

# God's Answers to Our Prayers

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God has ordained a plan and place of service for each of us individually as believers, and He answers our prayers according to His will for our lives. Prayer is simply talking with God, and it comes very naturally to all of us, even from the beginning of our Christian walk as we ask God to help us with the troubles that we face.

In the book of Acts we read that Paul and Barnabas strengthened the disciples, encouraging them to remain true to the faith, and they taught that we must go through “many tribulations” to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). These many tribulations or hardships that God has ordained for our lives will drive us to Him in prayer, and they are one way in which He draws us close to Himself for fellowship.

## *Prayer with Thanksgiving*

Knowing that we would face many tribulations and hardships, Paul encouraged believers when he wrote: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7).

This peace that Paul mentioned is the kind of peace that only God can give. It is a peace that transcends human reasoning and understanding in that it is not dependent upon the presence of favorable circumstances in our lives. Rather, it is a peace and contentment that God promises to us even in the midst of our troubles, as we bring our requests to Him in prayer, with thanksgiving.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul gave us three exhortations. He said that we are to always be joyful; we are to pray continually, and we are to give thanks to God in all of the circumstances of our lives. Our circumstances themselves, and also the giving of thanks in the midst of these circumstances, are both God’s will for us. The Scriptures teach us that God is working for our eternal good and glory together with His Son through everything He allows to affect our lives (Romans 8:28-29), and this is the reason that we are exhorted to be joyful, and also thankful, in every circumstance and condition of our lives.

Bringing our prayers to God with thanksgiving is something that can be very difficult for us when we are confronted with trouble and suffering, because we know that our sovereign and omnipotent God could easily have spared us from these painful things, but He has not. And neither did He spare His own Son from the sufferings that He endured (Romans 8:32).

Many of us will question why we should be thankful when we know that God could have prevented our suffering from occurring in the first place. And we will also question why we should be thankful when we know that God could remove our burden at any time, and yet He chooses not to do so.

The reason given to us in the Bible as to why God allows these “many tribulations” to affect our lives (again, Acts 14:22), even as we walk in obedience to His word, is perhaps best summarized by Paul’s teaching in Romans 8:17-18. In this passage, Paul revealed that we as the children of God must share in the sufferings of His Son, in order that we may also share in His eternal glory. God has ordained that we as believers will all experience reflections of Jesus’ sufferings in

their own lives, becoming in some measure as He was: “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3, John 12:24-26, John 16:20-22). Through this share in His sufferings, we will bear fruit to the glory of God and receive a share in Christ’s eternal glory.

When we begin to understand these truths from the word of God, we can begin to understand why we are exhorted to present our requests to Him with thanksgiving for all that He is accomplishing for us, even though our losses, troubles, and hardships. For eternity, we have God’s promise of a share in the glory of His Son. For the days of our hard service now, we have His many promises given to us throughout the Scriptures, promises of His peace, help, sustenance, and His all-sufficient grace for our every weakness and need. All of these promises give us hope, comfort, a sure and certain future, and reason for thanksgiving to God.

### ***Jesus Taught His Disciples How to Pray***

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed His disciples about prayer. He began His teaching saying:

“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

“And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6:5-8)

In this first part of His teaching on prayer, Jesus told us that we are not to make showy public prayers to be seen by men. Such praying tends to exalt the one praying as one who is very “spiritual” and tends to shift the focus toward the one who is praying instead of where the focus of prayer should be, which is upon God.

There may be times when we are called upon to lead a prayer among a group of people. At such times, let our prayers emphasize God’s power, love, and mercy, as well as our dependence upon Him for every need of our lives. This was the kind of prayer that Jehoshaphat brought before the Lord in 2 Chronicles 20:6-12, and his prayer was heard.

Jesus also taught us that we should not keep babbling repetitively in our prayers like pagans do, because God our Father knows what we need before we even ask it. Our Father is aware of the smallest details of our lives, even down to the number of hairs on our head (Matthew 10:30). He knows what is best for us as He fulfills His purpose for our lives, and that purpose is revealed to us through His answers to our prayers, and through the circumstances and events of our lives, which unfold as He has ordained them.

In this passage of Matthew 6, Jesus first taught His disciples how not to pray. As He continued, He then taught them how they should pray, using an example or model prayer, which we all know as the Lord's Prayer. His prayer is recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. A line by line examination of the Lord's Prayer shows us what elements should be included in our prayers to God.

In the first line of the prayer, Jesus taught that we are to pray bringing our requests to God, "Our Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). In John 16, Jesus also taught us that we are to bring our requests to the Father, asking "in His name". Jesus said that we would receive whatever we asked in His name (John 16:23-24).

Praying in Jesus' name means that we are to pray in accordance with the word of God as revealed in the Scriptures, in complete obedience and submission to all that is taught in His word. And as we are taught in God's word, we are to submit our own will to His will, as His sovereign plan and will for each of us is revealed through the circumstances, conditions and limitations of our lives (Luke 14:27, 33, Philippians 2:5-8, others).

Continuing in Jesus' model prayer, the words "Hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9) show us that praise should be given to God the Father in our prayers. Praise is due Him, as is thanksgiving, for the gift that He gave to us when He called us to faith in His Son, whereby we have been given the privilege of praying to Him as "Our Father".

The following lines of Jesus' model prayer read: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10). These words again instruct us that our prayers should include an attitude of submission to, and acceptance of, God's will for our lives.

Jesus demonstrated His acceptance of God's will for His life, even when faced with the burden of overwhelming sorrow to the point of death. Once again

we recall that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to His Father knowing that everything was possible for Him, and asking Him to take away the cup of suffering and death that He knew He was about to drink at Calvary. But above all else, Jesus yielded Himself to His Father's will, even when His Father's will for Him was a painful and humiliating death on a cross (Mark 14:32-36).

Continuing with Jesus' model prayer we read: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). These words teach us that we should ask God for the things that we need in life, the things that are necessary to sustain our lives such as food, clothing, a place to live, etc. Notice that Jesus taught we are to ask for our "daily bread". We are not to project far out into the future with what we think we might face at that time.

God does not want us to be burdened by the worry of what we imagine might come about in our tomorrows. Therefore Jesus gave us this promise: if we will seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness as the priority of our lives, then God will give to us all of the things that we need to sustain our lives. With this promise, we are told not to worry about our tomorrows or what troubles our tomorrows may bring (Matthew 6:33-34). When we make it our priority to obey God's word and submit ourselves to the place of service in life that He has ordained for us, then He promises that He will provide for the needs of all of our tomorrows, as many tomorrows as He has allotted to us.

Continuing in the Lord's Prayer we read: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Matthew 6:12). Forgiveness is necessary and vital in the Christian life. We have sinned against God, and by the wounds of His Son Jesus Christ we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). Our sins made necessary in the sight of God our Father the painful and humiliating death that Jesus suffered in His crucifixion. His sacrifice was the propitiation, or payment that restores favor, for our sins. Just as God forgives our sins, He requires of us that we forgive the transgressions of those who sin against us.

In the last verse of Jesus' model prayer, we read: "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." (Matthew 6:13). In this verse Jesus taught us that we are to ask God for His help in the ongoing struggle with temptation and sin that we will experience as long as we live on the earth.

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray by the example of this "Model Prayer", He taught them that they should pray to God their Father. He also taught

that their prayers should include praise to God. And He taught that their prayers should include submission to the will of God. This submission means praying with an attitude and an understanding that the answers to our prayers, whether they are answered “yes” or “no”, should be accepted as the answer given by our loving Father, who gives “what is good to those who ask him” (Matthew 7:11).

If some burden is not lifted as we have asked, it is because God has willed that we should endure it, at least for a time, for our eternal good and glory. When God’s answer to our prayers to have some burden lifted from our lives is “no”, we have the assurance that the grace and the strength of Christ will be provided to us in sufficient measure to meet our need. The Scriptures reveal to us that His power at work in our lives is made perfect in our own weakness. This is to say that the power of Christ at work in our lives is at its greatest at the point of our own greatest weakness and need.

This realization resulted in the joy that Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. He did not have his “thorn” in the flesh removed as he had requested in prayer. (The Greek word in the original text which is translated as “thorn” could also be translated as “painful physical ailment”). But with the Lord’s answer of “no” to his prayer, Paul did receive joy and sustaining grace sufficient for his need, and he received further insight into God’s ways so that he could comfort and encourage us with the encouragement that God had given to him. (Consider 2 Corinthians 1:5).

With this understanding of God’s provision for our weakness and need, Paul came to understand that when he was weak, then he was strong. It was revealed to Paul that when his own strength faltered, Christ’s power and grace given to him to meet his need grew greater, and so it is with us.

### *Persistence in Prayer*

Even though God will answer our prayers according to His sovereign plan for our lives, Jesus taught that we are to be persistent in our prayers. In Luke’s account of the Gospel, right after Jesus instructed His disciples using the Lord’s Prayer as an example, He then continued His teaching:

Then He said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and from inside he answers and says, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my

children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. (Luke 11:5-8)

Jesus used this parable to teach His disciples another lesson about prayer, and that is the need to persist in our requests to God until we get an answer from Him. In the following verses Jesus said: "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened." (Luke 11:9-10).

It is interesting to note that in the original Greek text, the words translated as "ask", "seek", and "find" all have a continuing action to them. A more complete translation to the English language would be "ask and keep on asking", "seek and keep on seeking", and "knock and keep on knocking".

Jesus concluded His teaching by saying: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). The Holy Spirit is referred to as the Comforter or Counselor in several passages of John's Gospel (John 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7). In Matthew's account of this same teaching, we read: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11).

From these passages we learn that when we persevere in prayer to God our Father, we are promised the Holy Spirit, who is our Comforter and Counselor. And we are also promised "what is good" for us and planned for us according to God's sovereign purpose for each of our lives.

The need for persistence in prayer is also illustrated in the Parable of the Persistent Widow in Luke 18. Jesus told this parable to teach His disciples that they should always pray and not give up hope of receiving an answer from God.

Jesus began the parable saying that there was an unrighteous judge who did not fear God, and who had no regard for men. There was a widow who kept coming to this judge, asking for justice against an adversary of hers. The judge at first kept putting her off, but she kept returning to him, persisting with her request. Finally the unrighteous judge said to himself that he would grant this widow the

justice she sought, so she would not keep troubling him with her continual returning and pleas.

Jesus ended the parable with a lesson for His disciples about persistence in prayer when He said: "...Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:6-8).

So again in the Parable of the Persistent Widow, as in the Parable of the Friend Who Comes at Midnight, Jesus taught about the necessity of persevering in prayer as we bring our requests to God, and He assured us that we will receive God's answer to our prayers. Jesus' final words in the passage are: "However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). This question that Jesus put forward indicates that at times, some of God's answers to our prayers may challenge our faith.

When the answer to our prayer is "no", our faith may indeed be challenged. We may wonder why our God, who can do all things, and who said that He loves His children, will not grant us our request to be freed from some burden that we have brought to Him in prayer.

If God's answer to our prayer is "no", then He calls upon us to submit to His answer as part of His will and plan for our life, at least for the present time (again consider Matthew 26:36-46). If our burden is not lifted, and we find that we must continue to suffer with it for a while longer, then we can take comfort in seeing and understanding the troubles which God has allowed to touch our lives in the light of the teachings that we have seen from the Scriptures before.

These teachings reveal to us that a share in the sufferings of Christ will be experienced in the life of every believer. Just as Jesus bore fruit through the sufferings that the Father had ordained for His life, we must follow Him in that we will bear fruit through sharing in His sufferings, in some measure, as God has ordained for each of us. And the fruit born through these sufferings will achieve for us a share in Christ's eternal glory (John 12:24-26, Mark 10:36-39, Romans 8:17).

Once again let us consider the encouragement that Paul gave to us for the troubles of our present lives. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 he taught that our troubles are only for a short time when considered in the context of eternity, and they are



achieving for us an eternal measure of glory that will far exceed the weight and burden of the troubles themselves. Even though we must endure these things for a time as part of God's plan for our lives, we can take comfort in knowing that we have been promised the all-sufficient grace and strength of Christ for our every weakness and need, as Paul learned through his own experience (2 Corinthians 12:1-10, Philippians 4:11-13).

### *In Conclusion*

When we bring our requests to God in prayer, how can we be sure that He hears us, and how can we have the assurance that we will receive what we have asked of Him? In 1 John 5 we find the answer to this question. John wrote: "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him." (1 John 5:14-15).

So when we ask for anything that is "according to His will", we can be assured that God hears us; we can be sure that our prayers will be answered and that we will have what we have asked of Him. If we ask anything in accordance with God's commands to us, His directives, His teachings, His admonitions, or any principles of the Christian life set forth in the Scriptures, then we can be sure that we will receive what we have requested of Him. And this is exactly what it means to pray in Jesus' name (John 1:1, John 16:23-24). God will also answer our prayers according to His will for each of our lives individually, or according to the plan, purpose, and place of service that He has ordained for each of us.

There are many prayers of God's people recorded in the Scriptures. The Psalms contain many prayers asking for God's forgiveness, mercy, and deliverance, and many of these prayers praise Him for His love and mercy, which endure forever. There is great blessing for us as believers in reading the Psalms, because they give us insights into the struggles of the saints who have gone before us, and they tell us of the help and comfort that God provided for them in their time of need.

In 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Hannah prayed expressing the sovereignty of God and the help that He provides for His saints. Toward the end of her prayer we read: "He keeps the feet of His godly ones, But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness; For not by might shall a man prevail" (1 Samuel 2:9).

Recorded in Isaiah 38 is Hezekiah's prayer, where we gain more insight from the lives of the Old Testament saints into the struggles that we as God's people will face in life and bring to Him in prayer. Beginning in verse 1, we read:

In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him: "Thus says the Lord, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'" Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, and said, "Remember now, O Lord, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. (Isaiah 38:1-3)

Hezekiah prayed earnestly to the Lord, reminding Him of the devotion that he had shown to Him during his life. His prayer was heard, and God's answer was to grant him an extra fifteen years of life. But the day inevitably came when he died, as all will. Whether we are granted our request to be freed from our burden or not, the day will come for all of us as believers when we will be made whole again, and that for eternity.

God's answers to the prayers of His people are all in accordance with His word as revealed to us through the Scriptures, and in accordance with His will for each of our lives, as He has planned for each of us individually. We have the assurance from God's word that all things will be made to work together for our eternal good and glory together with His Son. And all things include every burden that He has allowed to touch our lives and every burden that He allows to persist in our lives.

God will bring forth life and good through the deaths that our sufferings have wrought in our lives. We have been given many assurances and comforts through God's word, both for this present life and for life eternal with Him in Heaven. Therefore we are exhorted to bring all of our requests to God in prayer, with thanksgiving for all that He has promised and for all that He is accomplishing for us, even through the many troubles of this present life.