

**January 6, 2015**

**Question:** What does the Bible say about prayer? When I talk to God, does He really hear me? Does God really know when I talk to Him? Would you please, show me what the Bible says about prayer?

**Answer:** The Bible confidently affirms that God hears and answers prayer. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth" (Psalm 145:18). "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 4:16). "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John 5:14).

There is power in prayer, but many of us use it like we use the spare tire in the trunk of our car, just in cases of emergency. It should not be that way. Prayer ought to be the pulsation of the Christian faith. It should be an expression of reverence, gratitude, and the felt presence of God. Our God is not a distant God, but an ever present Father who not only hears, but also answers the prayers of His children.

Many of us view prayer much the way a six year old looks at his Christmas wish list. "Dear Santa, I've been a good boy. Please give me a new baseball glove, a computer, a wagon, et cetera." Wise parents never give their children everything they want, but they do seek to provide all that is needed. There's an old Chinese proverb which says, "Give a boy and a hog all that they want and you will have a very good hog and a very bad boy." As youngsters, what we think we need, and what we actually need, are not the same. I suspect that it is no different as adults.

God hears and answers our prayers, but His answer is not always the one we seek. Paul prayed three times that God would remove his "thorn in the flesh." God's answer to Paul was "No!" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). On another occasion, Paul made four separate requests to the Father (Romans 15:30-33). When we examine what Paul sought, and how God responded, we find God saying to Paul, "No, wait a while, yes, and yes, but my way not yours." Too often, when we don't get what we want we think that God has not answered. It may be that He is telling us no, or not yet, or yes, but my way not yours. Remember, God knows best!

As Christians, we must keep on praying, and trust God to give the answer which is best for us! We believe in the power of prayer, because we believe in a God who cares. We believe that God extended a man's life by fifteen years because he prayed (Isaiah 38:1-3). We believe that a man's prayer brought a three and one half year drought upon Israel, and because of that same man's prayer, God sent rain to end it (James 5:17, 18). We believe that God dispatched an apostle to preach the gospel to a sinner in answer to that sinner's prayer (Acts 10:1-48). And, although we can't point to a single contemporary example and dogmatically say that it was the result of answered prayer, we still believe in prayer because we believe in God.

It's not difficult to pray. Prayer demands no special language, and requires little time. It is not the length of our prayers that is important. It is the sentiment expressed therein that matters. Jesus even warned his disciples against excessively long prayers and reminded them that "vain repetition" and "much speaking" did not make for a more effective prayer (Matthew 6:7).

Prayer should be the sincere outpouring of the heart. Our prayers ought to reflect our own personalities and faith. They should be expressions of reverence, gratitude, praise, and devotion to

the Almighty. All that we seek in prayer should be in harmony with the will of God, and brought before Him in the name of Jesus (1 John 5:14; Ephesians 5:20). Notice the following:

A Seaman's prayer: "Oh God, Your sea is so great, and my boat is so small."

An Irish general's prayer: "O Lord, you know how busy we shall be today. If we forget you, do not forget us."

Sam Houston, before going into battle, stopped his troops and said, "Men, it will soon be morning and we will engage the enemy beyond those hills. I want each man to pray." One old Texan knelt by his horse and said, "Lord, if it be your will, help us whip those Mexicans. But, if it isn't your will, lay low 'cause you're going to see the biggest fight you ever saw."

Then there was the little girl who heard a sermon on "Is God Dead?" When she said her prayers that night they included the following request: "And please, God, don't die, because if you do we're all sunk!" Prayer works, so "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Today some folks express displeasure with those who mention the name of Jesus in prayers before government meetings and sports events.

For those who are genuinely concerned with what the Bible says, the name of Christ is nothing to be ashamed of. He is the world's only hope. Or, to use the language of Scripture, "...there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

A believer must be baptized in the name of Jesus. Peter told those at Pentecost: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Even if men reject Him now, a time is coming when all will acknowledge His precious name. "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

For Christians (Acts 11:26) our faith revolves around Him. We are admonished: "And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

And, in regard to the matter of prayer, the New Testament could not be clearer. Jesus told His disciples that whatever they asked the Father in His name He would give them (John 16:23, 24, 26). Of course such prayers must be in harmony with God's will (1 John 3:22; 5:14).

Further, we are to give thanks for all things in the name of Jesus (Ephesians 5:20). We understand that that which is done in His name is done by His authority. He is uniquely the Son of God and the Savior of the world. We do not seek to force Him on those who do not want Him, but we will not deny Him because some find his name distasteful!

What about the prayers we offer? Are they the kinds of things we should concern God with? Are they focused on others or are they selfish in nature? Did Jesus or the early disciples pray about the things we pray about?

Let's look at the apostle Paul's prayer for the Christians at Ephesus: "For this reason I bow my

knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:14-21).

We have already acknowledged that it is right to pray for the sick, to pray for those who govern us, to pray for those who are in need, but notice what was at the heart of Paul’s prayer? First, that they would be strengthened in the inner man. Second, that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith. Third, that they would be rooted and grounded in love. Fourth, that they would understand the depths of God’s love through Christ. Fifth, that they would be filled with the fullness of God. Did you notice the emphasis? It wasn’t on the physical and material, but the spiritual or inner man. We should all be praying a similar prayer for ourselves and others. These are the things God is concerned with, and He sent His Son to prove it!