

Why Aren't My Prayers Being Answered?

James 5:16: (NASB) *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.*



We always say that prayer changes things and it does. Jesus was emphatic about prayer and even gave us an example of how to pray in what is known as "The Lord's Prayer." With prayer (as with many parts of Christian doctrine), the core value of what the Bible teaches easily gets lost in the interpretive value of our own human perspective. Because of the imperfect human part of the equation, we create many questions. What about those circumstances where someone prays for what they need, and they simply do not get it? Is the problem that God is not listening or that He does not want them



to have what they need? Is the problem that this person is not praying appropriately? How does prayer really work?

Does God hear and answer everyone's prayers? Since we are all God's children, are we all entitled to have God hear our prayers?

If prayer were an entitlement, then everyone would have an equal opportunity and privilege to pray. The Bible seems to tell us otherwise.

First, we are to have the correct perspective about God and about ourselves:

Isaiah 57:15: (NASB) *For thus says the high and exalted One who lives forever, whose name is Holy, I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.*

We need to be contrite and lowly of spirit to be with God.

Second, we need to be actively seeking righteousness - God's righteousness and not worldly rights:

Proverbs 15:8-9: (NASB) ⁸The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight. ⁹The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but He loves one who pursues righteousness.

Does all this mean that everyone who prays is NOT on equal footing before God? Since we are ALL sinful, what distinguishes the wicked from the upright?

This is an important point because it does mean we are not all on an equal footing before God. There is a difference between people.

Proverbs 15:28-29: (NASB) ²⁸The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things. ²⁹The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.

Being a nice person does not guarantee our prayers are heard. We need to be on the road moving towards righteousness in order to be heard by God.

God is high and lofty and we are so small. We need to be seeking God in order to have our prayers heard - not just being "good."

How do we become righteous if we are coming from a sinful background? Is it possible?

Romans 3:10: (NASB) *as it is written, there is none righteous, not even one; (quoted from Psalm 14:3)*



If there is none righteous, and we just read God is with the prayers of the righteous, is this a contradiction? We are all wicked.

This is why we need the sacrifice of Jesus. It is not how good I am; it is how covered am I by the sacrifice of Jesus.

This can be depressing, but Paul finishes the story a few verses later:

Romans 3:24-25: (NASB) *²⁴being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because in the forbearance of God he passed over the sins previously committed.*

Being justified is a gift through the redemption that comes from Jesus. This is where we get the righteousness. It does not come from us; it comes from Jesus.

It has to be more than just being a good person. A person can be good without God - some atheists are good, caring, law-abiding people.

Think of all the sincere, “upright” Jewish people who earnestly devote their lives to God and prayer.



Are we saying God only hears the prayers of the Christian? Are the Jewish people locked out of prayer?

No! *Why would there be an exception?* They are part of God’s chosen people. We know God is still with the Jewish nation and He has favor towards them to the extent they are faithful because He has given them His Law. Yes, the Jewish people do have a connection and a way to be in communication with the Holy Father, and that is encouraging. But outside of that, the rest of us need Jesus.



There are sincere Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims. Does God hear their prayers, even though they are not directly praying to Jehovah God?

Buddhists do not believe in a divine being, so they would not be praying as we know it. Hindus pray to multiple deities, none of which have anything to do with Jehovah God. Muslims pray to Allah, not Jehovah.

If we call Rick on the phone, we cannot expect to talk to Julie. Picture it like having to dial “1-800-ONLY-GOD” in order to get in touch with Him. Answerable prayer is based on faith in God, so we want to be dialing God’s number and not some deity’s number, not some idol’s number, not some tradition’s number, not some emotion’s number, but the number that connects us to our Holy God, which, for Christians, comes through the righteousness of Jesus.



This is a journey that usually begins with appreciation of God and Christ, and then has the ability to grow into a vibrant faith in God and in the sacrifice of Jesus.

An example of one trying this journey is the rich young ruler, who had just told Jesus he had been faithfully keeping the Law:

Mark 10:21-22: (NASB) ²¹Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, *One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.* ²²But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property.

This young man had great appreciation for the words of Jesus but did not have the faith to follow him and leave his possessions behind.



Here is the key to this account. Jesus loved the man and his sincerity but could see he was too attached to his possessions. He did not have the ability or the faith to leave his possessions behind to follow Jesus. While he loved and kept the Law, and was blessed as a result, he was not ready to completely follow Jesus.



When we look at the development of prayer, the closer we get to real, true, honest faith, the more God is apt to hear our prayers. That would apply to the Jewish people if they are being faithful and to Christians who are being faithful to Jesus. We need Jesus. And we know that in God's plan, He will bless everyone through Jesus eventually.

There are requirements for having our prayers heard, and we want to have a proper prayer perspective.



Prayer is not some benefit we get when joining a club. Instead, we must grow into its privilege.

**Can our prayers actually affect change in someone else's life?
If so, can we alter God's will for them?**

For a Christian, the most important thing should always be not to change God's will in any way, but to unequivocally further His will with all our heart. While this may sound like easy "Christian common sense," it often runs into problems

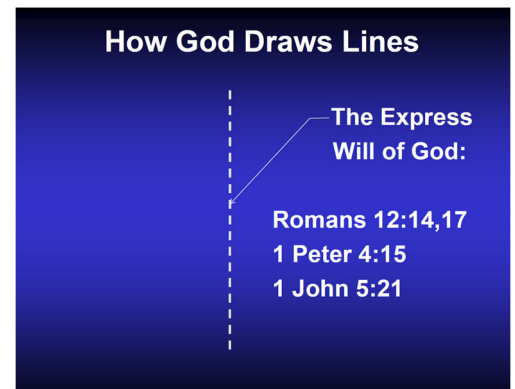


when it comes to praying for what we want. We want to be focused and make sure that our motivation is not keyed on changing God's will but following it instead.

We want to excerpt a few passages from an excellent sermon called "Drawing Lines" from Joe Megacz. He explained how much of our Christian lives are spent learning where to draw lines - between truth and error and righteousness and sin - so that we make the right decisions and pray for the right things. This discussion turned to how God draws lines for us that have to do with His will beyond just the black and white of what is acceptable or not acceptable. Here Joe starts us off in the discussion about the express will of God.

The express will of God, Joe Megacz

- The express will of God is like a line down the center of a roadway, and it applies to all of us. We are all to stay on that line and not deviate off of that line to the right or the left. God's will as represented by that line is expressly stated in the Scriptures, hence the name, "express will of God." Among the many examples of the express will of God are Paul's words in Romans 12:14 and 17, "Bless them which persecute you." "Provide things honest in the sight of all men." In 1 Peter 4:15 we read, "Let none of you suffer as a busybody in other men's matters." And lastly, from the Apostle John in 1 John 5:21, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." And there are, of course, many more examples of the express will of God.*



It is pretty simple. Black and white. These are things we HAVE to do or NOT do. It will get more complicated in our next segment.

We do believe that prayer can effect change, not only in ourselves but in others as well.



One often neglected partner of prayer is ACTION.



As we look at some prayer examples, focus on the theme that combining fervent action and fervent prayer can bring focused change:

Matthew 7:7: (NASB) *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

Ask, seek and knock! Prayer needs action! Let's not forget the action part of this. Prayer needs us to live what we are praying.

Prayer would be empty without the faith that necessarily drives it:

Hebrews 11:6: (NASB) *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.*



Here is an important question. When we pray for others, is it to benefit THEM or US?



SOME SAY: This prayer is for US. We become more sympathetic by nicely thinking of this person and talking to God about it. This might move us to send them a card or call them with encouragement. Because we pray for each other, we all feel closer together and closer to God by talking to Him.



BUT OTHERS SAY: That person we are praying for directly benefits from our prayer. They might receive a special blessing from God because we asked Him! Which leads to the question, if I DO NOT pray for that person, does God NOT give them everything they need? Is everyone I know dependent on MY petitions somehow for their blessings? If so, my prayer list needs to get a lot longer!

We will touch on James 5:16 at the end of this segment, but as it states, *the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* This means that prayers actually affect the lives of others.

We will look at some examples of the prayers and actions of Jesus for others.

First, Jesus expressed to Peter that he had ALREADY prayed for him; he knew Peter would be tested and he interceded for him ahead of time:

Luke 22:31-34: (NASB) ³¹Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; ³²but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers. ³³But he said to him, Lord, with you I am ready to go both to prison and to death! ³⁴And he said, I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know me.

Jesus was saying: My prayer is protecting you. Prayer is part of God's arsenal to keep us safe. He was telling Peter that he prayed for him, knowing that Peter would stumble on this horrific night despite Peter's assurance that he would not. Jesus also says *when once you have turned again* - he knew Peter's heart was true and that he would once again take up his ministry.



Even though Jesus knew that Peter would return to faithfulness in the future (he had already proclaimed him to have *the keys of the kingdom* in Matthew 16:19), it did not change the way Jesus brought Peter before the throne of grace. Peter would need grace and humility to minister to his brethren in the future, and Jesus asked God for this so that Peter's *faith may not fail*. God rewarded Jesus' prayer *and* He rewarded Peter!



This prayer would be a powerful part of Peter's future. Even though he would fail by denying the Lord three times, Peter would ultimately stand strong and be able to strengthen the other disciples - including us now. He is a huge influence on our walk. Jesus prayed that victory would be achieved after tragedy. Jesus was not praying this for his own benefit; clearly this was for Peter. But WHAT IF Jesus HAD NOT prayed for Peter? Would Peter not have been victorious in the end?

This is a "what if" question we need to be careful about asking. Jesus was so connected to his Father on all levels, that the question: "What if Jesus did not pray for Peter" was never a possibility because of who Jesus was. This was how his faithfulness was expressed. We would not ask, "What if Jesus did not heal people?" because he was driven to do that by God's spirit. Similarly, he was driven by God's spirit to pray for Peter, knowing what trials Peter would experience that night and in the coming days. This prayer and the rest of the life of Jesus were integral parts of his faithfulness.



When God's spirit puts on our heart and mind to pray for someone, we need to take on that responsibility, keeping the interconnectedness of the brotherhood active on every level. God's spirit drives us to pray for others. There is a heavenly connection between us. It works through God's spirit to help us, bless us, and encourage us. Jesus gives us this example. And when we are in a Bible study or sharing experiences in testimony, we should stop and offer prayer when someone asks for prayers either for themselves or someone else.

Prayer is not just a straight line between us. It is actually more like a flattened triangle where we are the baseline, but we pray by connecting through Jesus to God's holy spirit - His power and influence. This is a big part of how we are connected and how prayers for one another work. Our prayers for one another are not a direct line but go through God's holy spirit and by His grace, God delivers His answer and decision on that prayer.



Second, Jesus prayed for his disciples while in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion:

John 17:15,17-18,20-21: (NASB) ¹⁵I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸As You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ²⁰I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word; ²¹that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in me and I in You, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that You sent me.

Is God going to sanctify them? Yes, because Jesus prayed! Therefore, his prayer DID change things because his FAITHFULNESS changed things. And he could not have been faithful without prayer. Just like he could not have been faithful without obedience, he could not have been faithful without following the Law. All these things had to be present for his faithfulness to be complete.

We do not want to separate prayer out from the rest of a faithful Christian life. It is all part of the same thing. Prayer is the action that drives us toward being completely faithful. Prayer is a required action just like self-sacrifice is a required action for us.



Jesus asked God to care for his disciples as he was leaving them. Wouldn't God have done it anyway? Jesus' prayer for them was fulfilling God's will. It was God's will for Jesus to pray for them because that was what needed to happen, and we know that Jesus always did what needed to be done. God answered Jesus' faithfulness! We should also ask on behalf of others, for that is also God's will. By bending our will and prayers to God's will, we begin to learn how to live what we pray.

Another example of benefitting the one that we are praying for is when the Apostle Paul wrote to Philemon:

Philemon 1:22: (KJV) *But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.*

Paul tells Philemon that because of his prayers, God will deliver Paul to him.

Daniel was in Babylon for DECADES and prayed for the restoration of Israel and return to their home:

Daniel 9:17-19: (NASB) ¹⁷So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake... ¹⁸O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. ¹⁹O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

Would God have delivered Israel without Daniel's prayers? Remember, it was Daniel's faithfulness that was the catalyst for Israel's release from their 70-year captivity. God's providence waited for Daniel's faithfulness and prayers to release them. Daniel lived what he prayed.

Obviously, Daniel did not start praying in year 69, month 10 of the 70 years of captivity. He kept living faithfully and praying his whole life and would have done so even if he never saw the deliverance in his lifetime. Was God just waiting for the right king to be in place? Why did it take so long to have the prayer answered?

70 years of captivity was a prophecy given a long time prior. This number was the fulfillment of this particular period of punishment. Several things needed to be put in place and Daniel was the focal point of all of this. Why did it take



so long? Because this was God's timeframe. Daniel was the faithful conduit of God's will and therefore his prayers were answered, as were his actions. Why? Daniel was God's chosen one, knowing he would do what he was supposed to do. Like Peter, or Paul, James, or Ezekiel, he was that person who was there at that time, in that place, in that role.

If Daniel had not prayed for Israel, would they still be in captivity? If God was going to do it anyway, what was the point of Daniel praying? God was going to move Israel forward after the captivity. He put Daniel in place to accomplish this. We like to try to take things apart to see if we can find a flaw, but there isn't one. God uses individuals to carry forth His plans. If Daniel had not been praying or had not been faithful, God would have raised up another prophet.



The partnership of prayer and action is aptly shown in James 5:13-18. These verses also show us the need for true faith over appreciation and are focused on spiritual sickness, not physical illness. Note that the word *suffering* here means "to undergo hardship."

James 5:13: (NASB) *Is anyone among you **suffering** <2553>? Then he must pray...*

Suffering: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2553 *kakopatheo*; to undergo hardship

Faith requires hardship and prayer to be two interlocking pieces of a true Christian's experiences.

Prayer needs to accompany hardship:

James 5:13-14: (NASB) ¹³...*Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.* ¹⁴*Is anyone among you **sick** <770>? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.*



Sick: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #770 *astheneo*; to be feeble (in any sense)

We should ask for strength - not miracles! Action and prayer are companions.

What about people who are not in a church OR within their church environment, and they are not seeing much of this scripturally-based connectivity that is so important?

If we are in an environment where we are not seeing a scripturally-based approach to prayer, we need to seek it out. It is so important to pray appropriately before God, our Father. He is the Almighty Creator of all things.

Speaking of actions, we recently had a listener named Evan message us from the Christian Questions app (free in your app store). He asked if it was a sin to pray while doing other things like eating, playing games and normal daily activities if we pray with our eyes open and while still doing that activity.

Romans 12:12 tells us to *be instant in prayer* which in the Greek means "constantly diligent" and in a state of readiness. Are there rules to prayer - certain body positions, hand placements or words spoken?



It is important to remember that if we are praying while doing something else during the day, our prayers must maintain sacredness at those times. They must never be flippant; that is not appropriate. We never approach God in “fun.” Rick gets up from his desk periodically during the day and goes to the window to pray and then starts work again. He makes a conscience effort to check in with the Almighty Father from whom he wants guidance. We need to maintain a subservience, a loyalty to His will during prayer. We are enjoined to *pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18), to have an attitude of prayer always with us. It can be without the formal words, but with sobriety, talking to the Father through Jesus in your heart.



Remember, James said *faith without works is dead* in James 2:26. How about this - prayer without action is not complete. We need to live what we are praying to the very best of our ability.

If we want God to answer our prayers, we need to treat prayer much more reverently than just asking a favor.

**What do “hearable and answerable” prayers look like?
Do they have specific ingredients or a specific process?**

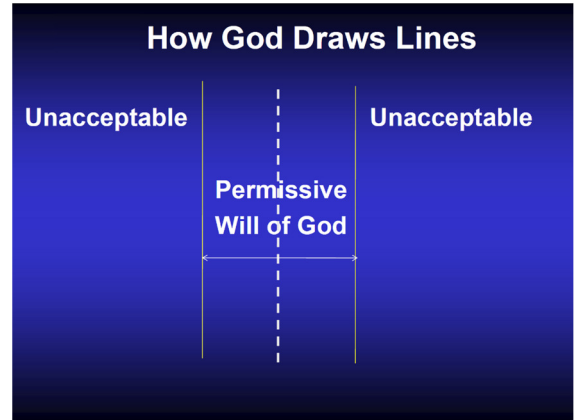
The very thought of our prayers being heard by God, the Creator of all things, should cause us to pause and consider His loftiness compared to our tiny little lives. With this contrast in mind, we should absolutely expect that this communication called prayer would follow some very specific guidelines. We want to adhere to these guidelines in order to honor God in our prayers.

Let's drop back in on the sermon by Joe Megacz called, “Drawing Lines.” He explained there are certain things in God's express will for us. Any deviation to the left or right is unacceptable. But now he is going to explain the permissive will of God that applies to all of us to help us pray correctly.

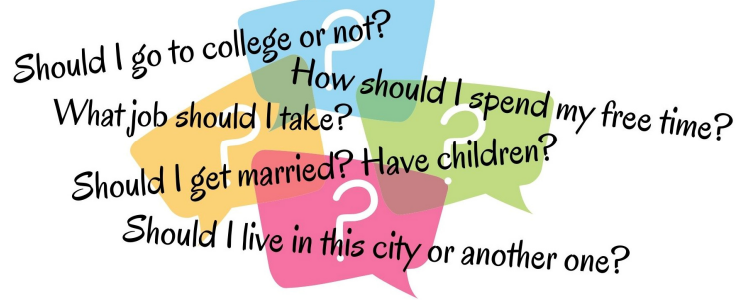


The permissive will of God, Joe Megacz

- *The other part of this illustration is called “the permissive will of God.” The permissive will of God is not expressly stated in the Scriptures. In the permissive will of God, we have some leeway to choose our actions and make decisions within boundaries that are broader than the express will of God. And so, in our illustration, the permissive will of God is drawn as the shoulder markings on each side of a roadway. We can move to the left or to the right as long as we stay within these outer lines so that we don’t go off the roadway. Everything within these two lines is in accordance with God’s permissive will. Anything beyond these lines, on either side, is not in accordance with God’s permissive will, and therefore unacceptable. Now, while the express will of God, clearly stated in the Scriptures, applies to all of us uniformly, the permissive will of God is more individual. It is a part of God’s training and shaping and molding each of us, individually, into copies of His dear son.*



Examples of important actions, decisions and choices each of us is given to make within the boundaries of God’s permissive will, are:



In Episode 1167, we provided a decision tree (please see on next page) to help each of us make sure we are using our spare time wisely to maintain spiritual excellence.

It is important we all personally strive to stay within the lines of that roadway.

James 5:15: (NASB) and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is **sick <2577>**, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

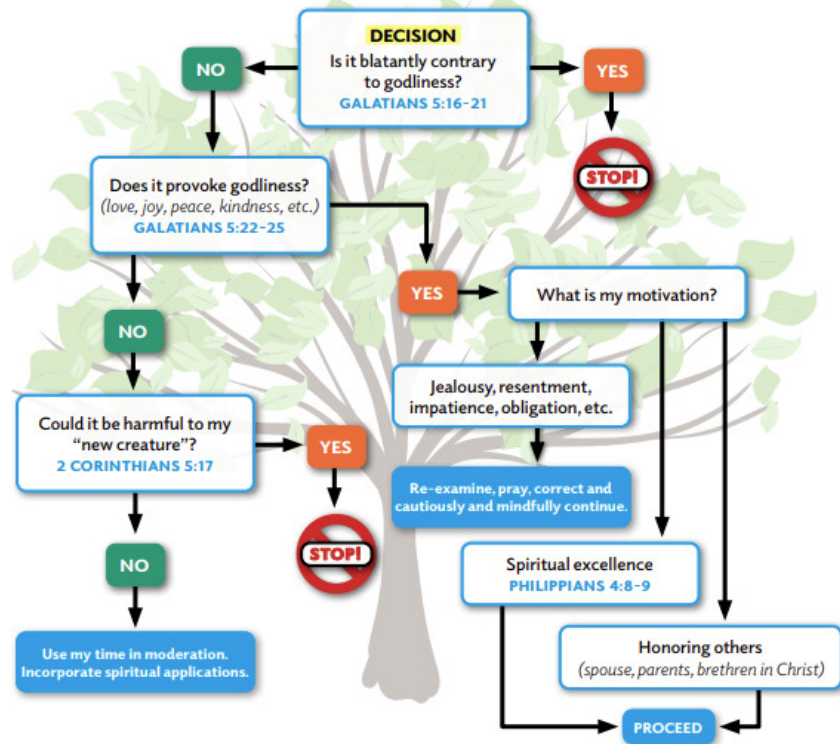
Sick: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #2577 *kamno*; properly, to toil, i.e. (by implication) to tire (figuratively, faint, sicken)

Remember, this is not a physical sickness. We do not think praying for physical healing is appropriate.



The how and why of early Christian healing and its place today

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31 (NASB)
Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.



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Hearable and answerable prayers are prayers of faith that seek to restore a disciple whose life has turned towards sin. Our actions verify the sincerity of these prayers.

This tells us our prayers DO affect other people and are not just for the benefit of ourselves. But where does the “action” part come in? If I am praying for you, maybe I move forward to call or send an email, but is that enough? Is it a requirement that I always tell you I am praying for you? We do not want this to become a checklist of what we have to do in order to make prayer count.

Prayer should not be based on a checklist; it should be a sincere extension of what we would like to see happen. If we are praying for someone going through a difficult trial, it should not be a casual mention to the Father and then we forgot about it. We should show our care for them - maybe it is an encouraging phone call or text. We want to make sure we are living what we are asking for. Our sincerity shows in the actions we take to follow up on our prayers.

While not required, telling the person you are praying for them can be a big comfort to them!

The result of the prayers of Cornelius the Centurion who became the first Gentile convert:

Acts 10:2-4: (NASB) ²a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually. ³About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, Cornelius!



⁴And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, What is it, Lord? And he said to him, Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.

As a Gentile, Cornelius was outside of the favor of God but praying continuously. When the time came, an angel appeared with an answer.



Hearable and answerable prayers are prayers that are offered in sincerity and sometimes require a waiting period before being answered. Waiting does not automatically mean no; it does mean it is not God's time.

This might be the hardest part of prayer - not knowing if it is being heard or not, or if we are just waiting for the right timing in God's providence. The point is, Cornelius had no idea what would happen but was faithful anyway. We talked about Daniel not knowing if the captivity would end, but he was faithful anyway. We still have to live faithful lives to the best of our ability and continue praying with sincere, honest motivation. We may NOT be delivered from a hard experience. Whatever happens or does not happen, if we are faithfully following in the footsteps of Jesus, we can trust the experience - and its waiting period - is for our highest spiritual welfare.

Romans 8:26: (WEY) *In the same way the spirit also helps us in our weakness; for we do not know what prayers to offer nor in what way to offer them. But the spirit itself pleads for us in yearnings that can find no words,*

Sometimes there is just heartbreak or we are so overcome with emotion that we cannot find words for our prayers. This might apply to our own experiences or those of someone else. We may not know all our brother or sister is going through, but we can still put the heartfelt prayer before the Lord and let God's spirit fill in the gaps. This helps us understand how strong prayers can be.



Hearable and answerable prayers are prayers that are offered in exasperation and sincerity as we struggle to sort out our trials and emotions. With God's spirit advocating, our actions verify the sincerity of these prayers.

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed. – *British poet and hymn writer James Montgomery in the year 1818*

Our prayers should come from a heart overflowing with gratitude and an overwhelming desire to be in harmony with our heavenly Father. But when our circumstances are desperate, this is difficult. Why is my child's cancer not being cured? Why is my loved one on life support? I am a good person - why aren't my prayers being answered? How does God's spirit fit into this?

God's spirit fits into this by helping us to pray that God's will be done rather than what we want. As harsh as it seems, sometimes suffering is necessary. Sometimes the loss of a loved one is necessary, but that is not the end for them. Jesus died for them and everyone else. This is part of the experience of sin. We are promised as Christians to suffer with the world so that we can learn and teach others in the future.

Colossians 1:8-10: (NASB) ⁸and he also informed us of your love in the spirit. ⁹For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you



will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Paul took action to write out his prayer for the Colossians. That is an example of actively living in prayer.



Hearable and answerable prayers are prayers for the brotherhood's highest spiritual maturity. Our actions verify the sincerity of these prayers.

We are not trying to change God's mind with our prayers; we want to support His providence working in our lives. God's spirit (His power and influence) will "advocate" for us, helping us to be focused on His will. This will help us to connect with those we pray for. We pray to God for others through His holy spirit and then His spirit and will are returned to them with an answer.



Luke 6:27-28: (NASB) ²⁷But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Hearable and answerable prayers are prayers that truly want the goodness of God to grace the lives of those who are enemies. Our actions verify the sincerity of these prayers.

There is a corresponding action for this one, too! Just praying for our enemies is hard enough, but now we have to actively do good for them? This is hard for everyone.

<p>shall speak well of their fathers to the 27 ¶ But I say unto you, which hate you, 28 Bless them that pray for them that hate you.</p>	 <p>Episode 1015: Condemned to Death, How Did Jesus Love His Enemies?</p>
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Watching "love your enemies" unfold in Jesus' last days

If Jesus could do it, we can try hard to do it, too. Our prayers should aspire to this level.

2 Thessalonians 3:1: (NASB) Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you;



Hearable and answerable prayers are prayers that seek for the gospel to be spread which will glorify God. Our actions verify the sincerity of these prayers.

We should not expect whimsical prayers to be taken seriously. “God, please let my sports team win the big game.” Or bargaining prayers like, “I’ll go to church every Sunday if only I can win the lottery this week.” These are ineffective, unacceptable kinds of prayers.

Hebrews 13:18: (NASB) *Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.*



Hearable and answerable prayers are prayers that will help us build powerfully on the godly foundation we have been given. Our actions verify the sincerity of these prayers.

Our prayer is not as sincere as saying it and *leaving* it, as saying it and *living* it.

James 4:13-15: (NASB) ¹³*Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit. ¹⁴Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵Instead, you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.*

While this is not an example of a prayer, it is an example of a prayer attitude.



Hearable and answerable prayers are prayers that clearly first seek God’s will and are willing to follow His providence only. Our actions verify the sincerity of these prayers.

It is interesting when people testify, “God answered my prayers!” only when the answer was positive to them. Sometimes the answer is an even more difficult experience, yet we rarely pray, “Thank you, Father, for not answering my prayer.” We are not supposed to be thankful only when it is convenient or it lined up with our wishes. It comes down to God’s will, not ours. Jesus is the perfect example of this.



We do not just stumble into getting prayers answered. Instead, we need to intentionally seek God’s will.

If the Bible is so clear, why does the power and appropriate usage of prayer get so easily confused?

Why would we be surprised at prayer being easily misunderstood and misrepresented? Because true prayer is communing with our most powerful

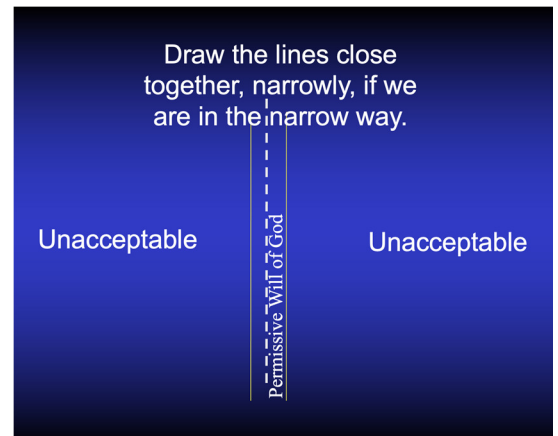


and wise Heavenly Father, its counterfeit has become a very profitable commodity being peddled as a way to happiness, ease, health and wealth, none of which are promised to the Christian.

Let's finish up with the thoughts of Joe Megacz on the will of God from his sermon about the lines of acceptability we draw, and the lines God draws for us. What about those questions we have specific to us where the Bible does not give a personalized answer?

The will of God, Conclusion, Joe Megacz

- *There are no scriptures that expressly give each of us, individually, the answers to those questions in our own particular circumstances. However, there are many scriptural principles and precepts, which guide our words and actions and help us determine where those outer lines are for each of us. And when we seek to discern God's permissive will for us, through prayer and the study of His Word, perhaps we do well to draw the lines close together, narrowly, because we are in the narrow way. The important understanding we should gain from this illustration is that God can shape us and train us and mold us into copies of Jesus as long as we seek to discern - and stay in between - the two lines that mark God's permissive will.*



He talked about *the narrow way*. This reference is found in [Matthew 7:14](#) and [Luke 13:24](#). We want to keep prayer and all of our actions in between the narrow lines of God's will for us.

Let's look at the way prayer can be misused:

[John 14:13](#): (NASB) *Whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the son.*

How easily this text and others can be interpreted to mean we are given a blank check from God! *Whatever you ask in my name*, it will be done! So many take this and run with it, and the only ones who come out ahead are those pushing this false idea (the so-called Prosperity Gospel) to make money off of those who are credulous enough to buy into it. It is a godless activity.

An example of how some twist the Scriptures for their own benefit is the prayer of Jabez. These are two obscure verses in the Bible that some point to as giving a broad definition of getting what we want as long as we are honorable.

His brief history is dropped into the genealogy of Judah:

[1 Chronicles 4:9-10](#): (NASB) ⁹*Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother named him Jabez saying, Because I bore him with pain.* ¹⁰*Now Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that You would bless me indeed and enlarge my border, and that Your hand might be with me, and that You would keep me from harm that it may not pain me! And God granted him what he requested.*

(Source: Jamieson, Fausset & Brown Commentary) His prayer... seems to have been uttered when he was entering on an important or critical service, for the successful execution of which he placed confidence neither on his own nor his people's prowess, but looked anxiously for the aid and blessing of God.

In the Old Testament, physical rewards (land, cattle, prosperity) for faithfulness were connected with God's dealings with Israel. God's blessings at that time were physical in nature. This is in contrast with the spiritual blessings promised to the Christian in the New Testament.

Some commentaries suggest there were border skirmishes with the Canaanites. Perhaps Jabez was involved in one of these, and knowing that God had promised this land would be theirs, he is praying for the land of promise to come true. However, we cannot take this prayer and arbitrarily apply it to ourselves.

Jabez asked God to enlarge his border. While we do not pray for physical health and wealth, we could appropriately pray for:



An enlarged heart that is open and honest. Every Christian should pray for a heart that communicates freely and honestly with all.

The Apostle Paul talked about having an enlarged heart towards the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 6:11-13: (ASV) ¹¹Our mouth is open unto you, O Corinthians, our heart is enlarged. ¹²Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own affections. ¹³Now for a recompense in like kind (I speak as unto my children), be ye also enlarged.

Also:

Psalm 119:32: (KJV) *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.*



An enlarged vision - the more we study the ways of Christ we find new treasures and new reasons to stay faithful and press on. We want to know more about the Bible and God's plan for mankind.

Proverbs 29:18: (KJV) *Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.*



An enlarged scope of activity - we can pray for an increased zeal and service in the Lord's work in spreading the gospel message.

Luke 19:24: (KJV) *Take from him the pound, and give to him that hath ten pounds.*

Each faithful steward of the Lord is rewarded with further responsibilities. We must zealously fulfill the privileges we are given.



Luke 16:10: (KJV) *He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*

Praying for increased zeal does NOT mean we sit on our chair, watching TV, waiting for God to zap us with increased zeal. It requires action! We have to *go do something to make it happen*. Search out the opportunities.

We take this prayer of Jabez on a spiritual rather than a physical level at this point in Christian history. How could we take this prayer of subservience and humility and have the audacity to apply it to our own earthly desires? It is a misrepresentation of Scripture!



Inappropriate prayers can be built upon misinterpreted Scriptures that bring us to egotistical conclusions.

Another example of misuse:

James 4:3-4: (NASB) ³*You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.* ⁴*You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

This is talking about motive. When our motives are wrong, when we ask for the wrong things, our prayers are not answered. It is easy to rationalize wanting things for the wrong reasons.



Inappropriate prayers can be easily and cunningly fueled by our own human desires which bring us to standing against God and not for Him.

This is a written prayer from another “Christian” group:

(Source: New Birth War Room - Financial Declarations): Lord, release the wealth of the wicked into my hands (Proverbs 13:22). I claim, command, and seize my wealth now in the name of Jesus. All nations will call me blessed, and I will be a delightful land (Malachi 3:12). My gates are open continually that the forces (wealth) of the nations can come into my life (Isaiah 60:11). I am the righteous of Christ and now is the time for the wealth that has been stored up for me to be released in the name of Jesus.

Zoinks! We went over this kind of selfish and completely inappropriate prayer in Episode 1188. This kind of prayer goes by all kinds of catchy names like “decree and declare,” “name it and claim it,” “confess it and possess it.” It is just not the way prayers work.



Distinguishing God's power from our own desires in our daily life

This kind of “decree and declare” attitude comes from the misapplication of several scriptures, including:

Job 22:23,27-28: (NASB) ²³If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored; if you remove unrighteousness far from your tent...²⁷You will pray to Him, and He will hear you; and you will pay your vows. ²⁸You will also decree a thing, and it will be established for you; and light will shine on your ways.

Job 22:28 was spoken by one of Job's "friends," Eliphaz the Temanite. He lied about telling Job that God was punishing him for his sins and that Job was secretly wicked. His advice was that in order to get back on track, Job needed to (Amplified Bible) *delight in the Almighty, lift up thy face unto God, make thy prayer unto Him and then anything Job decreed, it shall be established unto him.*

God challenges Job in Job 38. Job sees the greatness of God and repents - not of evil living, but of his doubts in Job 42:1-6.

Job 42:7: (NASB) *It came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is trustworthy, as My servant Job has.*

God was angry! The text some Christians use to say we should “decree and declare” to God for personal gain (Job 22:28) was an example of what NOT to do. Here they use it to justify demanding (and expecting) increased wealth from God. It is an insult to God and a gross misrepresentation of Scripture.



Inappropriate prayers can be adopted into our thinking because we are taught by those who hypocritically represent God that they are not only acceptable, but they are desirable.

We have been going over many examples of “hearable and answerable” prayer, looking at both appropriate and inappropriate motivations. We have looked at having God’s spirit work with us in carrying our prayers to Him and then effecting a result for the one for whom we are praying.



Check out our CQ Kids videos:
WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?
christianquestions.com/youtube



Check out our CQ Kids videos:
WHY IS PRAYER IMPORTANT?
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The title of this episode is, Why Aren't My Prayers Being Answered? If you find yourself asking this question, then ask:

Do I pray for my comfort **OR** do I pray for God's plan in my life to unfold?

Do I pray for God to provide me with shortcuts in life **OR**
do I pray for God to show me how to cut my wishful thinking short?

Do I pray for my family's convenience in their hardships **OR**
do I pray for their connection to God and His will?

Do I pray for things and experiences to bring me personal ease **OR**
do I pray for the things and experiences in my life
to provoke in me important personal growth?

Do I pray to give God my perspective to influence His decisions regarding me **OR**
do I pray to be purely subject to His providence in my daily life?

We need to work at being "godly" in our approach to God.

Consider this beautiful text:

Hebrews 4:15-16: (NASB) ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

This verse is talking about going **boldly unto the throne of grace**. This does not mean boldness from a human perspective. It is not egotistically going to God to tell Him what we are demanding, decreeing or declaring. That is not true prayer. Prayer is being bound up in fulfilling the will of God in our lives.



We have a choice in how we are going to approach our prayer life. Will we go to God through Jesus - with humility - to seek God's will and His guidance in our lives? Or, are we going to demand from God what we want?



It is acceptable to ask God for appropriate things as long as we preface our requests stating His will be done.

Pray with appropriateness and watch for His answers.

**So, why aren't my prayers being answered?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!**



Join us next week for our podcast on November 15, 2021
Ep. 1204: Am I Fighting For or Against God?

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.

Bonus Material and Study Questions

Let's observe and learn from the humble petitioning of two of God's faithful servants:

Daniel was in Babylon for YEARS and prayed for the return of Israel to their home:

Daniel 9:17-19: (NASB) ¹⁷So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary. ¹⁸O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. ¹⁹O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

Nehemiah, a rarely spoken of servant of God, was instrumental in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

His prayers and actions brought this most improbable task to fruition:

Nehemiah 1:4-7: (NASB) ⁴When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. ⁵I said, I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, ⁶let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.



Pray for ALL men and for those in authority:

1 Timothy 2:1-6: (NASB) ¹First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ²for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

Why? God wants His truth to go as far and wide as possible:

⁴who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

That truth is the gospel message that they could then and there have an opportunity to respond to:

⁵For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.

Paul, after listing out the armor of God, brings prayer into the picture. He not only entreats the brotherhood to pray but he asks for prayers on his own behalf:

Ephesians 6:18-20: (NASB) ¹⁸With 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, ¹⁹and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Simon the Magician and the need for prayer:

Acts 8:18-24: (NASB) ¹⁸Now when Simon saw that the spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹saying, Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the holy spirit. ²⁰But Peter said to him, May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²²Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity. ²⁴But Simon answered and said, Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.

WHY, HOW and FOR WHAT should we pray?

- **WHY:** The world brings a level of trouble that we cannot cope with on our own.
- **HOW:** As we go through our experiences instinctively, not necessarily needing an outward posture of prayer, but always in the mode of an inner posture of prayer.
- **FOR WHAT:** The sustaining, refilling and balancing of our hearts!

Psalm 43:5: (NRSV) *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God.*

Our personal experiences can drain us emotionally unless we continually refill spiritually:

Ephesians 6:18: (KJV) *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;*

The brotherhood's experiences can drain us emotionally unless we continually refill spiritually.



How, why and for what should we pray?

Another parable of Jesus that illustrates these three points:

Luke 18:9-14: (NASB) ⁹And he also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get. ¹³But the tax collector, 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! ¹⁴I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

A summation of prayer based upon Old and New Testament words:

Prayer: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #7881 *siychah*; reflection; be extension, devotion

Prayer: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #7879 *siyach*; a contemplation; by implication, an utterance

Prayer: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1156 *be` a'* (Aramaic); or *be` ah* (Aramaic) to seek or ask

Prayer: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #6419 *palal*; to judge (officially or mentally); by extension, to intercede, pray

Prayer: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #8605 *tephillah*; intercession, supplication; by implication, a hymn

Supplication in the Old Testament essentially describes a manner in which we are to pray:

Supplication: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #8467 *techinnah*; graciousness; causatively, entreaty

Supplication: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #2603 *chanan*; properly, to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to favor, bestow; causatively to implore (i.e. move to favor by petition)

Prayer in the New Testament:

Prayer: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #4335 *proseuche*; prayer (worship); by implication, an oratory (chapel)

Prayer: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1189 *deomai*; to beg (as binding oneself), i.e. petition

Prayer: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1162 *deesis*; a petition

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SHOW NOTES

1. Does God answer everyone's prayers? If not, what we have to do to have our prayers heard and answered? (See Proverbs 15:8-9,28-29, Isaiah 57:15, Romans 3:10,24-25)
2. What was Jesus' response to the rich young ruler who wanted to follow him? What did he love more than Jesus? How does this apply to *our* Christian walk? (Mark 10:21-22)
3. When we pray for others, does it actually help them or is it only for our own benefit? How do biblical examples help us understand how to pray for others? (See Daniel 9:17, Luke 22:31-34, John 17:15-21, Philemon 1:22, James 5:13-16)
4. How can we pair our prayers with action? Why is this important? What does Hebrews 11:6 say we need before praying? (See Matthew 7:7, James 5:13-16)
5. What are the characteristics of the different types of hearable and answerable prayers? (See Luke 6:27-28, Acts 10:2-4, Romans 8:26, Colossians 1:8-10, 2 Thessalonians 3:1, Hebrews 13:18, James 4:13-15)
6. What are the expressive and permissive wills of God? How do they differ? What are some examples of each? (See Romans 12:14,17, 1 Peter 5:15, 1 John 5:21)
7. How can prayer be misused? What are some ways that our prayers can become inappropriate? (See 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, Job 22:23,27-28,38, 42:1-7, John 14:13, James 4:3-4)
8. What are some things for which it would be appropriate to pray? (See Psalm 119:32, Proverbs 29:18, Luke 16:10, 19:24, 2 Corinthians 6:11-13)
9. What questions should we ask ourselves in order to pray in a godly manner? (See Hebrews 4:15-16)
10. For what do you pray? How will/do you ensure that your prayers are heard by God?