

## Prayer

I suppose that to write about how to pray a prayer that will receive an answer may seem somewhat of an arrogant position to take. I certainly do not have the monopoly on prayer. I think the key is not so much how we pray as it is that we do pray — and pray from the heart. In Mark 10:15 we are told, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." We are also told that as Christians we have received a Spirit of adoption as sons of the Father, by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15). Abba is the word framed by the lips of infants. When we view God as our Father and ourselves as His children, it is easy to approach Him; yet there is also a sense of fear when we know we have done wrong. As humans we can see that children can both love and fear their father, depending upon their behavior. In Scripture we can see that love, fear, and discipline are all part of a Christian's relationship with God (1 John 3:1, Proverbs 1:7, Hebrews 5:12-14). We as Christians cannot expect to nurture our relationship with our Father without communicating with Him. As the saying goes, "seven days without prayer makes one weak". We will examine some of what the Bible says about prayer, but keep in mind that it is not a matter of using a certain formula to get a desirable answer to our prayer. More importantly, we should approach our Father as a child would and communicate with Him so that our relationship with Him is alive and healthy.

## WHAT IS PRAYER?

Random House, *Webster's College Dictionary*, 1996, page 1060: "pray v., prayed, praying. —v.t.

to offer devout petition, praise, thanks, etc., to (God or an object of worship). 2. to offer (a prayer). 3. to make earnest petition to (a person)."

Random House, *Webster's College Dictionary*, 1996, page 1060: "prayer n.1. a devout petition to God or an object of worship. 2. a spiritual communion with God or an object of worship, as in supplication, thanksgiving, or adoration. 3. the act or practice of praying to God or an object of worship."

I find it interesting that in the dictionary prayer is coupled with worship. Perhaps developing this attitude could greatly improve our prayers. Notice also that the dictionary included giving “thanks and adoration”, not just making petitions.

## **TO WHOM SHOULD WE PRAY?**

Our prayer will not help us much if we pray to one that is incapable of answering that prayer. Some people may pray to Buddha, or to one of the apostles or early saints. But Scripture tells us to pray to the Father through Jesus. We are not told to pray to anybody else. In fact, we are told that Jesus is the only means by which we can access the Father. Jesus is the one speaking in the following verses:

Matthew 6:6: "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.:

Matthew 6:9: "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name."

John 15:16: "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you."

John 14:13: "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

John 16:23: "And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name."

John 14:6: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.'"

## **WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?**

This may at first seem like a ridiculous question to some, but considered this question for a minute: Since God knows everything, including all my thoughts and the motives of my heart; then why must I communicate to Him that which He already knows? I have found experientially that everything that God tells me to do is for my own good.

By praying to the Lord, my attention is focused upon Him, and not so much on myself. When my focus is on Him rather than on myself, I am less likely to stumble and fall. When Peter tried to walk on water, he was fine until he took his eyes off Jesus and looked instead at the rough waves caused by the wind. Once Peter took his focus off Jesus he began to sink (Matthew 14:24-32). There is also the matter of obedience — we are told we should pray, and so we should pray!

Luke 18:1: “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.”

Mark 14:38: “Keep watching and praying, that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Colossians 4:2: “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”

Philippians 4:6: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

## **THERE IS POWER IN PRAYER**

### **Prayer has raised the dead**

I Kings 17:20-22: “And he called to the LORD and said, ‘O LORD my God, hast Thou also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?’ Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD, and said, ‘O LORD my God, I pray Thee, let this child's life return to him.’ And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived.”

### **Prayer is used to cast out demons.**

Matthew 17:18-21: “And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ And He said to them, ‘Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you. But **this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.**’”

## **Prayer stopped the rain for 3-1/2 years.**

James 5:16-18: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. **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 might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.”

## **Angels were sent in response to prayer.**

Daniel 9:21: “while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering.”

Daniel 10:12-14: “Then he said to me, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future.’”

There are numerous accounts of the results because of prayer. Not all answered prayers are as dramatic as raising the dead, casting out demons, stopping the rain, or having angels sent to speak to the one praying. However, this does show that if these types of prayers can be answered then our lesser problems can be easily dealt with by praying.

## **WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?**

We should pray before eating, when in need, when thankful, without ceasing. In other words, we should pray all of the time.

Mark 8:6: “And He directed the multitude to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the multitude.”

Acts 27:35: “And having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all; and he broke it and began to eat.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: “Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Colossians 4:2: “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”

There is no wrong time to pray. And, when you remember the story of Jonah (swallowed by a fish, praying from the belly of the fish, and then being vomited up on shore), or the reports of dead being raised to life — then you begin to realize that it is also never too late to pray. Sometimes, Christians tend to live by the rule, “If all else fails, then pray.” Prayer should not be our last resort, and our prayers should include more than a list of things we wish to receive

## **DOES GOD ALWAYS ANSWER PRAYER?**

Often, I have heard the phrase, “God always answers prayer, but sometimes the answer is ‘No!’” It is true that sometimes the answer is “No,” but God does not always answer every prayer.

### **Sometimes God refuses to listen to the prayer.**

Isaiah 1:11-20: “‘What are your multiplied sacrifices to me?’ Says the LORD. ‘I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed cattle. And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats. When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies-- I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. **So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you, yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen.** Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless; defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.’ Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

In this passage we see that God said He would not listen to these people even though they multiply their prayers. Why? He is fed up with them carrying out a religious ceremony of sacrifices and burning incense when their hearts are far from Him. God declares that their hands are “covered in blood”, and they are continually doing what is evil. Notice even though God declares that He will not listen to their prayers He says, "Come now, and let us reason together," I would like you to think again about God being the Father and His people being His children. If your child is continually getting into all kinds of trouble; are you going to listen to the child's vain excuses? What if your child refuses to even admit wrongdoing, even when caught? Suppose the child then wants a ride over to a friend's house, so they can play? Even though you love and would like to please your child, you probably will not give into his or her wishes until the child's bad behavior is dealt with. This is what God is doing in this passage. God refuses to listen to the prayers until the people's behavior is dealt with. God is willing to reason with them, but until the people are also willing to reason with Him, He will not listen! Following are some other passages where we can see that there are times when God will not listen. In each case the reason why God will not listen is because of improper behavior and lack of repentance on the part of the people.

Proverbs 21:13: “He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.

Ezekiel 8:18: "Therefore, I indeed shall deal in wrath. My eye will have no pity nor shall I spare; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet I shall not listen to them."

Proverbs 28:9: “He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination.”

(See also: 1 Samuel 8:18, 2 Samuel 22:42, Psalm 18:41, Psalm 109:7, Jeremiah 7:16, Jeremiah 11:11.)

## **DOES THIS MEAN THAT GOD WILL NEVER HELP AN UNBELIEVER?**

No. In fact, God does his work in a world that is already condemned and prepared for destruction (John 3:18-19, Mark 16:16, 2 Peter 3:7-10). If He refused to work in the lives of unbelievers, no one would ever be saved — not that salvation is always the outcome of God working in an unbeliever's life. In Luke 17:12-19 we read of ten lepers that Jesus healed. Only one of them gave thanks and glory to God. Are we to believe that the other nine were believers who did not give thanks and glory to God? Rather, it seems to me, God healed them despite their lack of commitment to Him. We are told to imitate God and love our enemies and be kind to them even as God is.

Matthew 5:44-45: "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

Jesus also can be seen associating with sinners. His purpose? His purpose is to call sinners to Himself. Jesus won people to himself not just through words, but through acts of love.

Mark 2:16-17: "And when the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax-gatherers, they began saying to His disciples, 'Why is He eating and drinking with tax-gatherers and sinners?' And hearing this, Jesus said to them, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

## **HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?**

We have already seen that God listens to those who are willing to listen to reason from him and be an obedient child. I would like to remind each of us at this point that there is no pattern or formula for every prayer. What is important is that we pray from our hearts and are willing to listen and respond to God's direction.

Matthew 6:5-13: “And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to 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, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay 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. Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and power, and the glory, forever. Amen.’”

First, we are told not to be as the hypocrites, who pray only to be seen by others. God is not interested in how religious you can be, but rather in what is on your heart. Repeating even a good prayer over and over is useless, if it is not from your heart. In this passage Jesus told them to go into their inner room and shut the door to pray. This is an illustration in contrast to praying only to be seen by men, as the religious hypocrite does. Jesus can be seen praying with others present in several passages. The point is not to pray only to be seen by man, but rather to communicate to God that which is on your heart.

Next Jesus gives an example of an appropriate prayer. There is a lot that could be said about this prayer, but for now I will show a brief breakdown that I see in this prayer:

“Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.  
Focus on and praise to God.

“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth  
as it is in heaven. Focus on His will.

“Give us this day our daily bread...

“And forgive us our debts, as we also have  
forgiven our debtors. Physical and Spiritual  
needs.



“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Deliverance.

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”  
Praise.

I do not believe that Jesus intended for us to merely recite this prayer. There are several examples in the Bible of people praying to God. The prayers are heartfelt supplications, and not just mechanical recitations. We see other prayers in the Bible, and they do not just mechanically recite a given prayer. I think Jesus was using this prayer to illustrate some essential points that should be included in prayer.

Luke 18:10-14 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

This passage shows that we are to come before God with humility and honesty, rather than arrogance and self-deception.

I John 3:22: “and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.”  
(Receiving from God is a consequence that stems from obedience to God.)

Psalms 145:18-19: “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and will save them.”

## WHY WE DO NOT RECEIVE FROM THE LORD

James 4:1-3: “What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. **You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives,** so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

There are two reasons given here why we do not receive from the Lord. Because we do not ask.

Because when we do ask, the motives of our hearts are wrong.

## SOMETIMES THE ANSWER IS “NO”!

Sometimes God answers our prayers with a “NO”. This may not mean that we had selfish motives. It may simply be that God has a greater plan or purpose.

Matthew 26:39: “And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.’”

Just before Jesus was led off to be tried and crucified, Peter took a sword cut of the ear of a soldier in an attempt to protect Him (John 18:3- 11). Jesus responded to Peter by saying, **“Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?”** Jesus' prayer in the garden was that “the cup” (His crucifixion) would pass from Him. As we know, Jesus did drink of the cup and was crucified. Jesus’ prayer as a man to be spared was a prayer that was not granted affirmatively; instead, He fulfilled the will of the Father. The greater purpose was our salvation.

Paul made a request to the Lord, and the response was “No”.

Corinthians 12:7-9: “And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me — to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from 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, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”

Paul was not delivered of his thorn in the flesh, but rather he was told God's grace was all that he needed. Paul tells us this was to keep him from exalting himself due to the surpassing greatness of the revelations he received. Many believe that perhaps Paul's “thorn in the flesh” was some sort of eye disease because of the following passages.

Galatians 4:13-15: “...but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have **plucked out your eyes** and given them to me.”

2 Thessalonians 3:17: “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.”

Galatians 6:11: “See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.”

Through Jesus we receive salvation. Through Paul we have received a large portion of the New Testament. Yet Jesus and Paul each received a “No” from God, in the sense that they did not get what they had prayed for. We are in good company then when we do not always get what we pray for. God may choose to help us through our trials and sufferings rather than taking them away from us. This also means that running away on our own may not be the answer. Rather let us turn to the Lord for wisdom, strength and direction.

Isaiah 40:31: “Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”

Proverbs 3:6: “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” (KJV)

James 1:5: “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ASK IN HIS NAME?

John 14:13-15: "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. **If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.**"

This does not mean that we will get whatever we ask for just because we end our prayer "in Jesus' name, amen". "In His name" includes in His person. Does your prayer line up with Jesus the person? Would He fully agree with your prayer? If not, the prayer is not really in Jesus' name. We might have intended for it to be in His name, but for this to be true the prayer must line up with Jesus' mind and interest. Following is the definition of the word "name" found in this passage:

### *Thayer's Definitions*

"3686 onoma-

name: universally, used of proper names

**the name is used for everything which the name covers, everything the thought or feeling of which is aroused in the mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering, the name, that is, for one's rank, authority, interests, pleasure, command, excellences, deeds etc."**

So, you can see that "in Jesus' name" means more than tacking the word "Jesus" on the end of a prayer. Following are some Scripture references that also show the meaning of Jesus' name:

Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the **name** of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

Matthew 18:5: "And whoever receives one such child in My **name** receives Me."

Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three have gathered together in My **name**, there I am in their midst." (See also Matthew 19:29, Acts 2:21, Acts 2:38, and Romans 1:5.)

All of these references use the same Greek word for "name" that is defined above by *Thayer's*, and the clear implication is that using Jesus' name with sincerity includes all that is found there in the definition.

## WHAT IS PRAYING “IN THE SPIRIT”?

Ephesians 6:18: “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”

The context Paul is using here talks about the Christian taking up the armor of God to stand against the forces of darkness. To pray “in the Spirit” is to pray in the *power of the Spirit*. It is much like praying in the name of Jesus. The prayer that the Holy Spirit inspires will indeed be answered.

The Holy Spirit plays an important part in our Christian lives. We are told the Holy Spirit will teach us (Luke 12:12, John 14:26). Then in Romans 8:26 we read, “for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words...”

**The Holy Spirit intercedes for us because we do not know how to pray.**

In Matthew 10:20 we are told that there is a time that the Holy Spirit can speak through us. (“For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you”).

**When we are in tune with God our prayers can be inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit.** This is a powerful prayer because it is lined up with God's will and it will be answered according to His will. We find a similar passage in Jude 1:19-20: “These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit.”

Some people lean toward the understanding that praying “in the Spirit” is the same as speaking in tongues. This could be because the gift of tongues is from the Holy Spirit — but I do not believe that praying “in the Spirit” is limited to speaking in tongues; the context of Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 1:19-20 is not a discussion of the gifts of the Spirit.

In both cases the context is exhorting the Christian to stand firm in his faith during opposition from the enemy. In this we need to be empowered in our prayers through the aid of the Holy Spirit.

**The Bible shows us there is a connection between prayer and faith.** To understand this connection, I believe that it will be helpful to understand what faith is.

*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition*

“**faith** n, pl faiths [ME feith, fr. OF feid, foi, fr. L fides; akin to L fidere to trust — more at bide] (13c) 1 a: **allegiance** to duty or a person: loyalty b (1): fidelity to one's promises. (2): sincerity of intentions 2 a (1): **belief and trust in and loyalty to God** (2): belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion b (1): firm belief in something for which there is no proof (2): **complete trust** 3: something that is believed esp. with strong conviction; esp: a system of religious beliefs syn see belief -- in faith : **without doubt or question**: verily faith vt (15c) archaic: believe, trust”  
(See also Hebrews 11:1.)

For the Christian, faith includes allegiance, complete trust, and loyalty to God, without doubt or question. A Christian who wants a successful prayer life should pray with this understanding. Not only should the person believe in the existence of God, but all allegiance, trust, and loyalty should be in God also. As one who prays adopts this position, the prayers will line up with the will of God.

Psalm 37:4-5: “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.”

The first part of the above passage is often quoted and largely misunderstood. Think about this for a minute. If you truly delight yourself in the Lord, will not your desires be for God's will to be done? The desires of your heart would not be for worldly things, but rather for the things of the spirit. Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4). Notice that the second part of Psalm 37:4-5 requires commitment and trust in the Lord. The passage does not just say that God is going to fulfill the desires of your heart. As you delight, trust, and commit to Him, your desires will change to His desires — and then He will fulfill His purpose.

In the following two passages, we see that faith is an important aspect in our relationship with God. Keep in mind that by Webster's definition, Christian faith includes allegiance, complete trust, and loyalty to God, without doubt or question.

James 1:6-7: “But let him 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 let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord...”

Hebrews 11:6: “And without faith it is impossible to please Him for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

**Some people make the mistake of putting their faith in their own prayers.** It is not by our power that the prayer is answered. Things do not come to pass simply because we have prayed for something and believe that it will happen. God is the one who has the power to make all things happen. Our trust should be in this truth, not in a prayer itself. Keep in mind that if the motives of our hearts are wrong, believing something will make no difference (James 4:1-3).

Matthew 9:28-29: “And after He had come into the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord.’ Then He touched their eyes, saying, ‘Be it done to you according to your faith.’”  
(The faith here was placed in Jesus' ability to give them their sight.)

Romans 4:19-22: “And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, **with respect to the promise of God**, he did not waver in unbelief, but **grew strong in faith, giving glory to God**, and being fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore also it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”  
(Abraham's faith was placed in God's ability to accomplish what he promised.)

For some related passages with emphasis on faith, you may also want to read Matthew 9:22, Mark 10:52, Mark 11:21-2, and Luke 7:48-50.

## **DOES THIS MEAN THAT GOD WILL NOT HELP THE BELIEVER IF THERE IS A LACK OF FAITH?**

As I look at and admire the disciples, I am comforted to know that they also suffered the error of lack of faith — just as we all sometimes do.

Matthew 14:28-32: “And Peter answered Him and said, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ And He said, ‘Come!’ And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, ‘Lord, save me!’ And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’ And when they got into the boat, the wind stopped.”

(Peter walked on water for a short distance and then faltered in his faith and began to sink. Jesus gave Peter a mild rebuke for not having enough faith.)

Mark 4:37-40: “And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they awoke Him and said to Him, ‘Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?’ And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Hush, be still.’ And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, ‘Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?’”

In this example, Jesus asked His disciples why they had no faith. Jesus indicates they should not have been afraid. Why? Because they should have trusted Him through the storm. How often do we find ourselves in a storm and suffer from lack of faith? Our focus should be on the Lord, and not the storm. I admit that this is easier said than done at times, but it is still the position that we must take.

In Acts 12:1-17, we read that Herod had Peter thrown in prison. In verse 5 we see that “Peter was kept in prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.” Then we are told how an angel went and took Peter out of the prison. In verse 12, we read that Peter “went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. And when he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer.



And when she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. And they said to her, 'You are out of your mind!' But she kept insisting that it was so. And they kept saying, 'It is his angel.' But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened the door they saw him and were amazed. "

What is amazing about this passage is that the church was praying fervently on Peter's behalf, but when Peter was rescued, they did not believe it and they were amazed. They were apparently praying according to God's will because He sent an angel to rescue Peter. Yet even though they were praying fervently they showed a lack of faith when they did not believe it was Peter at the door. In Scripture we see that faith pleases and moves God to respond. Yet at the same time a lack of faith does not necessarily mean that He will not answer our prayers.

## **BEWARE OF WHAT IS IN CONTRADICTION TO THE WORD OF THE LORD**

A woman was praying to know what church to join. When she had finished praying the Jehovah Witnesses knocked at her door. The woman mistook this as an answer to her prayer and joined the Jehovah Witnesses. Since that time, she has had the truth explained to her in some detail, but she still clings to that moment as an answered prayer. Is God at fault? Certainly not. She has heard the truth, but rejected it because of feelings, not Scripture.

In a similar case Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), tells us that he went into a grove to pray, to know which church to join. He tells us of a heavenly vision in which he was told to join none of them, because they were all wrong. Since then, we are told that the true church was restored through him. Yet Mormons do not teach of the same God, Jesus or Gospel as is found in the Bible.

In both instances, an individual sought divine guidance to identify the true church. Both religions are opposed to each other, as well as historic Christianity and the teachings of the Bible. We are also warned not to make these errors in the Bible. In 1 Kings Chapter 13 we find an example of someone listening to another person and ignoring what the Lord had previously told him. This error led to his death!

1 Kings 13:18: “And he said to him, ‘I also am a prophet like you, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.' But he lied to him.”

In the context here the man of God declares "For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'You shall eat no bread, nor drink water, nor return by the way which you came.'"

Yet he listened to this man who lied to him declaring himself also to be a prophet. Due to his disobedience to the Lord after listening to the liar the man of God was killed by a lion.

The following are some warnings for us that we should not fall into the same trap:

Proverbs 16:25: “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

Matthew 24:24: "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.”

Galatians 1:8: “But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”

1 John 4:1: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Peter 2:1-3: “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”

Corinthians 11:3: “But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 11:13-15: “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.”

If these warnings tell us anything, it is that we should not believe things that contradict what we find in God's written word the Bible.

Proverbs 3:6: “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” (KJV)

## **PERSISTENCY IN PRAYER**

God does not always give us what we ask the first time we ask for it. Whether due to timing or persistence, the outcomes remain consistent in extending our faith. There are times that what we ask for may seem as though it lines up with the word of God. We search our motives, and we cannot find fault, yet it seems as though there is no response at all. Well, then — keep praying!

Luke 18:1-8 “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, ‘There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect man. And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.’” And the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now shall 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 speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

Luke 11:5-8 “And He said to them, ‘Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say 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 shall answer and say, ‘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.’”

Ephesians 6:18 “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints...”

(“Perseverance” means “persistency”.)

Matthew 15:21-28 “And Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region, and began to cry out, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.’ But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came to Him and kept asking Him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she is shouting out after us.’ But He answered and said, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, ‘Lord, help me!’ And He answered and said, ‘It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.’ But she said, ‘Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. ‘Then Jesus answered and said to her, ‘O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed at once.”

In this last passage, it seems as though Jesus first ignored the woman; then, as she persisted in her request, it would appear she was rebuked for her request. Still, she did not stop. Finally, Jesus said she had great faith and her request was granted. Suppose she had just given up after being ignored or rebuked?

If after we search the Scriptures, we can find no fault with our prayer or our motives, then perhaps we should just keep asking until God does answer or makes it clear that He wants us to stop asking or shows us what is wrong with the prayer.

Is it motive, timing, or something else?

Keep asking until you know for certain which it is. I prayed for my dad's salvation for ten years before it happened and my dad was saved.

Sometimes, I only realize God has answered my prayers by reflecting on them later. At other times, God has answered my prayers so clearly that even though I did not hear His audible voice, there was no doubt in my mind what He said. I believe the key is to pray continually with an open heart and respond to the Lord when He speaks to you. We may not always know how He directs our paths, but if we simply trust Him, we will never regret it. As in any relationship, if you want your relationship with God to grow, keep the lines of communication open. God speaks to us in His written word and in our hearts when we communicate to Him by prayer. Our spiritual growth depends upon our willingness to apply what he shows in our studies and prayers.

**Remember, “7 days without prayer makes one weak”!**