Dash

I remember one time hearing somebody talk about the importance of prayer, and he was right. And at the end of it, though, we were all feeling guilty. And then he said, you need to pray, but you need to also remember that when we are prayerless, that we have a Savior who's an intercessor, who's praying for us. And, yeah, I really love that. I was actually motivating to my prayer life to realize it's not all up to be like, I've got to pray, but even when I'm prayerless, there's still prayers being offered for me. And somehow that really helped me.

I wanted to ask you. Jesus seems to give so many lavish promises about prayer. Reading the gospels, it's almost like Jesus writes a blank check, right, that if we pray, we keep asking, seeking, knocking that the door will be opened. If if Jesus didn't say it, I would be like, man, that just seems like it's too good to be true.

How do we actually reconcile the reality of unanswered prayer with some of the statements where Jesus seems to write almost a blank check in terms of if you pray it, your Father will give it to you.

[00:15:38.730] - Blake Long

Yeah, I can't think of the specific verses you're talking about, but I know what you're talking about. And it really comes down to understanding, understanding the context of those verses and knowing that it's not talking about if I pray for a Lamborghini in the name of Jesus, I'm going to get a Lamborghini or this promotion or whatever it is. He's not saying ask whatever you want in my name and I'm going to give it to you. It's in a form or in the context rather of a Father-son relationship. He's not saying I'm going to give you all that you want, but he's saying I'm going to give you what you need. There are going to be sometimes when we pray for something that we want and he answers it not necessarily with the exact thing that we want but with what we need.

And so I think that's certainly a part of that. It really comes down to understanding we're not always going to get what we want but we will always have what we need.

[00:16:43.390] - Darryl Dash

It's like you would be an irresponsible father if you gave your children always what they wanted right. And yet you give them what they need and your heart is actually for their good. You're not withholding things from them.

I would be intimidated writing a book about prayer.

[00:17:04.710] - Blake Long

Yes.

[00:17:05.560] - Darryl Dash

How have you grown in your prayer life as a result of writing this book?

[00:17:10.490] - Blake Long

Yeah, it was certainly humbling thing to write the book because I don't necessarily think I'm so qualified to write it, but it's certainly something God laid upon my heart and with my prayers. It kind of goes back to what I said earlier as I've finished writing the book and now that it's out, my prayer life has changed in their respective. Sometimes I get home and I realize that I have either prayed very little or not at all and of course conviction sets in which it really should but it comes down to what I talked about.

I'm intentional in my prayers, I'm intentional about as I am praying whatever it's about as I'm praying it. I'm also believing that very second, that very moment, our Heavenly Father is paying attention to what I'm saying and that the Son is interceding for my prayer at the right hand of God and that the Holy Spirit is within side me, helping me pray that even though sometimes my prayers sound all jumbled and rambled and just a crazy mess, he can certainly take those prayers and make them perfect on the way up. Somebody smarter than me said that.

I'm not sure who it is at the top of my head but somebody said he takes our imperfect prayers and makes them perfect. So it's changed my prayer life in the respect of when I do prayer, I'm much more intentional about what's happening because it's so easy for us

to just wait. And this is still a good thing because we're still praying, but it's so easy for us to just pray and talk kind of like we're talking to the air. But when we really pray and really believe and understand what's happening, that moment, it makes prayer that much more enjoyable.

[00:19:07.390] - Darryl Dash

Yeah. And it's a big difference, isn't it, to see prayer is a joy, not an obligation, but actually something we want to do that we'll never do it perfectly, we'll never want that perfectly, but where it actually becomes something that we look forward to doing.

[00:19:21.300] - Blake Long

Right.

[00:19:22.690] - Darryl Dash

Well, what advice would you give to somebody who is struggling in prayer and maybe discouraged that many of their prayers haven't been answered? What advice would you give them on how to build their prayer life?

[00:19:34.710] - Blake Long

The advice I would give is this for me, at least, what has really helped me is it comes down to knowing and believing my relationship with God. I try to hit this home in the book. I try to help people understand that our prayer lives. It's coming from our relationship as God's children, by sheer grace, just by sheer mercy.

And so we're a part of the family. We're not praying to get us favor. We're not praying to, you know, put on a performance, though, you know, there are sometimes we do we need we should repent of that, of course. But we're praying as his children to the Father, and it's such a privilege. And it's so enjoyable when we do that, when we understand what prayer is and who we're praying to and who is helping us. I think not only will it make our prayers more persistent and consistent as we're supposed to pray without ceasing, it certainly will make our prayers more enjoyable. And I think the Lord will bless

that. It's the same way where people struggle with the assurance of their salvation. Of course, we all struggle with the assurance that God really is hearing us.

And so I think that's going to help that and have us be more assured that when we pray, we're not just floating thoughts around in the air, but the Lord of the universe is listening to us.

[00:21:10.630] - Darryl Dash

Well, Blake, I want to ask you one more question about prayer before I ask you a couple of more personal questions to end. What is the prayer that God always answers?

[00:21:20.740] - Blake Long

There are many that he always answers, but the one I really want people to know is that God is always going to answer the prayer of you asking to become more like Jesus. And sometimes that is a scary prayer because more often than not, we become more like Jesus through suffering rather than life being easy. It's far easier for me to become more like Jesus through the trial we went through the blighted ovum than it is for me to become more like Jesus. When I'm healthy, I have a good job, my family is great, though, of course, he can sanctify us through that as well, but we certainly become more like Jesus through the avenue of suffering.

And so don't be afraid to pray that prayer. I know in theory, we all want to be more sanctified, as we should, but knowing that he uses trials and tribulations to make us more like a son, it can maybe make us feel like we don't want to pray that prayer. But in the end, we know that there is so much tremendous blessing that comes through suffering, and the biggest and ultimate blessing of that is becoming more like Jesus.

[00:22:36.690] - Darryl Dash

Amen. Amen. That's good. Well, let me ask you a couple of more personal questions as we end. What has God been teaching you lately?

[00:22:46.470] - Blake Long

God has been teaching me in two respects.

Number one is patience. Before we recorded this, I talked to you about how just yesterday this is still, of course, a little bit about the book, but it's certainly personal to my life that I was so impatient with the book to get released that things weren't going my way, and I was just getting pretty angry about the process. And I told my wife something that I did in regards to getting that book released, and she said, that's not very Christlike. And I said, yeah, you're right. And so he's certainly teaching me, revealing more about the sin of my own impatience. And it was certainly a wake up call that I'm a very natural, impatient person. And so he's certainly teaching me to just be content, be patient with when he wants to do things, even when it means the book is released a little later.

But then also, really, this is kind of more serious, but he's also teaching me about my own probably my own pride, because dealing a lot with having the book be self-published, and I have to check myself a lot in regards to how well I want the book to do and the numbers behind that.

And, you know, there's certain that's certainly okay to think about. You want your book to do well, but it's revealing the pride in my heart because ultimately there are times when I'm making it just about me and what I wrote, rather than I want God to be glorified in this, and I want his church to be edified. So it's it's a little humbling in that respect. So those are, of course, both connected with the book. But that's at least right at this moment, that's certainly what he's been teaching me.

[00:24:53.150] - Darryl Dash

It reminded me of George Whitfield, who said that he can't preach without sinning, he can't pray without sinning. Even his prayers need to be repented of, or I think it was his repenting needs to be repented of. So, yeah, it's convicting when even our desire to serve him can actually become about us.

Blake, what is encouraging you lately?

[00:25:13.190] - Blake Long

What has been encouraging to me lately is my local church. We've been a part of our local church, Sovereign Greece Bible Church, for six years, I believe six or seven. So, you know, for an average Christian going to church, that that's kind of a long time, because, you know, most people hop around a little bit here and there, and there have certainly been frustrating times because we aren't always going to see eye to eye on everything. But I'm encouraged to be part of this local fellowship because though they're not perfect, there is sound theology, there is passionate preaching and biblical preaching. And when you have to have it, there is church discipline. There is beautiful fellowship.

I mean, we always joke about the fact that we're Southern Baptist Church, although we are distinctly reformed, and most Southern Baptist churches, 12:00 hits and everybody's out the door. But at my church, you have to shoot people out. People stay in fellowship and talk with each other after every service for a very long time, an hour, hour and a half, and they just don't leave. We love each other. And so it's so encouraging to see that fellowship and just to know that we're plugged into a very healthy church.

[00:26:34.030] - Darryl Dash

I love that. I'm always encouraged when people say that they're being encouraged through the local church.

Well, Ben, I appreciate this book. It's such a timely topic. I don't think I've ever told you, but I was reading [A Praying Life](#) by Paul Miller that just ignited my prayer life and your book. I'm praying that it will do the same for many people, that it will just give them that boost they need to learn how to pray, to delight in prayer, and to see God at work, even when God doesn't seem to be answering prayer. So grateful for your ministry.

And how can people find out more about the book and more about you?

[00:27:09.440] - Blake Long

Yeah, so for the book, you can purchase it through Amazon. That's really the main avenue, I think, here. Within the next coming weeks or months or however long it takes.

It is usually available online at Barnes and Nobles. Other than that, if people don't want to purchase it through Amazon, they can purchase it directly through me. It just might take a little longer.

[00:27:32.750] - Darryl Dash

That's great. Well, good to talk to you, Blake, and I hope the book does well, and I hope you're encouraged in the work that God is doing through you. So thanks for talking to us tonight.

[00:27:41.500] - Blake Long

Yeah, thanks for having me.