

"God Answers Prayer"

The Pew Research Center says more than half of Americans say they pray every day. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're exploring how God answers prayer!

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. We love the Lord, because we know He loves us enough to teach us the truth about ourselves and our need for salvation. He opens our hearts and helps us to see ourselves. We learn from Scripture how deeply we need Him in our lives now and what He has promised for our future. The Scriptures teach what is good and acceptable and perfect. Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

An anonymous poem was found on the body of an unknown Confederate soldier. It said: "I asked God for strength, that I might achieve, I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey. I asked for health, that I might do greater things, I was given infirmity that I might do better things. I asked for riches, that I might be happy, I was given poverty, that I might be wise. I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men, I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God. I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life, I was given life, that I might enjoy all things. I got nothing I asked for—but everything I had hoped for. Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were all answered. I am, among all men, (he says) most richly blessed."

Alfred Lord Tennyson said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." And he is certainly correct. Prayer is not an empty exercise but is asking God to exercise His great power for good. The power of prayer doesn't arise from our praying but from God's answering. God doesn't always give us what we ask for, but He does give us what is best for us. God is wiser than we are.

We offer this study free on the importance of prayer. And if you'd like a printed copy of our study and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at www.searchtv.org, or you can watch us on YouTube.

We'll now worship in song, and read from Psalm 40:1 thru 5, and explore how God answers prayer.

Our reading today is a psalm of David, Psalm 40, verses 1 thru 5, "I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear, And will trust in the LORD. How blessed is the man who has made the LORD his trust, And has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood. Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders which You have done, And Your thoughts toward us; There is none to compare with You. If I would declare and speak of them, They would be too numerous to count." Oh, we serve a wonderful God.

Let us pray. "Heavenly Father, we praise Your name and we adore You as our God and as the one who has prepared for us a place in heaven, and has forgiven our sins. Father, we pray that You will always be willing to hear our prayers, and help us to be people who walk in Your ways, so that You will hear. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen."

How does God answer prayer? Well, He answers in a variety of ways. Sometimes God says yes to our prayers. He did so for Elijah, a man like us, and God may bless our lives as well. James 5:16 to 18 says, that "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a

nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it didn't rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit." God answered Elijah's prayer with a yes.

God expects His children to keep on asking until we receive. The Lord Jesus in Luke 18:1 to 8 says that we ought to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I'll give her justice, so that she'll not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" What we need most is to believe that God will hear us and answer our prayers.

Sometimes God says no to our prayers. A negative answer may be the answer of a loving God who cares for His people. No parent would give his four-year-old son a brand new car. The apostle Paul gives us an example of God saying no. 2 Corinthians 12:7 to 10 says, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me (that is the apostle Paul) a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.'" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I'm well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Christians must learn to pray God's will be done, realizing God's will may be better in the bigger picture than getting what we want. Jesus accepted God's will be done in the Garden of Gethsemane. He said to His disciples, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death" (Matthew 26:38). Jesus knelt down and fell on His face to pray. And Jesus prayed, "Father, if You're willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." God's will was for Jesus to bear the cross for the sins of the world, your sins and mine. Jesus didn't escape the pain and the shame of the cross, but He knew that His sacrifice was what was best. Hebrews 12 and verse 2 says that "Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith ...for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

God highly exalted Jesus and gave Him a name above every name. And one day every knee will bow to Him and every tongue will confess "Jesus is Lord," because Jesus was willing to obey the Father. Where would we be if Jesus had not obeyed the Father and died on the cross for our sins? Why we'd have no hope. Jesus desired our salvation more than He desired to live. Psalm 37:4 to 5 says, "Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it." Jesus despised the shame but He delighted in our salvation.

Don't lose confidence in God if the answer turns out to be no. Your children have likely asked you for things that were unreasonable or unneeded, or things you couldn't provide. And you likely said no to them. God knows what is best, just as we know what is best for our children. Trust God.

Sometimes God says, "Wait a while." Though Israel suffered much in Egyptian slavery and cried out to God, God did not answer their prayers until Moses was eighty years old (Exodus 1 thru 3 tells that story). Jesus also responded slowly to the request of Mary and Martha, that Jesus come and heal

Lazarus. Well, Jesus didn't heal Lazarus; He raised him from the dead for the glory of God. You see, in waiting Jesus did a greater work than if he had merely healed His sick friend.

Sometimes God gives us something different from what we ask. The thief on the cross only wanted to be remembered when Jesus came into His kingdom, but Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43). Now we don't always know what is best or how we should pray (Romans 8 verse 26 says). And we can confidently be assured, however, that God as a loving Father will do what is best for us. God knows us and He will give to us the things that we need—even when we cannot see our own needs. God sees what we can't see and He knows what we don't know. And so let's trust Him to do what's best for us.

Sometimes, perhaps often, God does more than you or I ever ask Him to do or think that He can do. Paul had great faith in God's ability to answer prayer. You remember in his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 20 and 21, he said, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." We live limited lives, but God is not limited. We don't serve a small God but a great One. And God is able—and that is what we must always remember – God is able. And Christianity is built upon what God can do in and through us.

In 1 Kings 3 God granted to Solomon the opportunity to pray for anything he wished. 1 Kings 3:8 to 13 tells the story: "Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant, (Solomon prayed) an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

Well that prayer was pleasing in the sight of the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said to him, "Because you've asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. I've also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days."

God certainly blessed Solomon far beyond his expectations. And we too can thank God for what He's done for us. Who knows how many blessings we have received from His hands and don't even know it. He's likely been far kinder to us than we realize. Let's never fail to be thankful to our Father in heaven.

Jesus said our heavenly Father knows our needs even before we ask. He knows our physical needs of food, and clothing and shelter. He knows our emotional needs of love and respect. He knows our spiritual needs of instruction, encouragement, and even correction. When children of God come to Him humbly, sincerely and fervently, He'll bless them richly. Even though the spiritually poor tax collector couldn't lift his eyes toward heaven (because of his shame), God heard his prayer, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner" (Luke 18, verse 13, New American Standard); and he went home justified. God doesn't despise a broken and contrite spirit (Psalm 51 verse 17).

Sometimes God answers our prayers through what He says in His inspired word. The answers were there all along. Life gets hard and we pray for God to help us, comfort us, and to give us patience. And God teaches us patience when we study the Scriptures. Romans 15:4 says, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement

of the Scriptures we might have hope.” One can hardly read about the saints of old and not see the hand of God leading them, protecting them, comforting them, and giving them hope.

Do you pray someone might know the truth and obey it? You know, prayer is the first step in reaching the lost with the gospel. Colossians 4:2 to 4 says, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.” I tell you there’s power in the word itself to help people come to believe. Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” John 20:30 to 31 says, “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Have you ever prayed for a deeper knowledge of God? Well the best way to gain knowledge of God is to study the Scriptures. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 15, “Be diligent (King James says study) to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Read it, study it, meditate, and memorize God’s word. And it’ll bless you. 2 Timothy 3:16 to 17 says, that “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” God is able to shape and mold your life through His word in answer to your desire and request to grow spiritually.

You see, it’s in prayer that we come to realize our need for the Father in heaven. It’s a great day in a person’s life when he realizes that however wise and strong he thinks he is, he still needs a Father in heaven to help him and to bless him. We can approach God with reverence and boldness. We can approach our God, because He is our Father, who makes His ear and His heart available to us when we pray. How sad it is that so many people fail to pray, fail to take their sorrow and heartaches and worries to the only One who can do something about them—and that’s God! Paul’s advice is worth our hearing today: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5, verse 17).

Let us pray. “Father we’re thankful that You are our Father, and we praise You as the One who has made us, who’s created all things and has blessed our lives down to this time. Father we’re thankful that You listen to our hearts and hear our prayers. Help us to love You and to do Your will. In Jesus name, Amen.”

Prayer is such an important part of the Christian life. I can’t imagine my life without the access God gives me in prayer. God is ready and willing to listen to my requests, my praise, my thanksgivings, and my penitent heart asking for forgiveness as a Christian. I can think of many good reasons to pray, but no good reason to quit praying. Our world is in such a mess spiritually. Many have decided God doesn’t matter, the idea of sin is outdated, and there’s no judgment after death. Because the world is moving away from God, crime is increasing, war is threatening, and the traditional family is disappearing.

Some Christian friends and I are calling on every Christian and churches of Christ to begin praying passionately and fervently to God for a revival of our commitment to Christ. We wish and pray that every person would come to know the Lord and be saved. We wish and pray that every member young and old begin the habit of daily, fervent prayer. We can’t regularly come into the presence of God and not seek to leave sin and to be more like God. Knowing God will one day judge this world, we seek to reach the lost with the gospel of Christ, the gospel of grace and salvation. Will you commit to praying fervently and daily?

Now to become a Christian, place your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the gospel, the story of His death, burial, and resurrection. Turn from wickedness to righteousness in repentance so that you can find healing. Confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and be baptized into Christ, immersed in water, for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). Today is the best day to change your heart, to be born again by your obedience to the Lord in baptism, and then take up your cross every day to follow the Lord Jesus.

We hope today's study about how God answers prayer has deepened your trust in God. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now there's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches that are in your area at www.searchtv.org. Now you can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! We ask that you subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." And be sure to like the programs you watch. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. And we're not asking for money, but we want to help you draw close to God.

Well, as always we ask that you tell a friend about our program. And we always want you to know, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.