
Prayer

Prayer is the expression of man's thoughts to God the Father. The Bible, God's Word, is the expression of God's thoughts to mankind. Therefore, human beings can have two-way communication with the almighty God.

Prayer is an extension of the Faith-Rest principle - it is a part of the Grace principle of claiming promises from the Bible. Here are some of the principal passages dealing with prayer:

Psalms 116:1,2

Isaiah 65:24

Jeremiah 33:3

Matthew 7:7

John 14:13,14; 15:7**

Philippians 4:6

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Principles of Prayer

Prayer is for Christian believers only. One can address God as Father only as a member of the family of God. John 1:12; Gal. 3:26

Prayer should be directed to God the Father. Eph. 5:20; Matt. 6:9; 1 Peter 1:17

Prayer should be made in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. John 14:13; 15:16

The power for prayer is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Eph. 6:18 Prayer is never made to the Holy Spirit.

Four Parts to Private Prayer

The first part of private prayer is the confession of personal sins. This makes it possible for the Lord to respond to the other parts of the prayer, because the believer is in fellowship when he prays. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Psalm 66:18. See also 1 John 1:6-10.

Next, thanksgiving should be made to express appreciation to God the Father for His blessing and provision. Eph. 5:20

Then, prayer should be made for others (intercession). Eph. 6:18

Finally, it is in order to pray for one's own needs. Heb. 4:16

REASONS WHY SOME PRAYERS ARE NOT ANSWERED

Sometimes God does not respond to prayers from believers, no matter how heartfelt and earnest that prayer might be. The main reason that this communication is hindered is carnality on the part of the one praying. When a Christian is not walking in fellowship, the only prayer that God will answer is that of confession. When confession is made, the Lord provides cleansing, according to the provisions of 1 John 1:9, at which time further prayer can be made. There are many reasons given in the Bible why some prayer is not answered:

- Lack of faith: Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24; Rom. 14:23; James 1:5-7
- Failure to take in Bible teaching (lack of edification): Prov. 1:24-31; Prov. 28:9; Zech. 7:11-13
- Selfishness: James 4:2,3
- Carnality: Psalm 66:18; Micah 3:4; Isa. 1:15; 59:1-3**
- Lack of compassion: Prov. 21:13
- Lack of harmony in the home: 1 Peter 3:7
- Pride and self-righteousness: Job 35:12,13
- Lack of control of the Holy Spirit: Eph. 6:18
- Lack of obedience: 1 John 3:22; Eph. 5:18; Deut. 1:43-45**; 1 Sam. 14:37; 1 John 5:14

Four Ways Prayers are Answered

Many times we pray for things because we think that what we ask for will bring happiness to ourselves or to someone else. The petition may be for some specific detail of life such as good health, money, or success in some enterprise. But the desire is for something less tangible, perhaps, like prosperity or happiness. Often the Lord will answer prayer by granting the unstated inner desire, without granting the petition directly. Sometimes we get everything we ask for, sometimes nothing. Here are the four methods which God uses to answer prayer.

PETITION GRANTED; DESIRE NOT GRANTED

"And he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." Psalm 106:15

Prayer

In Numbers 11 is the story of the Israelites wanting meat to eat. Their petition for meat was granted; but their desire for a pleasant experience was not answered.

In 1 Samuel 8, the children of Israel asked for a king. They did not want to continue under God's personal rule. Their petition, to have a king, was granted. Their desire, to be like other nations and to have peace, was not granted. Instead, they had strife and civil war as long as Saul was their king.

PETITION NOT GRANTED; DESIRE GRANTED

In Genesis 17:18, Abraham asks that Ishmael might be his established heir. His petition was denied; but his desire for a son and heir was later granted in the birth of Isaac.

In Genesis 18, Abraham prays for God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah. His request was denied; but his desire, that Lot and his family be safe, was granted.

See also 2 Cor. 12:7,8**

PETITION GRANTED; DESIRE GRANTED

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah prayed that God would destroy the altar on which offering had been made to Baal. His desire was that God would be glorified. His petition and desire were granted.

Samson asked God to strengthen him so that he could have vengeance on his Philistine enemies. Both petition and desire were granted. But God had already decided to judge the Philistines.

One of the thieves on the Cross petitioned Christ, "Remember me..." His desire was for salvation. Both his petition and his desire were granted.

PETITION AND DESIRE DENIED

Refer to an earlier section on the reasons why prayers are not answered for information as to why God sometimes does not grant either the petition or the desire.

Conclusion

The Lord uses a variety of means to bring about those things we desire for ourselves and for others. However, His responses take into account His knowing all there is to know about every situation and what is best for everyone concerned. His answers are sometimes obvious, but at other times they are quite subtle. When the believer is aware of the various ways God answers prayer, he is better able to recognize the answers to prayer.

As an example, we might pray that a person be healed from some illness, not knowing why God has allowed that illness to occur in the first place. But our desire is that the sick person be happy, be prosperous, and be free of discomfort and pain. The person may remain ill, in spite of our prayers; yet God might make the Word of God more available to that person; and in his sick condition, the person may have more time to think on spiritual things. This could result in a great improvement in the growth of spiritual fruit in his life along with inner peace and prosperity. Therefore, one might see his desires realized while the actual prayer request seems to be unanswered.

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