

The Wonderful Facility of Prayer

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(All New Testament quotations are from the Kingdom of God Version)

The Power of Prayer

MOSES CHANGED GOD'S MIND CONCERNING ISRAEL

- ❖ “And now leave me [*Yahweh*] alone so that my anger may blaze against them, and let me destroy them, and I will make you into a great nation.” And Moses implored **Yahweh** his God, and he said ... Turn from your fierce anger and **relent** concerning the disaster for your people ... **And Yahweh relented concerning the disaster that he had threatened to do to his people**” (*Ex.32:10-11, 14 Lexham English Bible*).

THE HEALING OF THE SICK

- ❖ “And the prayer of faith **will restore the ill person to health**, and the LORD will raise them up” (*James 5:16 KGV*).

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN ELIJAH PRAYED AND GOD ALTERED THE WEATHER

- ❖ “The petition of a person who has God’s approval has great power and effectiveness. Elijah was a man just like us, and he prayed fervently for it not to rain, and it didn’t rain on the land for three years and six months. ¹⁸He prayed again, and the sky gave rain, and the land produced its harvest” (*James 5:16-18*).

God’s Response to Jesus’ Prayers

- ❖ “But even now I [*Martha*] know that **whatever you [Jesus] ask** from God, God will give you” (*John 11:22*). *Yet Jesus doesn’t respond affirmatively to Martha’s statement. He simply says that Lazarus will rise in the resurrection. Yet elsewhere Jesus shows that the Father always hears him.*
- ❖ “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another helper to be with you...” (*John 14:16*).
- ❖ “However, I don’t ask only for these, but also for those who put their trust in me through their message, ²¹ that they will all be one. Just as you, Father, are in solidarity with me, and I am in solidarity with you, I ask that they also may be in solidarity with us, so that the world will believe that you sent me” (*John 17:20*).

How to Pray

- ❖ “But whenever you pray, go into your private room, close the door, and **pray to your Father who is present in that private place**; and your Father who sees you in private will reward you”
“When you pray, **don’t keep repeating meaningless words** like the pagan Gentiles do! They think that because of their many words they will be heard. So, don’t be like them, because your Father knows what you need before you ask Him (*Matt. 6:6-7*).
- ❖ “...So you should be self-controlled and **clear-headed for the purpose of prayer**” (*1 Pet. 4:7*).
- ❖ “Again, I assure you that if two of you on earth are **in agreement** concerning something you ask for, my Father in heaven **will do it for you...**” (*Matt. 18:19*).

The Most Vital Things to Pray For

- ❖ “So **this is the way you should pray**:
‘Our Father in heaven, may your **name** be regarded with profound awe, may your **Kingdom** come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us the **bread** we need for today; and **forgive** us for the wrongs we have done, as we have forgiven those who have wronged us. And do not let us fall during times of severe temptation, but **rescue us** from the Evil One” (*Matt. 6:9-13*).

1. **God’s name** to be regarded with profound awe.
2. **God’s Kingdom** to come (then God’s will shall be done on earth).
3. Our **daily necessities**.
4. **Forgiveness**
5. Rescue from **Satan’s temptations**

What Else One Should Pray For

Apart from the vital prayer subjects stated by Jesus in the Lord's Prayer and our continuing thankfulness to God, the following are major subjects for us to pray about:

1. LOVE, KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM, HOLY SPIRIT, AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS

- ❖ “So if you, in spite of being degenerate, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give **holy spirit** to those who **keep asking Him!**” (*Luke 11:13*).
- ❖ “Now we **pray** to God that **you won't do anything wrong**. ... We also **constantly pray for this**: that you **grow in maturity**” (*2 Cor. 13:7, 9*).
- ❖ “**I pray that** the God of our Lord Jesus the Messiah, the Father of glory, will **give you all a spirit of wisdom and revelation** so that you can truly know Him, by having the eyes of your heart enlightened” (*Eph. 1:18*).
- ❖ “It is **my prayer** that your self-sacrificing **love for one another will keep on growing**, as guided by true knowledge and insight. **I pray this** so that you can determine what is best, and so be uncontaminated and **free of guilt** in the day of Messiah; and indeed **filled with the fruit of everything having God's approval**, fruit that comes through Jesus the Messiah for God's glory and praise” (*Phil. 1:9-11*).
- ❖ “And so, from the day we heard about it, we haven't ceased **to pray for you**. We are asking that **you will be filled with the true knowledge** of His will in all **wisdom and spiritual understanding**. Then you will be able to **walk in a manner worthy** of the Lord, pleasing him in every way, as you **bear fruit** in every good work and grow in the true knowledge of God” (*Col. 1:9-10*).
- ❖ “...Epaphras ... is always **striving on your behalf in his prayers**, so that you may **stand mature** and fully convinced about everything required by the will of God” (*Col. 4:12*).
- ❖ “**We are always praying for you to this end: that our God may count you worthy of His calling** — that He may **fulfil your every desire for goodness**, and every work of faith with power” (*2 Thess. 1:11*).
- ❖ “However, if any one of you falls short **in wisdom**, let them ask God, and it will be given to them. Certainly, He gives generously to all without reproach. But let them **ask in faith**, without doubting, because the person who has doubts is like a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people needn't suppose that they will receive anything from the LORD since they are people of two minds and changeable about everything they decide” (*James 1:5-8*).

2. THE PROMOTING OF THE GOOD NEWS

- ❖ “With **every prayer and petition**, keep praying at every opportunity in spirit. To this end you must keep alert with all perseverance and **petitioning** for all God's holy people. Also **pray for me**, that when I open my mouth, the words to **boldly and plainly make known the divine secret of the good news** will be given to me” (*Eph. 6:18-19*).

3. OUR NEEDS AND TO RELIEVE ANXIETY

- ❖ “...so **stop being anxious** about anything, but in every situation let God know what you need by your **prayers and requests**, whilst also giving Him thanks” (*Phil. 4:6*).
- ❖ “Everything in God's creation is good; nothing is to be rejected if it is **accepted with thanksgiving**, because it is made holy by what God has said and by **the prayer of thanks** confidently said over it” (*1 Tim. 4:4-5*).
- ❖ “But the widow who really is in need is one who, left on her own, has set her hope on God, and perseveres both in **asking for God's help** and **in her prayers night and day...**” (*1 Tim. 5:5*).

4. PEACE FROM THE AUTHORITIES

- ❖ “First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, confident intercessions, and thanksgivings be offered **on behalf of all people**—on behalf of **kings** and all who are in authority, so that we **may lead a tranquil and quiet life** in all godliness and dignity” (*1 Tim. 2:1-2*).

5. PEACE AT THE MEETINGS

- ❖ “Therefore, I want the men **in every [meeting] place to pray**, lifting up holy hands, without anger or quarrelling” (*1 Tim. 2:8*).

The Conditions for Prayer to Be Answered

- ❖ “And this is the confidence that we have in Him: **whatever** we ask **in harmony with His will** He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in regard to whatever we ask, we know that **we have the requests** that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).
- ❖ “If you remain incorporated in me, and my words remain within you, ask **whatever** you want and it will be done for you ... so that the Father will give you whatever you **ask in my name**” (John 15:7, 16b). Also see John 14:13-14, 16:23-24).
- ❖ ““I assure you,” Jesus responded. “**If you have faith** and don’t doubt, not only will you do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the lake,’ it will happen. And **whatever** you ask for in prayer, **you will receive, if you believe**” (Matt. 21:21-22).
- ❖ “This is why I’m telling you that **everything** that you pray and ask for, **believe** that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mark 11:24).
- ❖ “My dearly loved family: **if our conscience doesn’t condemn us**, then we can approach God with boldness, ²² and receive from Him **whatever we ask**. This is because we **keep His commands** and do what pleases Him. ²³ And this is His command, that we put our trust in the name of His Son Jesus the Messiah, and that we practice loving one another, just as he has commanded us” (1 John 3:21-23).
- ❖ “You don’t have, because you don’t ask. Or if you do ask you don’t receive it, because you ask with a **wrong motive**, namely to squander it on your sensual pleasures” (James 4:2-3).

So clearly God’s promise to answer our prayers is if *we* do these certain things first. These are:

1. Ask according to God’s will.
2. Ask in Jesus’ name.
3. Remain incorporated in Jesus.
4. Have Jesus’ words remain within you.
5. Have faith.
6. Believe that you have received what was asked for.
7. Have a clear conscience.
8. Remain obedient to God’s commands.
9. Have a good motive.

Unanswered Prayer

It can be a real struggle with one’s faith if God seems to be silent and with no answer to one’s continuing prayers over major issues. Things can seem even worse when other Christians claim that God regularly answers their prayers – sometimes for things that seem to be of no consequence. So when our expectations concerning a particular prayer are not met it can be quite a knock to our faith. So what is the problem?

It is often that our expectations have been formed by our interpretation of Jesus’ words in all the passages like Matthew 21:21-22 where Jesus says: “If you have faith and don’t doubt, not only will you do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the lake,’ it will happen. And **whatever you ask for in prayer, you will receive, if you believe.**”

On the surface Jesus, here, seems to be promising that God will do whatever we ask, provided we have faith. So if our prayer goes unanswered we end up in confusion and with damage to our faith – especially is this true over a vital issue such as a friend dying, or a child being injured, in spite of our daily prayers for their safety. The common answer to this is that you failed or the person you prayed for failed – either because:

- You or they did not have enough faith.
- You or they had not confessed some sin that had been committed.
- You did not pray with good motives.

To say that the prayer wasn’t answered because the person who was prayed for had not confessed some sin that had been committed, completely contradicts James’ words, which say that: “if they have been committing any sins, they will be forgiven” (James 5:16-18). This is after they had been healed.

Furthermore, to say that God would only have answered your prayers concerning your dying friend if you had confessed your sin seems pretty cruel. It also seems to be unbiblical as in the case of Bartimaeus who, although he had faith to be healed, had not necessarily lived a life totally pleasing to God, nor did he necessarily confess his sins before asking for the restoring of his eyesight, yet Jesus healed him. So to explain that God does not answer our prayers because we aren't good enough seems out of Character with God or Jesus.

Of course faith is vitally important in prayer. However, the comment that one did not have enough faith is contradicted by Jesus' hyperbolic statement "that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt. 17:20). Indeed, the problem has been our failure to understand what Jesus meant when He said that we could move mountains and have whatever we ask for if we pray with faith.

HYPERBOLE

So to understand the meaning of Jesus' statement of, "**whatever** you request of the Father" we need to realize that whenever Jesus spoke, he very often used figures of speech (John 16:25). One such figure is hyperbole—an exaggeration to make a point. It is also called 'teacher's rhetoric.' It was well used by the ancient prophets and first-century teachers. So when Jesus says *in Matthew 21:21-22* "if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the lake,' it will happen" he is using hyperbole. And when, in the same verse, he continues by saying "**whatever** you ask for in prayer, you will receive, **if you believe**" he is still using hyperbole which is not to be taken literally and mechanistically. This and all similar statements by Jesus are an exaggerated way of speaking whereby Jesus is inviting his followers to pray boldly with complete trust. Those disciples would have understood Jesus as saying, "Be bold in your prayers, trusting that God hears you. So even though you don't understand how the prayer will be heard or answered, nevertheless God will help you with your problem, issue, or situation."

The Variables Concerning Prayer

Many people imagine that God can and will answer any prayer from any person soon after the prayer has been offered. Some may say that all that matters is whether or not the prayer conforms to God's will, and if so it will be answered. However, in all these views there is a failure to realize that there are many variables concerning, when, how, and even if a prayer will be answered.

1. GOD'S WILL

- ❖ *Jesus* "prayed, "My Father, if possible, let this cup be taken away from me! Yet it's not what I want [that matters], **but what you want**" (*Matt. 26:39*).
- ❖ "In the same way, also, the spirit assists us in our weakness, because **we don't know what to pray for** as we should. But the **spirit itself intercedes** on our behalf with inexpressible groans. And He who searches the hearts knows what the spirit has in mind, because it intercedes **in harmony with God** on behalf of His holy people" (*Rom. 8:26-27*).
- ❖ "And this is the confidence that we have in Him: **whatever we ask in harmony with His will** He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in regard to whatever we ask, we know that **we have the requests** that we have asked of Him" (*1 John 5:14-15*).

One problem for us is that we don't always realize that God's will may not always be **God's ideal will**, but is a will that is accommodated to the various situations of life, and in particular to the overall state that the world is in.

For example it wasn't God's ideal will for Jesus to have to be the sacrifice for mankind, but the situation of the sinful condition of mankind made it the best way forward. So we must not conclude that because something is God's will for one particular situation that it is His ideal will in general. Additional to this, it is a mistake for us to appeal only to God's will, even though that is the foundational crucial factor. There are many other factors concerning whether one's prayer is answered or not.

2. THE FAITH OF THE PERSON BEING PRAYED FOR

When we pray about something for ourselves it is essential to have faith for the prayer to be heard. In fact, Jesus "**was heard because of his devotion**" (*Heb. 5:7*).

At the times when Jesus healed someone he often said to the healed person, "Your faith has healed you" showing that the people had faith in God who used Jesus to produce such miraculous healings. However, where there was a lack of faith even Jesus' prayers for the people went unanswered:

- ❖ “So he wasn’t able to perform any miracles there, except to lay his hands on a few ill people and heal them. And he was amazed **because of their refusal to believe...**” (*Mark 6:5-6*).
- ❖ “If you are able?” responded Jesus. “**Everything is possible** for anyone who has **faith**” (*Mark 9:23*).

So, it seems that if I pray for a friend to be healed, there has to be some degree of faith in that friend—some willingness to believe—if they are to be healed. But please note that although God’s ideal will is for all people to be healed, we must not conclude that a person necessarily lacked faith if they aren’t healed—there are more factors that may be involved. Indeed Paul’s “thorn in the flesh”—his eyesight problem—was never healed although he had strong faith.

3. THE FAITH OF THE PEOPLE PRAYING FOR OTHERS

Many times the person being prayed for is not mentioned concerning their faith; for instance, the servant of the centurion (Matt. 8:13), but the centurion had faith that God could do this through Jesus.

- ❖ “Then he [*Jesus*] said to the centurion, “Go; it will be done for you **just as you’ve believed** it would.” And his young servant was healed at that very hour” (*Matt. 8:13*).

Again it was the men who lowered the paralyzed man through the roof of the house who had faith for him to be healed (Luke 5:20). Similarly James shows the power of the faith of those praying for someone who is ill:

- ❖ “...If anyone among you is ill, they should send for the elders of the assembly, and they should pray over the ill person, having anointed them with oil in the name of the LORD. And **the prayer of faith** will restore the ill person to health, and the LORD will raise them up. And if they have been committing any sins, they will be forgiven. So practice confessing your sins to each other, and praying for each other, so that you may be cured. The **petition of a person who has God’s approval has great power and effectiveness...**” (*Jas. 5:13-16*).
- ❖ “I always thank my God as I mention you in **my prayers**, because I continue to hear of your self-sacrificing love and of **the faith that you have for the Lord Jesus** and for all God’s holy people.²² Yet at the same time also, prepare a lodging place for me, because I hope that, **through your prayers, I will be set free** to come to you” (*Philemon. 4-6, 22*).

Here mutual prayer of both Paul and Philemon was effective because of their faith, no doubt because it was done in the right spirit:

- ❖ “But you, my dearly loved family, must continue to build yourselves up in your most holy faith, by **praying in [an atmosphere of] holy spirit...**” (*Jude 20*).

Especially is it true, concerning those who were being oppressed by demons, that their faith is not mentioned; for instance the boy being attacked by a demon. But in this case even the disciples were shown to lack faith and therefore were unsuccessful in expelling the evil spirit (Mark 9:14-19).

But again we must be careful to note that faith is not the only factor involved.

4. PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER

Jesus gave several illustrative stories to show the need for persistence in prayer. There was the woman who sought justice from the reluctant and irreverent judge, but it was only through her persistence with him that she got justice (Luke 18:2). Then there was the person who kept on knocking on a neighbour’s door at midnight to borrow some bread because their friend had arrived. Only because of the persistent knocking did the neighbour finally respond (Luke 11:5-8). So Jesus finishes the story with the punch-line:

- ❖ “So I’m telling you: **keep on asking, and it will be given to you, keep on seeking and you will find, keep on reverently knocking and the door will be opened for you.**¹⁰ Indeed, the person who keeps asking receives! The person who keeps seeking finds! The person who keeps reverently knocking will have the door opened for them. (*Luke 11:9-10*). Verse 13 adds the detail: “how much more will the heavenly Father give holy spirit to those who keep asking Him!”

So we should pray as people who desperately need something from our Heavenly Father as Paul also showed when he gave many statements concerning our need to be persistent in prayer:

- ❖ “Don’t let your zeal slacken; be on fire in spirit in serving the Lord; celebrating in hope, enduring in suffering, **persisting in prayer...**” (*Rom. 12:11-12*).

- ❖ “**Persevere in prayer**; being mentally alert and with thanksgiving. At the same time, **pray also for us, that God may open to us** a door for the message, to declare the divine secret of the Messiah, on account of which I am in prison — that I may make it as clear as possible” (*Col. 4:2-4*).
- ❖ “We give thanks to God always for all of you, and **unceasingly mention you in our prayers**” (*1 Thess. 1:2*).
- ❖ “...keep on **praying without ceasing**. In everything give thanks, because this is God’s will for you through your incorporation into Messiah Jesus” (*1 Thess. 5:17-18*).

But once again we must be careful not to give up, because there may be any one of the other factors yet to be in operation for the prayer to be answered.

5. THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE PRAYING

- ❖ “Again, I assure you that **if two of you on earth are in agreement concerning something** you ask for, my Father in heaven **will do it** for you; because where **two or three** gather together in my name, I am there among them” (*Matt. 18:19-20*).

The bigger the rock to be lifted the more people are needed it to get it off the ground. This concept is also appropriate to the problems we may encounter and the amount of prayer needed from many individuals. Clearly the apostles recognized this in their new situation with Jesus no longer being physically with them:

- ❖ “They [*the apostles*] **all** continued devoting themselves to **prayer with one mind**, together with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (*Acts 1:14*).

Paul also recognized this factor in writing to the Ephesians:

- ❖ “With **every prayer and petition**, keep praying at every opportunity in spirit. To this end **you must all** keep alert with **all perseverance and petitioning** for all God’s holy people” (*Eph. 6:18*).

6. HUMAN FREE WILL

God generally chooses not to override human free-will. So if we pray for someone who is without faith and whose will is very much out of line with God’s will, then it is less likely that much will change for them. However, God’s response to our persistent prayer, and therefore His influence on that person may in time make a difference in their circumstances so that a change of heart may occur in them.

Even our safety cannot be guaranteed, in spite of our prayers, because of the free-will others have to do things that may be harmful; but again this does not mean that we should not pray for safety—having God with us increases our chances for safety and for others too.

7. ANGELIC FREE WILL

Angels have free-will just as much as do humans. This is seen in the choice Satan and those who became demons made, when exercising their free will to become God’s enemies. Since then they have made many destructive choices in their warfare against God and His people. In contrast, many other spirit beings have exercised their free will to work for God and to support God’s people:

- ❖ “Another angel, who was holding a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given a large quantity of incense to offer up on the golden altar that is in front of the throne. It was offered **along with all the prayers of God’s holy people**.⁴ So the smoke from the incense, with the **prayers of God’s holy people, ascended from the angel’s hand to God**” (*Rev. 8:3-4 also see 5:8*).

8. THE NUMBER AND STRENGTH OF SPIRIT AGENTS

Nevertheless, even these good angels do not always get their own way in trying to serve God and His people during this time of spiritual warfare. For instance in response to Daniel’s prayer, the following happened:

- ❖ “Then the man [*the angel*] said to me, “Don’t be afraid, Daniel, because **from the day you first set your mind** to understand things and to humble yourself before your God, **your words were heard**. I’ve come because of your words!¹³ **For twenty-one days the leader of the Persian kingdom blocked my way**. But then Michael, one of the highest leaders, came to help me. I left Michael there with the leader of the Persian kingdom” (*Daniel 10:12-13 CEB*).

So if Michael hadn’t been available to help this angel the answer to Daniel’s prayer would have taken even longer. Perhaps this puts things into perspective for us when it seems to be taking a long time for a prayer of ours to be answered.

9. THE PRESENCE OF SIN

Sometimes it is vital to deal with an issue even before beginning to pray. This was the case with Joshua as leader of Israel after their defeat in the battle against the men of Ai. (Josh 7:10-11). Significant sin had been committed by a single individual—Achan. When Joshua and the leading men fell on the faces in prayer to God, He told them to stop praying and go and identify who had committed this sin and then bring the sinner to justice first. (Josh 7:16-26).

Similarly with Christians who have some issue that has not been dealt with. Their prayers are blocked until the issue is resolved. The following are examples of such issues:

- ❖ “In the same way, you husbands should live with your wives in an understanding way, since they are physically weaker than you. **Treat them with respect**, since they are fellow heirs with you of the divine favour of perfect life, **so that nothing will hinder your prayers**” (*1 Pet. 3:7*).
- ❖ “Whenever you stand up **to pray**, if you have anything against anyone, **forgive them**, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions” (*Mark 11:25*).
- ❖ “Keep on **praying for us!** We are persuaded that we have a **clear conscience**, because we wish to act commendably in everything” (*Heb. 13:18*).
- ❖ “That water prefigures baptism, which now saves you all, not by removing dirt from the body, but as a **response from a good conscience** toward God. It is effective because it comes through the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah” (*1 Pet. 3:21*).
- ❖ “You don’t have, because you don’t ask. Or if you do ask you don’t receive it, because you ask with a **wrong motive**, namely to squander it on your sensual pleasures” (*James 4:2-3*).

There are other lesser factors that are the variables too. Nevertheless we can now see that there are many factors involved in the matter of when, and even if, a prayer gets answered.

How God Answers Prayers

For most of the biblical record when God wants something done, He has typically sent people. Rather than suspending the laws of nature God typically works through natural laws and through people. Such laws have been suspended only rarely by God. Even when there are miraculous events God has used nature, as for example with the plagues upon Egypt. Generally by means of His spirit God prompts and influences people into action, working in hearts to be His instruments to answer the prayers of others.

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