

Prayer

What is Prayer?

Prayer is praising and worshipping God, requesting forgiveness as needed and then finally seeking the Will of God and asking God for help so that we can carry out His Will.

To be able to speak to God in prayer is one of the most special right and honour that a true Believing Christian has. Prayer is much more than coming to God and asking for help or things for your life, it is a wonderful and precious action which allows us to commune and worship God the Father, getting to know Him and ourselves better. God has great pleasure in responding to any prayers, Matt 7:11.

"11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

However, there is a problem for the Believer, God does not always appear to answer a prayer. In fact God will always answers all prayers, His response is usually "YES, NO, PLEASE WAIT." But there are reasons why He does not apparently answer.

Why God does not always appear to answer Prayer?

According to God's purpose.

It is possible that God may delay in responding or answering a prayer, there may be a reason. Consider the story in John 11:1-44,

"1 Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) 3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. 4 When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

The reason Jesus delayed in answering the request for help from Mary and Martha was all for the Glory of God, v40.

"40 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? "

A known Sin of the person praying.

God may not respond to a prayer because there is a "known sin" in the lives of the person praying, See Psalm 66:16-20.

"16 Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

17 I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue.

18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:

19 But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer.

20 Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me."

Each one of us has a sinful nature, it comes from Adam, and this fact also includes all Believers until the Rapture. Though we all have this sinful nature, this fact on its own does not prevent God responding to prayer, Psalm 66:18 "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:" the word "regard" has the meaning "know something is present". If I know that there is a sin in my life, which I have chosen to ignore or do nothing about, then God cannot react to my prayers, He cannot have anything to do with sin, 1 John 1:6-10.

"6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

If this is our situation then we are saying one thing but doing another. To ignore a sin in our life is very serious to a pure, holy God, v10" If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and His Word is not in us." Therefore, when we approach the throne of God in prayer we must always have a time of confession and cleaning, 1 John 1:10.

"10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

Rejection of the Word of God.

The Word of God and prayer will always go together, John 15:7.

"7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

During the early growth of the Church the leaders spent as much time as possible in prayer and the Word of God, Acts 6:4.

"4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

Prayer is not something we do ourselves, prayer comes from the action of the Holy Spirit speaking through the Word of God, therefore if we ignore and reject the Word of God then God is unable to hear our prayer, we have put a barrier between us and the Holy God.

Personal desires

James 4:1.

1 ¶ From whence come wars and fighting's among you? Do they not come even from your lusts that war in your members?

2 Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain. Ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

3 Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

The readers of this letter of James were praying only to satisfy their own desires, the church was fighting over various subjects, hence they were praying for their own "wants" and not for the Will of God in their life.

It is not wrong for a Believer to pray for their own needs, but they should come after the worship and prayers for the Will and plans of God. Consider the points and example Jesus gave the disciples in the "Lords Prayer" Matt 6:1-18.

Examine the order of the prayer given by Jesus. It started with the worship of God, note it refers to "our Father" not "my Father," showing we are all together in God. Then the prayer goes on to request that our life is according to the Will of God. Finally we have prayers for ourselves.

We must also consider how we make our personal prayer requests, God likes us to tell Him about our needs and wants, but we must be careful not to pray for ourself in a selfish way, praying to satisfy our own desires, a common action for the unbeliever, James 4:2,3.

"2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. "

Our prayers should always be designed to ask for the power and / or ability to help and serve God and others.

Are your thoughts and desires only centered on yourself? Does your life give glory to God? The purpose of prayer is to carry out the Will of God, when we ask according to the desires and Will of God then He will answer, 1 John 5:14,15,

"14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. "

Prayer is to get God's Will done on earth.

Presumptuous prayer

God has great patience's with every Believer, He is prepared to give us another chance when we fail Him. An example of this is in an event associated with the failure of Peter, Luke 22:54-62.

"54 Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off.

55 And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.

56 But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him.

57 And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not.

58 And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not.

59 And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean.

60 And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.

61 And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice."

After His resurrection, Jesus especially went out to find Peter and forgive him for his failure, to restore Peter and prepare him for his future work for God.

We must note that though God has restored the relationship with a Believer following a person's failure, his confession followed by restoration, there is the possibility that God will do something as a discipline for the Believer's actions. The aim of God is to make us as much Christ-like as possible.

An example of this is recorded in Numbers 13:1-25, Israel would not accept the promise of God and the Promised Land at Kadesh-barnea. Israel were on the border of the Promised Land, instead of taking God at His word they had sent in spies to look at the land God had promised them. On their return, ten out of the twelve spies reported there was great danger for them, despite the promise of God that the land was theirs. They even thought of return to Egypt and becoming slaves again, Numbers 14:1-4.

"1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.

2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!

3 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt."

As a result of their unbelief and failure to trust God, He disciplined all the people of Israel who were over the age of 20, He told them that they would not be permitted to enter into the Promised Land. As a result of this lack of faith in God, the Nation of Israel had to wait for another 40 years in the wilderness for that generation to die, then the next generation were permitted to enter into the Promised Land.

Though the Israelites had realized their failure and made a confession, the hearts of the people still did not trust God, The Bible tells us that they tried to enter the Promised Land under their own power, Numbers 14:40-45.

"40 And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned.

41 And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper.

42 Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies.

43 For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you.

44 But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.

45 Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah."

Just admitting their lack of faith and sins was not enough, they were still not prepared to submit fully to the Will of God, they thought they could change the mind of God, their prayers were not answered.

See other examples of an insincere heart of confession:-

Balaam, Numbers 22:20-34;

Pharaoh, Exodus 9:27-35.

Prayer and Suffering

There are many examples of people praying for things or actions which were not apparently answered, in some reports it is obvious why there was no answer, selfish requests, a desire for finance not needed etc. However, there are some prayer requests which appeared to be according to the requirements of God, but God has not responded.

In 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 Paul makes a request for the healing of some health problem he suffers. God chose not to heal him, it was to be a "thorn in his side," a reminder of the Grace of God.

We all suffer pain at some time or we may have a health problem, this record associated with Paul shows us that health afflictions can have a divine purpose. Please note that not all health problems come from God, some may be self inflicted by our own way of living, wrong diet, smoking, drinking or exposing our bodies to harmful diseases through an ungodly life. God wants to make us perfect, but this may involve a physical illness. Hebrews 12:5-8

"5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."