

"Will God Hear My Prayer?"

Will God hear my prayer? Does God really care about my problems? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders and this is a Bible study, "In Search of the Lord's Way." Today we're exploring when God hears our prayers. Stay tuned.

Welcome to In SEARCH of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. The Bible opens a marvelous treasure chest of wisdom, that prospers our lives and our souls. God's word enriches us in a thousand ways and touches every aspect of our lives. Solomon told his son in Proverbs 3:13 to 18, "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, And the man who gains understanding. For her profit is better than the profit of silver, And her gain better than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; And nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, And all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, And happy are all who hold her fast." Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be part of your life each week.

A recent report said that 84 percent of Americans prayed within the last week. Even six percent of atheists say they pray every single day. We sometimes wonder, "Will God hear my prayer? Will praying make a difference?" Prayer is an amazing gift of God; we should rejoice over it and be thankful. But like any gift, it only works if we practice it; and only works if we practice it according to the will of God. God answers prayer, but God doesn't grant every request. Some prayers violate the will of God; and some prayers come from selfish or disobedient hearts. Prayer's not like rubbing a lamp and having a genie grant you wishes. We pray to a holy and righteous God, who wants us to be holy and righteous.

If you want to study more about prayer, we offer this study free. 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. Now if you live outside the United States, we have materials free online, and you can stream this program at our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from James 1:5 to 8, and explore how God hears our prayers.

Our reading today comes from the book of James, chapter 1, verses 5 to 8. And here he tells us what we can do when we're facing difficult times. "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." That's a reading from God's holy word.

Let's pray. "Oh Father we're thankful that we have Your word to teach us and to help us. And Father we're thankful that we can pray to you and pour our hearts out whenever we have difficult circumstances. Father we pray that You'll help each of us, and give us strength and give us wisdom. In Jesus name, Amen."

Each of us faces times when we need to pray. We need God's help. We want to know God will hear us and grant our requests. Certainly God hears the prayers of those who love and follow Him. Jesus said in Matthew 6:31 to 33, "do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For all the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." First, when you pray, you're praying to your Heavenly Father. Second,

your Father knows what you need and has heard your every prayer. Third, He promises to supply your needs if you put Him first in your life.

The Father loves us and deals with us as His children. Jesus said in Luke 11:5 to 8, "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'll get up and give him as much as he needs." Now God is better than that. He gives to us out of love, not because we are a bother.

Paul, with lots of experience, said in Philippians 4:19, "my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." God the Father wants to bless His children and supply their needs, just as any father might. God invites us to pray. And we don't have to apologize to God for taking up His time. Jesus said in Matthew 7:7 to 11, "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 the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

Jesus wants us to feel confident in prayer. Some think that when they sin God doesn't want to be around them, so they withdraw from God and they quit praying. Well that's exactly what God doesn't want. He wants us to cease from sin, yes; but He also wants us to come boldly to Him for help. Hebrews 4:14 to 16 says: "Since then we have a great high priest who's passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Rather than avoiding God, let's draw near to get the help we need for temptation.

Now it matters how we live, whether we believe, and whether we seek first the kingdom, if we wish the Father to hear our prayers. 1 Peter 3 and verse 12 says, "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." Ephesians 3 and verse 20 says that God "is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." Many shut God out and wonder why He doesn't hear their prayers. You can't live a wicked life and expect God to bless you. If that's the case, whose prayer will God not hear?

Well, James 4:1 through 3 says, "What's the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and you don't have; so you commit murder. You're envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You don't have because you don't ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." Now if I'm praying to God, and what I'm praying is selfish and wasteful, I shouldn't expect God to help me do what's wrong. Think about what you're praying and how the Father thinks. Some people's prayers are so self-centered and hurtful to others that God wants no part of it.

When you pray, remember that God treats you the way that you treat others. Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6 and verse 12 "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Now Jesus explains in Matthew 6:14 to 15, "That if you forgive others their trespasses, then your heavenly

Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” How can you expect God to forgive you, if you aren’t willing to forgive others? If we’re children of God, we ought to have the same tenderness and compassion for others that God has shown to us.

Proverbs 15:29 says that “The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous.” God allows us to change our ways, so we can have a loving relationship with Him. Now nobody is perfect, though we strive to serve God. God distinguishes the person who sets his heart to do right but sometimes fails and the person who lives his life to serve his own desires but sometimes does good. We can’t be perfectly sinless, but there’s a difference between endeavoring to do right and having no intention of following God. One is one way, the other is the other. The Father will not hear the person who has turned his heart away.

Peter speaks to husbands in 1 Peter 3 and verse 7, “husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” A man who mistreats his wife or children cannot expect to draw close to God and be heard. God will treat him in the same way that he has treated his family. Don’t let a lack of kindness toward those whom you love put a barrier between you and God.

Faith is necessary. The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 11 and verse 6, that “without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Now if we seek God’s help and blessing, we need to believe that He will keep His promises and will bless us. James said in James 1:6 to 8, “But let him ask in faith, without doubting, for the one who doubts is like the wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he’ll receive anything from the Lord; because he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

Repentance also comes into this discussion. Some folks think God is supposed to be at their beck and call, but they continue their sinful behaviors. They think God will overlook all their sins. Some folks think they can negotiate with God. “Well I’ll change Lord, if you just grant me this wish.” Well God’s no fool. You can’t bargain with repentance. Some people repent just long enough to get what they want and what they’re after, but their change is temporary and not real. You can fool yourself, but you can’t fool God with a negotiation. If you want God to hear you, then first change your ways.

Isaiah 59, verses 1 and 2 says, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.” Now you can’t hang on to sin and expect to have the ear of God listening to you. The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 66:18, “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” Here the Psalmist is clarifying for us the point. You can’t let sin be cherished in your heart and find room for God too. He won’t hear your heart’s request, if your heart’s real desire is sin.

Now continuing in sin and failing to repent builds up a wall. Tear down the wall. God said in Isaiah 1:15 to 20, that “When you spread out your hands [that is when you pray], I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s case. [then he says]’Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If

you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

God has always wanted His people to pray and to love Him, but people don't show love to Him when they live in sin and ignore His teaching. You can't love the world and love God at the same time. 1 John 2:15 to 17 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride in possessions or life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with all its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." We must keep Him close and live righteously if we wish to have God's blessing.

I'm thankful for the opportunity and the privilege of prayer. God not only allows us to pray, He asks us to pray. He wants to hear our hearts and to grant our requests. In John 14:13 to 14 Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." We can approach God because we have a right relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son. God hears us when we speak in His name.

I don't know how close you are to God, but I know prayer is a precious privilege. And to be able to speak our hearts to God and to know that He will hear us is a great blessing. And I don't want to build some kind of a barrier between God and me by neglecting God or ignoring God, or by sin. I want my life to say to God, "God I love You and I serve only You." I don't want to disappoint my Heavenly Father by participating in moral compromise or error. I want to stay close to Him in this life, so that I can live with Him forever in the next life. My friend, are you close to God? Are you living in such a way that you draw near to Him, or have you pushed Him away? If you want God close to you, then you move close to Him.

Let us pray. "Heavenly Father we are so grateful to You that You hear our prayers, and that our prayers matter to You. Father help us to live in such a way that we glorify Your name and that we do Your will. And Father, we pray that You will grant our requests and help us through the difficult times. Be with us, give us wisdom, give us strength, and give us courage so that we may live in such a way to glorify You. In Jesus name, Amen."

God speaks to us through His word, the Bible; and we speak to God through prayer. Now prayer is powerful, because God is powerful. Our Father wants to hear our prayers and bless us. We should tell God "I love you," "thank you," and "forgive me" everyday. When our hearts are burdened, the Lord can help us bear our burdens. When we're weak, He can strengthen us. When we're fearful, He can reassure us. Prayer is a blessing. Let's maintain a close, peaceful, loving relationship with God. Jesus said, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation" (Matthew 26:41). Prayer keeps us from sin and keeps us close to God.

1 Thessalonians 5 verse 17 says, "Pray without ceasing." Now this passage isn't speaking about praying every minute. It's saying, "Keep on praying. Keep loving Him, thanking Him, praising Him, and asking Him for help." Live with love and obey the teaching of Christ. Keep worshiping at church. Keep serving others. Don't start even a single day without prayer, and you'll find life is richer and fuller. Time with God is time very well spent.

To become God's child, believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Galatians 3:26 to 27 says, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." When we're baptized into Christ by being immersed in water, God unites us with Christ (Romans 6, verses 3 to 7) and washes away our sins (Acts 22, verse 16). In baptism, He adds us to His church (Acts 2:41 to 47) and causes us to be born again (John 3 and verse 5). In baptism you begin your

walk as a follower of Christ and a child of God. Can you think of anything better than having Christ as Lord and Savior?

We hope that today's study about prayer has stirred you to get right with 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, call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633.

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Focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. And as always we say, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.