

Why Doesn't God Answer My Prayers?



The Frustration of Unanswered Prayer

How many times have you earnestly prayed for something, only to wait in vain for an answer from God? You don't have to be a Christian long to recognize that we don't always get what we pray for! Why doesn't God seem to answer all our prayers? Is it because we aren't praying properly, or have we simply failed to recognize the fact that God has already answered our prayer?

Our ideas about prayer and God's ideas about prayer are sometimes very different. Look at Jesus' model for prayer offered in the Gospel of Luke



Luke 11:2-4

And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

Now let's take a deeper look at Jesus' model for prayer and see if we can learn something about the nature of prayer and the nature of the God who answers prayer:



1 Recognizing the Holy Nature of God

Notice here that Jesus begins by praising God and recognizing His holiness. He wants God's will to be accomplished first, even before asking for anything for Himself. Now honestly, are your prayers like this? The Bible tells us that we must put God first if we want our prayers to be heard:



Ezekiel 14:3

Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put right before their faces the stumbling block of their iniquity. Should I be consulted by them at all?



John 15:7

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

We are called to abide in God first and to put aside all other idols in our lives before we come to our Holy Creator to ask Him for something. How often are we truly able to do this (how often do we even WANT to do this?)



2 Recognizing Our Desperate Need Related to Forgiveness

The last part of Jesus' prayer is centered entirely on the truth about each of us as believers. Jesus recognizes our need for forgiveness and our need to forgive others. And more importantly, Jesus recognizes our natural fallen tendency to slip into sin and the need we have for God's help in this area. Do your prayers recognize the reality of

who you are? The Bible says that we must be honest about our sinful condition if we want our prayers to be heard



Isaiah 59:1-2

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.

Honest confession is often missing from our conversations with God, but the need for forgiveness was not omitted by the only perfect man who ever lived, Jesus Christ. If He is modeling this for us, it must be important to God. But more critically, our need to examine our fallen nature is important to us because it helps us to see God for who he really is (especially when compared to us!)



Recognizing the Simplicity of Our Material Need

And right in the middle of the Lord's prayer, Jesus submits a simple request: "give us this day our daily bread". Simple, immediate and humble. The request is focused more on our 'needs' rather than our 'wants', and it asks for no more than what is required in the 'here and now'. Jesus asks for more than His own needs; His prayer is concerned with the needs that all of us have.



Proverbs 21:13

He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered.

Are your prayers this humble and self-sacrificial? The Bible says that we must be concerned with the needs of others if we want our prayers to be heard.



So Why Doesn't He Answer?

Now, even if you do pray the way that Jesus taught us to pray, you may sometimes feel like God hasn't answered your prayer! That's because most of us think that the only acceptable answer to prayer is "yes". If you are a follower of Christ, you can have confidence that God will always say "yes" to your request for wisdom, forgiveness, or salvation.



James 1:5

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.



1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.



Romans 10:13

for "whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved"

But there may be times when God will say “no” or “not yet” to other kinds of requests. It’s not because He doesn’t love you or isn’t listening. Remember, God sees the end from the beginning:



Isaiah 46:10

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'

God has a complete understanding of what is good for us, even if it doesn’t make sense to us at the time:



Isaiah 55:8-9

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares 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.”

Given this reality about the knowledge (omniscience) and kindness (omni-benevolence) of God, we are simply called to pray as Jesus taught us, expecting God to answer us:



Matthew 7:7-11

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

We are called to trust God, even when the answer to our prayer isn’t what we were hoping for:



Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.



Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful

There are many times when we don’t get what we ask for in prayer and then years later are glad that we didn’t get what we first wanted. Has that ever happened to you? As a parent, I’ve had the experience of having to say ‘no’ (or remain silent) to a request made by one of my children, even when I so desperately wanted to make my child happy in the short-term by simply saying ‘yes’. But I knew there was something more valuable in store if I could just help my son or daughter understand the value of waiting, or the danger of actually getting what they were asking for. In those situations, my kids needed to trust my wisdom even if they

couldn't understand my response at the time. I was confident that they would someday understand why I said 'no'. In a similar way, we need to patiently accept whatever answer we get from God, knowing that we will someday understand why He responded the way He did.