

Prayer

And the answer is...

We have learned that there are many elements that make up a prayer – worship, praise, thanksgiving, petition, intercession and confession. When we pray, we may experience or express one or more or all of these areas depending on our situation, feelings, available time, circumstances, etc.

But when it comes down to it, if we were to admit it, most of us pray because we want God to answer our prayers. That is only natural. So, does God always hear and answer our prayers?

The Bible says, *"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."* - I John 5:14, *"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer..."* I Peter 3:12.

If so, then what is an *answer*?

an·swer • [*an-ser, ahn-*] *noun*

1. any spoken or written reply or response to a question or request
2. the *correct or desired response* to a question or request (tests or quizzes)
3. any action serving as a reply or response or acknowledgement
4. the *correct or desired solution* to a problem (mathematics)

What are possible “answers” to typical prayer requests?

- A job
- Money, financial help or blessing
- Healing (physical, emotional)
- Success (job, school, project, test)
- Salvation of friend, neighbor, loved one, family
- Protection, safety
- A date or mate
- Relational healing
- A new car (or even one that runs)
- A new (or bigger) house or maybe just a place to live

Factors:

God's will?
Underlying need?
God's Word?
Wisdom/Common sense?

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: 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 what we asked of him." God answers our prayers according to His will (and according to his wisdom, his love for us, his holiness, etc.).

Where we many times trip up is assuming that we know God's will, because a certain thing makes sense to us! We assume that there is only one right "answer" to a specific prayer, thereby concluding that only THAT particular answer would be God's will. And this is where it gets tough. We live within the limits of time and limits of knowledge. We have only limited information about a situation and the implications of future action on that situation. God's understanding is unlimited. How an event plays out in the course of life or history is something only He knows. And He may have purposes far beyond what we could even imagine. So, God is not going to do something simply because we determine that it must be His will." <http://www.everystudent.com/wires/prayers.html>

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What can affect or impact answers to our prayers?

Sin - Psalm 66:18-20 – *“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!”* (NIV)

Wrong motives - James 4:3 – *“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”* (NIV)

Doubt, unbelief - James 1:5-7 – *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.”* (NIV)

Lack of a relationship with the Lord - When a person is actually a child of God, when the person belongs to God, He knows them and hears their prayers. Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me...my sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”* John 10:14, 27

When it comes to God then, do you really know Him and does He know you? Are we striving to have a relationship with Him that warrants God answering our prayers? Or is God mostly absent or distant or just a convenience in our lives?

Our prayer partner – the Holy Spirit

Romans 8:26-27 - *“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”* ²⁷ *And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.”* (NIV)

How does God hear and/or answer all those prayers at once?

C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* reveals, “I should like to deal with a difficulty that some people find about the whole idea of prayer. A man put it to me by saying ‘I can believe in God all right, but what I cannot swallow is the idea of Him attending to several hundred million human beings who are all addressing Him at the same moment.’ And I have found that quite a lot of people feel this.

Our lives come to us moment by moment in chronological order. God, however, works and exists outside of time. Almost certainly God is not in Time. His life does not consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty tonight, He need not listen to them all in that one little snippet of time which we call ten-thirty. 10:30 – and every other moment from the beginning of the world – is always the Present for Him.”

Book example – character, Author and reader

Because God can take an “eternity” to personally address each and every prayer, we can have the confidence that He does, that He cares, and that ours are not crowded out by all the other prayers He hears. Each prayer is a special moment “out of time” to which He can tenderly and lovingly listen while, at the same time, make His presence felt and known.