

Lesson 8: (No) Answers to Prayer

Introduction We have already spent considerable time exploring the truth that God loves to hear and answer our prayers. What happens when we feel like God doesn't answer our prayers? What do we do when we feel like crying out, "God, do you even hear me at all?"

If we ever find ourselves in this situation, it is important to remember that God does hear our prayers. It is also important to remember that God is faithful and in control. Could it be that there are reasons why God does not answer our prayers, or at least doesn't answer them as quickly or in the way we think they should be answered? Let's find out!

1st Cause **God knows what is best for us more than we do.**

Sometimes we ask God for things, which aren't good for us, but we don't even realize it. Sometimes young men pray, "God, give me this girl! I know that she is the right one for me!" (Don't worry men, young women do the same thing.) In spite of what our emotions tell us, God knows better than us if he/she is the "right one". God knows the future and whether this relationship has the potential to be a happy marriage or not. If He knows it won't, what should He do? Should He fulfill the prayer request or, in His wisdom and goodness, not answer the prayer? In light of this truth, which would you want Him to do? The answer is obvious!

Good parents do exactly the same thing. When children ask and beg for something that is clearly not good for them, the parents don't give it to them, no matter how much the children nag for it. Faith means that we bring our requests to God and trust that He will answer them according to His good will. This is the kind of faith we need when our desires don't coincide with His. We must be ready to accept God's will, trusting that He knows what is best. Faith doesn't mean that we adjust God's will to ours, but rather we adjust our will to His. The first would be presumption, not faith.

In the Bible we find many examples of God answering prayers differently than what the people wished. The best examples for this are Jesus and Paul. Write down what they asked God for, how God answered their prayers, and how they responded.



Matthew 26:39,40,42-44: _____

2 Corinthians 12:7-10: _____

Quote #1

“When we do not receive the very things we asked for, at the time we ask, we are still to believe that the Lord hears and that He will answer our prayers. We are so erring and short-sighted that we sometimes ask for things that would not be a blessing to us, and our heavenly Father in love answers our prayers by giving us that which will be for our highest good—that which we ourselves would desire if with vision divinely enlightened we could see all things as they really are. When our prayers seem not to be answered, we are to cling to the promise; for the time of answering will surely come, and we shall receive the blessing we need most. But to claim that prayer will always be answered in the very way and for the particular thing that we desire, is presumption. God is too wise to err, and too good to withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly. Then do not fear to trust Him, even though you do not see the immediate answer to your prayers. Rely upon His sure promise, “Ask, and it shall be given you.”” (*Steps to Christ, p. 96*)

2nd Cause

God wants us to learn patience and perseverance.

Another reason why God may not answer our prayers as quickly as we wish is that He wants to teach us patience and perseverance. Perhaps He wants us to pray patiently until His time comes. Wasn't that the message of the parable about the persistent widow in which Jesus wanted to show us “that men always ought to pray and not lose heart”? Sometimes God says, “Your request is good, but wait a while!” Unfortunately, our fast-food society influences us into thinking that all our desires need to be instantly gratified. God says, “Wait!”

Let's point out a few examples of this from the Bible. How long did the believers have to wait until the promise of a Redeemer was fulfilled? How many went to their graves without seeing the fulfillment of this promise? Did God forget? No, God is faithful! And “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son”. What about Abraham, how long did he have to wait for his promised son? Abraham waited 25 years! His son Isaac didn't have it much better because Rebecca was barren, a nightmare for every woman back then. But they prayed and trusted that God would give them a child. Twenty years passed before Rebecca had Jacob and Esau.

God has His time! It is an eternal truth for every one of us! To pray in faith, means to present our petitions to God persistently and submit them to His time plan. Let's not forget that perseverance in prayer doesn't refer to the number or length of our prayers. It refers to the attitude of our hearts. In Jeremiah 29:12-14 it says: “Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD.” This verse tells us to search for *God* with our whole hearts, not the *answer* to our prayers. God answers the prayers of people who wholeheartedly seek to live in a close relationship with Him and to do His will. When we have this attitude we will not come to God with selfish requests, because we want to do what pleases Him most. That is what it means to pray in His name.

3rd Cause

The people for whom we pray still have a free will.

Oftentimes we pray for people to be converted, to come to reason, or to be reconciled with one another. There is no doubt that these are good prayer requests, according to God's will. We know that God works in the lives of people. He works on

them through the Holy Spirit, gives them thoughts, brings about certain situations and much more. But ultimately, each person has to decide for him/herself if they will submit to God's will. God will never manipulate the free will of a person in order to change them.

4th Cause

There are things in our lives, which hinder God from answering our prayers.

It may be that we are asking God for something good and He wants to give it to us. But He can't do it because we have obstacles in our life. Read the following Bible texts carefully and jot down the things in our lives, which can hinder God from answering our prayers.



Psalms 66:18: _____

Proverbs 28:9: _____

Ezekiel 14:3: _____

Mark 11:24-25: _____

Isaiah 30:15: _____

James 1:5-8: _____

James 4:1-3:

Quote #2 “There are certain conditions upon which we may expect that God will hear and answer our prayers. One of the first of these is that we feel our need of help from Him. He has promised, “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground.” Isaiah 44:3. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who long after God, may be sure that they will be filled. The heart must be open to the Spirit’s influence, or God’s blessing cannot be received.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 95*)

Quote #3 “If we regard iniquity in our hearts, if we cling to any known sin, the Lord will not hear us; but the prayer of the penitent, contrite soul is always accepted. When all known wrongs are righted, we may believe that God will answer our petitions.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 95*)

Quote #4 “Another element of prevailing prayer is faith. “He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” Hebrews 11:6. Jesus said to His disciples, “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Mark 11:24. Do we take Him at His word?” (*Steps to Christ, p. 96*)

Quote #5 “If we take counsel with our doubts and fears, or try to solve everything that we cannot see clearly, before we have faith, perplexities will only increase and deepen. But if we come to God, feeling helpless and dependent, as we really are, and in humble, trusting faith make known our wants to Him whose knowledge is infinite, who sees everything in creation, and who governs everything by His will and word, He can and will attend to our cry, and will let light shine into our hearts. Through sincere prayer we are brought into connection with the mind of the Infinite. We may have no remarkable evidence at the time that the face of our Redeemer is bending over us in compassion and love, but this is even so. We may not feel His visible touch, but His hand is upon us in love and pitying tenderness.” (*Steps to Christ, p. 96*)

Quote #6 “When we come to ask mercy and blessing from God we should have a spirit of love and forgiveness in our own hearts. How can we pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” and yet indulge an unforgiving spirit? (Matthew 6:12). If we expect our own prayers to be heard we must forgive others in the same manner and to the same extent as we hope to be forgiven.” (*Steps to Christ 97.1*)

No Answer to Prayer? So, when we experience situations in which God doesn’t answer our prayers we should in no way doubt God’s faithfulness. God keeps His promises! Instead of doubting we must ask ourselves why God may not be answering our prayer. The following questions can help you get started:

1. Is my request according to His will?
2. Does God want me to continue praying with perseverance and patience, to wait and to trust Him?
3. Is there something in my life hindering God from giving me what He would like to bestow on me?

It is important that we honestly ask ourselves these questions and take them to God. “Lord, is my request really according to your will or have I maybe just talked myself into believing that it is your will? Lord, is there something in my life that is hindering

you from answering my prayer?" When we earnestly present these questions to God, He will give us the answer in His way and in His time.

Claiming Promises

In a later lesson we will learn how to better understand God's will. Until then, let us remember that the things God has commanded and promised in His word are His will for us. Sometimes we aren't quite sure if our prayer requests are God's will. In such cases we should pray, "Not my will, but your will be done." Of course where God has spoken clearly, we don't need to pray in this manner. I don't need to say, "Lord, if it is your will that I shouldn't work on Sabbath, then please let me know." Or "Lord, if you want me to be honest, then please show me." We already know these are God's will because He has told us in His word.



1. John 5:14-15

What does God promise us when we pray according to His will?

There are some things, which are most certainly His will. For example:

- Forgiveness of our sins (1 John 1:9)
- Forgiving others (Ephesians 4:32)
- Overcoming sin (Romans 8:37)
- Receiving the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:11-13)
- Power to obey (Ezekiel 36:27)
- Leading people to Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20)

Moreover, God's promise is included in every command to help us keep it. Jesus never said to the lame man, "Stand up, take up your bed and go home," without first giving him the power to do so. God knows that we can't keep the commandments in our own power. This is why He gives us the strength to be obedient at the same time that He gives us the command to be obedient.

Therefore, when we have an explicit promise from God and fulfill the conditions on which God has given this promise, we may ask God in faith to answer our prayer and immediately thank Him for doing so. We don't need to wait until we feel that He has heard us. His word is sufficient!

The Bible is full of precious promises. But a word of caution is appropriate here. We can't simply take every promise in the Bible that God gave in a specific situation and apply it as a promise for ourselves. There are certain things, which God promises to every person. Likewise, there are things, which He promised for specific situations. Thus, not every promise in the Bible is addressed to every believer. For example, when God said in Isaiah 43:2, "When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you," He didn't mean that a believer would never

- Quote #8** “Every promise in the word of God furnishes us with subject matter for prayer, presenting the pledged word of Jehovah as our assurance. Whatever spiritual blessing we need, it is our privilege to claim through Jesus. We may tell the Lord, with the simplicity of a child, exactly what we need. We may state to Him our temporal matters, asking Him for bread and raiment as well as for the bread of life and the robe of Christ’s righteousness. Your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things, and you are invited to ask Him concerning them. It is through the name of Jesus that every favor is received. God will honor that name, and will supply your necessities from the riches of His liberality.” (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, p. 133*)
- Quote #9** “For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christ like temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift He has promised, we may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received. We need look for no outward evidence of the blessing. The gift is in the promise, and we may go about our work assured that what God has promised He is able to perform, and that the gift, which we already possess, will be realized when we need it most.” (*Education, p. 258*)
- Quote #10** “Not because we see or feel that God hears us are we to believe. We are to trust in His promises. When we come to Him in faith, every petition enters the heart of God. When we have asked for His blessing, we should believe that we receive it, and thank Him that we have received it. Then we are to go about our duties, assured that the blessing will be realized when we need it most. When we have learned to do this, we shall know that our prayers are answered.” (*The Desire of Ages, p. 200*)
- Quote #11** “When we pray for earthly blessings, the answer to our prayer may be delayed, or God may give us something other than we ask; but not so when we ask for deliverance from sin. It is His will to cleanse us from sin, to make us His children, and to enable us to live a holy life. Christ “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.” Galatians 1:4. “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” 1 John 5:14, 15.” (*Ministry of Healing 70.2*)
- Quote #12** “So with all the promises of God’s word. In them He is speaking to us individually, speaking as directly as if we could listen to His voice. It is in these promises that Christ communicates to us His grace and power.” (*Ministry of Healing 122.3*)
- Trust!** When you pray and don’t immediately get an answer from God, don’t despair! Ask yourself why the prayer hasn’t been answered. The reasons listed in this lesson can help you find the answer. In any case trust God. He is so good that He would never deprive you of anything that is for your best. One day you will see that every prayer He answered, didn’t answer, answered later, or answered differently than you expected was for your best.

