

PRAYER

Prayer. What is it? Bible dictionaries provide pages of information about prayer. The American Heritage Dictionary simply says prayer is a reverent petition made to a deity. That definition would imply that prayer is asking a deity (God) for something. But I believe a much simpler definition of prayer is simply talking to God – having a conversation with God. You can't have a relationship with someone you don't talk to. That works both ways. God can't have a relationship with us either if He won't talk to us. Individual prayer defines our personal relationship with God.

God is our Father. He loves us and cares for us just as a father does for any of his children. In our human relationships, we understand that we must talk to people to communicate our ideas, wants, goals and desires. Our relationship with God is no different. God wants us to share with Him the same things. Likewise, God also shares with us His ideas, wants, goals and desires. God took the initiative to start the conversation. How? Initially He did this through His written word. The basics are there for everyone to read. He didn't stop there. God took on human form in the person of Jesus and came to this earth and spoke (communicated) directly to man. He didn't stop here either. Jesus promised that after He left this earth He would send His Spirit to indwell everyone who would be willing to accept Him and to teach us. We read of this promise in John 14:25-26

25 "These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you.

26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. NASB

Just like in any school we are taught by and through communication.

The Holy Spirit goes even farther in helping us to pray. Look at Rom 8:26-27

26 And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. NASB

God the Holy Spirit will take our thoughts and the desires of our hearts that we don't know how to express to the Father in the name of Jesus and express them for us.

Prayer doesn't have to be expressed with eloquent flowery words. God already knows our thoughts and our hearts so why try and express out thoughts and ideas to God with words and terms that we wouldn't normally use? We can talk to God just like we would talk with anyone else.

We can also pray silently. Look at Gen 24:12-14

12 And he said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. 13 Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; 14 now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'; — may she be the one whom Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and by this I shall know that Thou hast shown lovingkindness to my master." NASB

Gen 24:45

"Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder, and went down to the spring and drew; and I said to her, 'Please let me drink.' NASB Abraham's chief servant prayed in his heart (silently) what is recorded in verses 12-14. God heard and answered.

We see examples all through scripture of people praying and God answering. Then we hear the argument that “I pray and nothing happens.” Why? Why does it seem that God hears some people and not others? Let’s look at what God’s word teaches us about prayer – what God communicated to us as to what He wants and expects.

I like what James tells us in James 5:13-18

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 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. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit. NASB

James refers to Elijah as a man that has a nature just like ours. In other words, he was no different than we are. That being the case, then we should also be able to be used by God just as Elijah was. If we aren’t being used to that extent, why? Perhaps it is because we aren’t totally given over to God as bond servants. Let’s look at God’s word and see what He says are reasons why are prayers aren’t answered.

Disobedience. Deut 1:43-45

43 "So I spoke to you, but you would not listen. Instead you rebelled against the command of the LORD, and acted presumptuously and went up into the hill country. 44 And the Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you,

and chased you as bees do, and crushed you from Seir to Hormah. 45 Then you returned and wept before the LORD; but the LORD did not listen to your voice, nor give ear to you. NASB

Israel was told something specific to do. Instead, they disobeyed (rebelled) and therefore God didn't answer their prayer. He told them specifically the reason He didn't answer was because of their disobedience.

Secret sin. Ps 66:18

If I regard wickedness in my heart,
The Lord will not hear; NASB

This phrase means secretly hiding the sin – not confessing it. How foolish. God knows our hearts and what we think and feel.

Indifference. Prov 1:24-33

24 "Because I called, and you refused;
I stretched out my hand, and no one paid attention;
25 And you neglected all my counsel,
And did not want my reproof;
26 I will even laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your dread comes,
27 When your dread comes like a storm,
And your calamity comes on like a whirlwind,
When distress and anguish come on you.
28 "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;
They will seek me diligently, but they shall not find me,
29 Because they hated knowledge,
And did not choose the fear of the LORD.
30 "They would not accept my counsel,
They spurned all my reproof.
31 "So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way,
And be satiated with their own devices.
32 "For the waywardness of the naive shall kill them,

And the complacency of fools shall destroy them.

33 "But he who listens to me shall live securely,
And shall be at ease from the dread of evil." NASB

Fairly self explanatory.

Iniquity. Isa 59:2

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. NASB

These are just a few of the reasons God tells us that will cause Him
not to listen to us. Prayer is a wonderful thing. It is a gift from God
Himself made available to everyone. But for our prayer life to be
successful, we must read God's instruction manual and obey it. God
also tells us clearly what will cause our prayer life to be successful.
Look at the following verses and see the instructions God gives us for
a successful prayer life:

Confession of sin: 2 Chron 7:13-14

13 If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I
command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence
among My people, 14 and My people who are called by My
name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn
from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will
forgive their sin, and will heal their land. NASB

Pray believing: Mark 11:22b-24

Have faith in God. 23 "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this
mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not
doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to
happen, it shall be granted him. 24 "Therefore I say to you, all
things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have
received them, and they shall be granted you. NASB

Live a life of obedience: 1 John 3:21-22

21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. NASB

These are just a few of the reasons God tells us that will cause our prayers to be answered or not.

There is one more issue about prayer that I would like to address and that deals with being diligent in our prayers.

I believe that one reason that our prayers aren't answered is because we give up too soon. I have heard, and I'm sure you have also, that when we pray, if you have to ask more than once then you don't have enough faith and your prayer won't be answered. This is contrary to scripture. Let's take a look at what Jesus taught about this issue. To start with, turn to Luke 11:5-9

5 And He said to them, "Suppose one of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; 6 for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; 7 and from inside he shall answer and say, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' 8 "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs. 9 "And I say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. NASB

and Luke 18:1-8

1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, 2 saying, "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God, and did not respect

man. 3 "And there was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' 4 "And for a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, lest by continually coming she wear me out.' " 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; 7 now shall not God bring about justice for His elect, who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? 8 "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them speedily. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" NASB

God looks for faith and often requires persistence in our prayer life. Jesus taught us in these two parables to pray and not give up. I believe that a lot of the time we don't see our prayers answered is simply because we give up praying before the answer gets to us. I believe that when we pray, God does answer our prayer but there are times when the messenger with the answer is interfered with. It's called spiritual warfare. Paul clears this up for us in Eph 6:12

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. NASB

When God's people pray, things happen on the spiritual realm. God also tells us this and gives us a description of what takes place. It is recorded for us in Dan 10:1-14

1 In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar; and the message was true and one of great conflict, but he understood the message and had an understanding of the vision. 2 In those days I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks. 3 I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all, until the entire three weeks were completed. 4 And on the twenty-fourth day of the

first month, while I was by the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, 5 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. 6 His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult. 7 Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, while the men who were with me did not see the vision; nevertheless, a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves. 8 So I was left alone and saw this great vision; yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength. 9 But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.

10 Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. 11 And he said to me, "O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. 12 Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. 13 "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. 14 "Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future." NASB

Wow! What a lesson God gives us as to what happens when we pray! Daniel fasted and prayed for twenty-one days. An angel was

sent to Daniel the day he started praying, but as Daniel is told, this angel met spiritual opposition. It doesn't specifically state it, but the implication is that if Daniel would have stopped praying before the angel came with the answer, the answer would not have gotten through to him. This section of scripture clearly shows us that his prayer was answered as soon as he asked. But it was Daniel's diligence that dictated the success of his prayer. This example of diligence is exactly what Jesus taught us as recorded in the two examples given from the Gospel of Luke.

In these past three issues of Restoration News we've only scratched the surface of prayer – what it is, what causes our prayers not to be answered and conversely, what causes our prayers to be answered. God clearly tells us what He expects. He tells us what happens when we obey and what happens when we don't. God's plans will be fulfilled with or without us. The beauty is, God in His love and mercy tells us what He is doing and He gives us the opportunity to be a part of fulfilling His plans. There are two things God requires for us to be a part of fulfilling His plan. First, John 6:29

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." NASB

God requires faith in Jesus. Second, God requires obedience. Look at John 8:31-32

31 Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." NASB

"If" we obey and abide in Messiah, then we are His disciples. The benefit of this is in John 15:14-16

14 "You are My friends, if you do what I command you. 15 "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. NASB

Jesus tells us "if" we will put our faith in Him and obey Him, then we are His friend. As friends, He communicates with us – talks to us – and tells us our prayer life will be successful. The choice is ours.