



# PRAYER

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# Review: Certainty of Prayer-God's Promise

**1 John 5:14** (ESV) And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

**John 15:7** If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. (context: [Vine and Branches](#))

**John 14:13** Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Sample of NT scriptures teaching & confirming the promise of answered prayer:

- [Matt 7:7-8, 17:20, 21:21-22](#)
- [Mark 11:24](#)
- [Luke 11:9-10, 17:6](#)
- [John 14:13-14, 15:7, 15:16, 16:23, 16:26](#)
- [Eph 3:20](#)
- [Phil 4:4-7](#)
- [James 1:5, 5:16](#)
- [1 John 3:22, 5:14](#)

# Review: Unanswered Prayer

- If answered prayer is a certainty, why does it seem like so many prayers go unanswered? Most prayer passages come with conditions:
  - Abiding in Christ (John 15:7)
  - *Christ dwells in our hearts, rooted, grounded in love (Eph 3:17-20)*
  - *Asked in His name (John 5:16)(according to what Jesus would want)*
  - *“because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him” (believe in Jesus and love one another)(1 John 3:22)*
  - *According to His will (1 John 5:14)*
  - *Asked in faith, without doubting (James 1:6)(Matt 21:22)*
  - *Not with self-service and empty words as the hypocrites (Matt 6:5-8)*
  - *Asked with pure motives, not for our passions (James 4:3)*
  - *“That the Father may be glorified in the son” (John 14:13-14)*
  - *Without iniquity (Psalm 66:18 and many similar)*
- General theme is a relationship aligned with God. → **Psalms 37:4** Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
- The caveats help us pray more effectively and tap into the power of prayer.

# Prayer and Praise – God’s Great Provisions

- There are 2 basic, fundamental provisions to communicate to God:
  - 1. *Prayer (petition); often associated with supplication, intercession and thanksgiving***
  - 2. *Praise (worship, thanksgiving, expression of joy)***
- Both praise and prayer equally important and normative for God’s people
- Prayer mentioned over 300 times in NKJV/ESV (#1 Psalms, #2 Acts)
- Bible speaks of prayer so often, that was assumed to be the common practice among God’s people.
- We don’t fully appreciate the gift of prayer.
- Many times, we turn to prayer as a last resort. “Crisis praying”
- “I feel far from God or where is God”; symptoms of forsaken praise/prayer
- Prayer is our most powerful weapon, but is often neglected and under-utilized

# Prayer – God’s Great Provision

- Normality, regularity, expectation and commandment of Prayer for saints

**Col 4:2** Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

**Phil 4:4** Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

**Eph 6:18** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication...

**Phil 1:4** always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,

**Rom 12:12** Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

**1 Thess 5:16** Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- No suggestion anywhere in the bible that prayer/praise is optional or occasional.

**Psalms 16:8** I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

**Psalms 62:8** Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

# Reasons to Pray

1. Prayer builds intimacy with God. Regular and honest communication critical to knowing God as our father.
2. Prayer restores perspective of life to make good choices. Wisdom and direction often the subject of prayer.
3. Prayer provides access to God's power in difficulty times.
  - *Acts 4:31 Peter and John received boldness to preach*
4. Prayer changes us to be more closely aligned with Jesus
  - *David prayed "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalms 139:23-24)*
5. Prayer changes situations around us
6. Prayer is a conduit for confession (remember the tax collector)

# Prayer's Aroma!

**Rev 5:8** And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

**Rev 8:3** And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

- Prayer may have an enduring purpose!
- Prayer is described as incense rising to God. Implies a pleasing aroma.

**Psalms 141:2** Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!

# Examples of Faithful People of Prayer

**Daniel 6:10** When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. 11 Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. (that's a steadfast, fearless prayer warrior!)

David: **Psalms 55:16** (NKJV) As for me, I will call upon God, And the LORD shall save me. 17 Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice.

- Hannah's prayer for a son (1 Sam 1:10-12)
- Elijah's prayer for drought & rain (Jam 5:17)
- Elisha's prayer for the dead boy (2 Kings 4:33)
- Hezekiah's prayer for protection and health (2 Kings 19:15; 20:2)
- Abraham for Abimelech (Gen 20:7, 17)
- Moses and Samuel for Israel (Num 11:2, 21:7, 1 Sam 7:5)
- The man of God for the king Jeroboam (1 Kings 13:6)
- Ezra and Daniel for Israel's sins (Ezra 10:1, Dan 9:4, 20).
- Jesus (John 17, Luke 22)
- Apostles (many times)

Prayer is a way of life for God's people

# Example of Prayerlessness: Jonah

- Jonah was not aligned with God. And his prayer life shows it!
- Only 2 recorded prayers of Jonah (actually 1)

## From the fish:

- **Jonah 2:1** Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly.... 7  
"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple.

## After Ninevah repented (not much of a prayer though)

- **Jonah 4:1** But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.
- He disobeyed God. (1:3, 4:2)
- Prayed to be rescued only in crisis. (2:7)
- He was angry with God for granting mercy. (4:2)
- **Don't follow Jonah's example!**

# Spiritual Warfare: The Ultimate Weapon

**Eph 6:18** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,

Focus of Prayer in spiritual warfare:

1. “all prayer and supplication”: variety
2. “at all times”: frequency
3. “in the Spirit”: submission to God’s will
4. “keep alert”: manner
5. “all perseverance”: persistence
6. “all the saints”, “for me”: objects
7. “utterance”, “open my mouth”, “gospel”: specificity
8. “boldly”: power & courage

# Effective Prayer

- Jesus taught on the basic elements of effective prayer (and ineffective prayer!) in his most popular sermon in Matt 5-7.

**Matt 6:5** “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

- Vs. 5 Prayer is not to be used to gain approval and praise of people.
- Vs. 7 Prayer is not just speaking words. Empty prayer is non-prayer.
- Vs. 8 God already knows our need, but that doesn't negate our need to pray.

# Effective Prayer

- Jesus taught a model for prayer, not a strict recitation
- It is brief, simple and comprehensive
- 6 petitions: 3 directed to God and 3 to human needs

**Matt 6:9** Pray then like this:

*“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

1. Hallowed (to make holy) be God’s name: *puts petitioner in the proper place*
  2. Your kingdom (or reign) come: *God’s law would be revered, and God’s influence would expand.*
  3. God’s will be accomplished on earth: *Alignment between God and people*
  4. Daily food: *recognizes our dependence (similar to wandering Israelites)*
  5. Forgiveness: *accompanied by teaching on forgiveness of others*
  6. Deliverance from evil: *victory in spiritual warfare*
- Note the balance between spiritual needs and physical needs

# Principles for Powerful, Effective Prayer

## 1. Pray with a humble and pure heart

- **Psalms 24:3** Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.
- **Psalms 66:18** If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.
- **Psalms 139:23** Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!
- **James 4:6** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (Parable comparing 2 prayers Luke 18)
  - *Luke 18:14* I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."
- Approach God with humility and purity

# Principles for Powerful, Effective Prayer

## 2. Pray with a forgiving spirit

- **Mark 11:24** Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. 25 And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”
- **Matt 5:23** So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.
- Approach God without bitterness or unresolved strife toward people.
  - **Rom 12:18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
  - Forgiveness does not always equal full reconciliation
- Bitterness is spiritual cancer and a heavy load. Stop carrying it!
  - **Acts 8:23** For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”
  - **Eph 4:31-32** Let all bitterness...be put away from you... forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

# Principles for Powerful, Effective Prayer

## 3. Pray in Faith, Believing, Expecting

- **Matt 21:21** And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. 22 And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”
- **James 1:6** But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;
- **Jesus limited his miracle ministry due to unbelief at Nazareth:**
  - **Matt 13:58** And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief. (see also Mark 6:5)
- **Prayer is often sabotaged with doubt.**

# Principles for Powerful, Effective Prayer

## 4. Pray with God's Glory as your motive

- God is a jealous god. He does not share his glory

**Isaiah 42:8** I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

- **John 14:13** Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.
  - To ask in Jesus' name is to ask for what he would want and according to his will.
- **James 4:3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.
- God vs. 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18); Elijah prayed with God's glory as his motive, not his own safety or comforts.

**1 Kings 18:37** Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again." 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.

- Elijah was just being an obedient prophet. He was on God's mission for God's glory!
- This intensified Jezebel's hatred and commitment to kill Elijah.

# Principles for Powerful, Effective Prayer

## 4. Pray with God's Glory as your motive (cont'd)

- Jesus worked miracles for God's glory; raising of Lazarus

**John 11:40** Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" 41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." 43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

- Like Elijah, this prayer and miracle intensified the Jews' desire to kill Jesus (vs. 53) and put an end to Jesus' public ministry. (vs. 54)
- Jesus' prayers and miracle were never for his own glory, but the Father's
- Likewise, our prayers should be focused on God receiving glory, not us.

# Answers to Prayer

- Yes! God delights in answering as many requests as are according to his will.
  - *Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*
  - *God answers yes more than we recognize.*
- Not yet (delayed)
  - *Sometimes, waiting is God's chosen way to show his glory. Waiting is also rich with opportunities for growth.*
  - *Lazarus*
- No, but...(disguised)
  - *Sometimes the request will be answered with not what we want, but with something much better...What we need!*
  - *Paul, Jesus*
- No (denied)
  - *Sometimes, God's sovereignty overrides our request.*

**1 Thess 5:16** Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

## Example: Disguised Answer

- Paul had seen many visions and revelations from the Spirit.

**2 Cor 12:7** So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- Instead of removing the “messenger of Satan” as Paul asked, God gave Paul something much better. GRACE and POWER!
- Result
  - *God is glorified in Paul’s boasting in weakness.*
  - *Paul received the power of Christ in an unforeseen measure.*
  - *Paul remained humble and God used him for much good.*
- Paul could have mis-interpreted the better gift by focusing on the “no”
- Jesus also received this answer in the Garden of Gethsemane

## Example: Disguised Answer (speculative)

**Luke 7:18** The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, 19 calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

- John was confused; his circumstances make no sense. Why am I in prison?
- He was doubting if Jesus was really the Christ after all.
- Was John praying while in prison? Did John experience unanswered prayer? Did he ever have peace in knowing his part was perfectly completed?

22 And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. 23 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” 24 When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John....

27 This is he of whom it is written, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.’ 28 I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

- Jesus said he was the greatest prophet ever to exist, but John never heard those words. Then John was executed.
- Vs. 23 Blessed is the one who is not offended when God answers in his way. 20

# At a loss for words? That's OK!

**Rom 8:26** Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

- Vs. 26 This passage is very helpful when we don't know what to pray for!
- Vs. 28 Trust that all things (especially answered prayer) work together for the saint's good.
  - *Caveat: those who love God! God makes no such promise to unbelievers.*

# Summary

- Prayer is not recitation or lengthy repetition, but honest communication from the heart.
- Prayer is necessary and normative for a Christian.
- Prayer is one of God's great provisions for saints.
- Prayer draws us into intimate relationship with the Father.
- Effective prayer requires:
  - *A humble and pure heart*
  - *A Forgiving spirit*
  - *In faith, believing, expecting*
  - *Motivated by God's glory*
- Trust that God's answer is always good.

**Eph 3:20** Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.