

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Concerns Christians sometimes have Does God answer prayer?

[The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Does God answer prayer?

Well, I am sure this is a question that even the godliest Christian asks at certain times in their lives. I recently lost my brother very suddenly to pancreatic cancer; he was 56 years old. The doctors could do nothing for him, so I prayed to God to perform a miracle. But He never did! Most of us have prayed expecting God to answer in a way that we feel is right as we understand things in human terms. However, when we read what the Bible says our hearts are humbled before our Creator and loving Father God.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55 vv. 8-9). ‘Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out! “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor? Or who has first given to Him, and it shall be repaid to him?” For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen’ (Romans 11 vv. 33-36).

God is a Sovereign God and He has a plan for our lives. God is also a faithful God who will pour His grace into our lives to help us in any time of need. We don't always fully understand God's ways and we question them at times. However, we must trust, rely, and lean upon our loving Father. Why would a father put his child through more than they could bear? Our Father will not.

Does God answer prayer?

We can say emphatically, yes! But we must follow on by saying, not always in the way we think He should. We must also be aware that God answers prayers in His time. Answers to your prayers may not even come in your lifetime, they may come to fruition after the Lord has taken us to be with Himself. Architect Antoni Gaudi spent his lifetime building the famous church in Barcelona called the Sagrada Familia. It is a magnificent building which is full of Biblical themes. He once famously said, ‘My client (God) is in no particular hurry, He has all the time in the world.’ In the world we live in today we expect everything to be instant, and we get impatient with even the slightest hiccup. But that's not the way God works. God has eternity before Him and in humility we read,

‘As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more’ (Psalm 103 vv.15-16).

To answer the question, Does God answer prayer? we really need to investigate God's word the Bible and look at examples of people's prayers and God's response to their prayers.

The prayer of Jabez, 1 Chronicles 4 vv.9-10

Jabez was a man of faith. He honoured God by asking to be blessed. He wanted true happiness which can only be found in a life poured out and committed to God. Jabez asked God for His protecting hand to go with him. He also asked to be kept from evil. This is something that we should pray for every day. Sin is something that robs a child of God of their relationship and joy in the Lord. It was a short, simple, heartfelt prayer, and God granted him what he requested. In his prayer he put God's interests before his own. Jabez's prayer was aligned with God's will, so it was answered as he requested. I am sure none of us pray in God's will every time, so please don't be discouraged. God answers the prayers of His people by His will, not our wishes. If you are walking with God, and you allow Christ to reign in you, you will understand better His thoughts and His ways, therefore your prayers may be more according to His will. Please continue to pray! As it is vital in Christian living.

The prayers of Hannah, 1 Samuel Chs.1-2

God had closed Hannah's womb, so she was unable to have children. Hannah's husband was called Elkanah and he loved her, but he also had another wife called Peninnah with whom he had children. Hannah was miserable because she longed to have children. Peninnah was cruel and took every opportunity to provoke her. Hannah's heart was sad, and she often wept. One day Hannah was praying, her heart was bitter, and she wept in anguish. It was a silent prayer quietly in her heart. Hannah prayed and asked the LORD to look upon her and the affliction that she had. She continued in her prayer to ask for a boy child and promised that once he was weaned, she would give him back to the LORD so he could serve the LORD for the rest of his life. The LORD answered Hannah's prayer, she was given a boy and she named her boy Samuel, which means 'asked of God'. Hannah kept her promise to the LORD and lent Samuel back to Him after weaning. Surely our human instinct would be to ask why did God have to put Hannah through this grief? Why did He not just allow her to have children in the first place? We don't know the answer, but it was God's way! It was a time of testing for Hannah, and she came through it well. Samuel was a chosen man in his generation and served God and the people of Israel faithfully all his life. Hannah later continued in her prayers with a joyful heart, with thanksgiving, praise, and adoration to God. Hannah went on to have a further three sons and two daughters. In life we don't understand the why, but we do know that God is faithful,

'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us' (Ephesians 3 v.20).

God uses times of testing to bring us closer to the Lord.

The prayers of the Lord Jesus

The question you may be asking is, why Jesus a man, yet God, prayed to His Father. This is a good question. When Jesus came into this world He did so in humility, in obedience, and in subjection to His Father. Jesus became a man, a human being just like you and me. Jesus felt the same emotion and feelings as we do. He was tempted by Satan, but He did not sin. He felt tiredness. He felt loss and sorrow. He felt rejection. He felt anguish and pain. The Lord Jesus while He walked through this world communicated with God, His Father in prayer. Jesus regularly took Himself away to the Mount of Olives to pray alone. It is wonderful and comforting to know that Jesus continues to intercede for us at the right hand of God in Heaven (Romans 8 v.34).

Let's look at some of the Lord's prayers and how they were answered. In Matthew 26, Mark 14, and in Luke 22, we are given an insight into the prayers and the agony of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus took James, John, and Peter with Him and He told them that He was sorrow-

ful and deeply distressed even to death. The magnitude of the cross was weighing heavy on His soul. He the holy One was about to be made sin for us. He was about to lay down His life in sacrifice before a righteous God. Three times He prayed the same prayer. "O My Father if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." His agony was real as 'His sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground.' Jesus asked His Father if there was any other way that God could be satisfied and be able to forgive the sins of the world rather than what He was about to go through. Heaven was silent! His prayer was heard but God's plan needed to be executed and this was the only way. Jesus accepted God's will. Dear friend, how many times we feel that heaven is silent to our prayers? Jesus in deep anguish prayed for that bitter cup of judgement to be removed but it was never going to be. God has a plan for our lives and sometimes we need to go through times of extreme anguish for our lives to be perfected by Him. His will must be done!

In John 17 we are privileged to hear the communication between God the Father and God the Son. Jesus prays for His disciples, for us, for protection and sanctification for the church, and that God would be glorified in Him. Jesus is anxious and concerned for His disciples knowing that He was about to leave them. They were hated as much as He was. Jesus prays that they would be protected from the evil one (Satan). He prays that they will be sanctified, or (set apart) by the truth of God's word. As we know it wasn't long after this that Peter denied the Lord. We could reverently say that the prayer of Jesus was not answered. However, we must remember the work of Satan will continue to tempt mankind until he is removed from this world. On the other hand, His prayer is answered as God sends the Holy Spirit to guide and protect the Christian, and to convict men and woman of sin and of judgement to come. Jesus also prays for those who will believe in Him, you and me. Is that not amazing! Before He lays down His life for us, He prays that we will also be kept, that we will be with Christ one day, and that we will see His glory. How wonderful! The prayers of the Lord Jesus were fully in accord with the mind and will of God. His prayers were and will be answered.

Jonah's prayer of repentance, Jonah 2

Jonah was a prophet of Israel. God sent Jonah to preach at Nineveh, which was 500 miles north-east of Palestine and the capital city of Israel's prime enemy. Jonah knew that God was a merciful and forgiving God, so he did not want the people to repent and come into blessing. Jonah on hearing God's call disobeyed and took a ship in the opposite direction to a place called Tarshish which was 2000 miles to the west. But God had His eye on Jonah. A great storm brewed and even the hardy sailors were afraid. Jonah owned up to the sailors that he had run away from God, and that it was his fault the storm had come. Jonah got the sailors to throw him overboard. Jonah thought his end had come and he would drown in the tempestuous sea. But little did Jonah know that God had prepared a great fish to swallow him and keep him safe. Jonah came to his senses, and he prayed a prayer of repentance and thanksgiving to God for saving his life. 'I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, and He answered me.' After three days the great fish spewed out Jonah on to a beach. Jonah then heard the call of God again, and this time he did what God asked him to do.

As we can see from the example of Jonah, that God has a plan for each of our lives. Jonah because of his disobedience had to go through a time of real trial. God's will had to be done by Jonah. Jonah feared God but his own pride got in the way. Jonah had stopped speaking to God and had run away. However, God is gracious and kind with His servants. Sometimes we need to learn the hard way in our lives. But God's ear is always open to listen to our prayerful cries. It was a good job God answered Jonah's prayer immediately or he would have drowned!

One of the shortest prayers in the Bible is in Matthew 14 vv.30-31 where Peter in his bravado stepped out of the boat and walked toward Jesus. He had his eyes fixed on Jesus. But when he became aware of the wind and the boisterous waves he began to sink. Peter cried out 'Lord, save Me!' 'Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him.' This is a special prayer to me. It was over 50 years ago in my grandfather's garage after a gospel meeting, and under the convic-

tion of sin, I uttered these very words. And the Lord saved me! Thank God that He heard my cry and answered my prayer!

So, does God answer our prayers?

Yes, He does! We again go to the Bible to get evidence that God answers prayer. Matthew 21 v.22,

‘And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.’

Believing! Well, that’s a challenge to us all.

1 John 5 vv.14-15,

‘Now in this confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have petitions that we have asked of Him.’

John 15 v. 16.

‘Whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.’

He (may) give you!

James 5 v.18,

‘The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.’

Prayer changes things!

Prayer is our way to communicate with God our Father. God speaks to us through His Word and through other believers. Prayer is a vital element of a Christian’s life. God wants to hear our prayers. Often, we don’t know what to say, but the Holy Spirit guides us as to what to ask. Paul was a man of prayer, as we read several times that he knelt to pray. God did not always give Paul what he asked for. He had an illness that God never took away from him. Often, he had to wait for his prayers to be answered. But God heard and answered his prayers when directed in love and care for the Christians he loved.

Remember again the prayer of our dear Lord in John 12 v.27 (paraphrased),

‘Is there any other way? Save me from this hour. What shall I say? Not My will but Yours be done.’

I say again heaven was silent as there was no other way. The Lord Jesus had to lay down His life so that we could be forgiven. God’s will had to be done.

Dear friend, as I said at the beginning of this talk, God did not answer my prayer in the way that I wanted. However, I don’t think I was wrong to ask Him to heal my brother in a miraculous way. But the will of God was, that he would not be healed. God took Him after a very short illness to be with the Lord Jesus. I don’t understand why, he was doing so much for the Lord. For example, he was one of Truth for Today’s speakers. But God’s ways are past finding out, He has a plan for our lives, and we must accept it, however short or however long, and continue to put our full trust in Him. One day when we are with the Lord, He will explain and help us to understand the answers to all our prayers. Let me encourage you if you are feeling that heaven is silent to any of your prayers with a lovely song, ‘I will wait for you’ by Keith and Kristyn Getty, based on Psalm 130:

Out of the depths I cry to You
In darkest places I will call
Incline Your ear to me anew
And hear my cry for mercy Lord.

Were You to count my sinful ways
How could I come before Your throne
Yet full forgiveness meets my gaze
I stand redeemed by grace alone.

I will wait for You, I will wait for You
On Your word I will rely.
I will wait for You, surely wait for You
Till my soul is satisfied.

So put Your hope in God alone
Take courage in His power to save
Completely and forever won
By Christ emerging from the grave.

Now He has come to make a way
And God Himself has paid the price
That all who trust in Him today
Find healing in His sacrifice.

I will wait for You, I will wait for You
Through the storm and through the night
I will wait for You, surely wait for You
For Your love is my delight.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on 'Does God answer prayer?' in our 'Concerns Christians sometimes have' series. Talk No. T1323.

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