

DOES GOD ANSWER OUR PRAYERS?

How to pray? What does it take for God to answer prayers?

Have you ever known someone who really trusts God? When I was an atheist, I had a good friend who prayed often. She would tell me every week about something she was trusting God to take care of. And every week I would see God do something unusual to answer her prayer. Do you know how difficult it is for an atheist to observe this week after week? After a while, "coincidence" begins to sound like a very weak argument.

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So why would God answer my friend's prayers? The biggest reason is that she had a relationship with God. She wanted to follow God. And she actually listened to what he said. In her mind, God had the right to direct her in life, and she welcomed him doing just that! When she prayed for things, it was a natural part of her relationship with God. She felt very comfortable coming to God with her needs, her concerns, and whatever issues were current in her life. Furthermore, she was convinced, from what she read in the Bible, that God wanted her to rely on him like that.

She pretty much exhibited what this statement from the Bible says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."¹ "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer..."²

So, Why Doesn't God Answer Everyone's Prayers?

It may be because they don't have a relationship with God. They may know that God exists, and they might even worship God from time to time. But those who never seem to have their prayers answered probably don't have a relationship with him. Further, they have never received from God complete forgiveness for their sin. What does *that* have to do with it you ask? Here is an explanation. "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."³

It's pretty natural to feel that separation from God. When people begin to ask God for something, what usually takes place? They begin with, "God, I really need your help with this problem..." And then there's a pause, followed by a restart... "I realize that I'm not a perfect person, that I actually have *no right* to ask you for this..." There's an awareness of personal sin and failure. And the person knows that it's not just them; that God is aware of it too. There's a feeling of, "Who am I kidding?" What they may *not* know is how they can receive God's forgiveness for all their sin. They might not know that they can come into a relationship with God so that God will hear them. This is the foundation for God answering your prayer.

How to Pray: The Foundation

You must first begin a relationship with God. Here's why. Imagine that a guy named Mike asks the president of Princeton University to co-sign a car loan for him. If Mike doesn't personally know the president of Princeton, that car loan is not going to happen. Yet, if the daughter of this president asked her dad to co-sign a car loan for her, it would be no problem. Relationship matters.

With God, when the person is actually a child of God, when the person belongs to God, he knows them and hears their prayers. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me...my sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."⁴

When it comes to God then, do you really know him and does he know you? Do you have a relationship with him that warrants God answering your prayers? Or is God pretty distant, pretty much just a concept in your life? If God is distant, or you're not sure that you know God, here is how you can begin a relationship with him right now: [Getting Connected](#).

Will God Definitely Answer Your Prayer?

For those who do know him and rely on him, Jesus seems to be wildly generous in his offer: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."⁵ To "remain" in him and have his words remain in them means they conduct their lives aware of him, relying on him, listening to what he says. Then they're able to ask him whatever they want. Here is another qualifier: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us -- whatever we ask -- we know that we have what we asked of him."⁶ God answers our prayers according to his will (and according to his wisdom, his love for us, his holiness, etc.).

Where we trip up is assuming we know God's will, because a certain thing makes sense to us! We assume that there is only one right "answer" to a specific prayer, assuming certainly THAT would be God's will. And this is where it gets tough. We live within the limits of time and limits of knowledge. We have only limited information about a situation and the implications of future action on that situation. God's understanding is unlimited. How an event plays out in the course of life or history is only something he knows. And he may have purposes far beyond what we could even imagine. So, God is not going to do something simply because we determine that it must be his will.

What Does It Take? What is God Inclined to Do?

Pages and pages could be filled about God's intentions toward us. The entire Bible is a description of the kind of relationship God wants us to experience with him and the kind of life he wants to give us. Here are just a few examples:

"...the Lord longs to be gracious to you. He rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for [trust] him!"⁷ Did you catch that? Like someone rising out of his chair to come to your help, "He rises to show you compassion." "As for God, his way is perfect...He is a shield for all who take refuge in him."⁸ "The Lord delights in those who fear [reverence] him, who put their hope in his unfailing love."⁹

However, God's greatest display of his love and commitment to you is this: Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends,"¹⁰ which is what Jesus did for us. And so, "If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else?"¹¹

What about "Unanswered" Prayer?

Certainly people get sick, even die; financial problems are real, and all sorts of very difficult situations can come up. What then?

God tells us to give our concerns to him. Even as the situation remains dismal, "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."¹² The circumstances may look out of control, but they aren't. When the whole world seems to be falling apart, God can keep us together. This is when a person can be very grateful that they know God. "The Lord is near. 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."¹³ God may provide solutions, resolutions to the problem WAY beyond what you imagined possible. Probably any Christian could list examples like this in their own lives. But if the circumstances do not improve, God can still give us his peace in the midst of it. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."¹⁴

It is at this point (when circumstances are still tough) that God asks us to continue to trust him -- to "walk by faith, not by sight" the Bible says. But it's not blind faith. It is based on the very character of God. A car traveling on the Golden Gate Bridge is fully supported by the integrity of the bridge. It doesn't matter what the driver may be feeling, or thinking about, or discussing with someone in the passenger seat. What gets the car safely to the other side is the integrity of the bridge, which the driver was willing to trust.

In the same way, God asks us to trust his integrity, his character...his compassion, love, wisdom, righteousness on our behalf. He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."¹⁵ "Trust in him at all times, O people. Pour out your heart before him. God is a refuge for us."¹⁶

In Summary...How to Pray

God has offered to answer the prayers of his children (those who have received him into their lives and seek to follow him). He asks us to take any concerns to him in prayer and he will act upon it according to his will. As we deal with difficulties we are to cast our cares on him and receive from him a peace that defies the circumstances. The basis for our hope and faith is the character of God himself. The better we know him, the more apt we are to trust him.

For more on the character of God, please see ["Who is God?"](#) or other articles on this site. The reason we pray is God's character. The first prayer God answers is your prayer to begin a relationship with God.

(Article by Marilyn Adamson)

(1) 1 John 5:14 (2) 1 Peter 3:12 (3) Isaiah 59:1,2 (4) John 10:14,27-28 (5) John 15:7 (6) 1 John 5:14,15 (7) Isaiah 30:18 (8) Psalms 18:30 (9) Psalms 147:11 (10) John 15:13 (11) Romans 8:32 (12) 1 Peter 5:7 (13) Philippians 4:5-7 (14) John 14:27 (15) Jeremiah 31:3 (rsv) (16) Psalms 62:8