

What Has God Promised Regarding Prayer?

Study Guide for Relationship 2.1

There's one thing about the Christian life that can't really be taught. We can learn what the Bible tells us about it, but just because we learn about it won't mean we understand it. What am I talking about? Prayer. Praying to God is really only understood by people who pray. So, we'll certainly explore a lot of biblical truth about prayer in this section of our discipline. But you'll never really understand what the Bible teaches about prayer until you pray. Not just offer a quick request while you wait at the stop light, but I'm talking about setting aside time each day to speak with the Lord about the most intimate details and feelings of your life.

By the end of this video you'll learn the basic definition of what prayer is and we'll explore just what God has promised to do through prayer. But again, you'll never really understand prayer until you pray. Let's get started.

First, what is prayer? Prayer is interacting with God by speaking with Him. Talking to God.

In some ways it's different than when you speak with an actual human being. When we talk to other people, there's immediate feedback. The other person responds, and communication takes place.

When we pray, we may not have the feeling that anyone is listening. We may not feel like God is responding. But we pray by faith. Even if we don't have a feeling, we exercise our faith and believe we are being heard by God. Why do we believe God is listening? Because God has promised to listen.

Psalm 4:3 But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.

When God promises something, he always keeps his word. So we know that when we talk with God in prayer, God listens.

OK, but let's take a minute and try to understand what God has promised to do when we pray. Because remember, whenever God makes a promise He obligates Himself to that promise. We certainly don't want to expect God to do things that he's never promised to do. And, on the other hand, if we're interpreting scripture correctly and if God has promised to respond in certain areas of life, we should pray with boldness and hope that whether we see it or not, God will do it.

So just what has He promised when it comes to prayer. Here's an example of how easily things can get misinterpreted. Just what does Jesus mean when he says:

John 14:14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Really? So if I want that brand new Lamborghini and the super model that goes with it, if I want a billion dollars in gold coins, all I have to do is ask Jesus? Has God really obligated Himself to write me a blank check whenever I feel like asking for something? Is He like some divine ATM machine where if we just enter the right pin number when we pray, we can have whatever we want? Or have we misinterpreted the promise of John 14:14?

I can tell you this for sure, God has never promised to answer our prayers by giving us anything we want.

James 4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

So prayer is not a blank check to spend on ourselves. God never promised that it would be.

But what prayer has God promised to answer?

One prayer God promises to answer every time is the prayer of salvation. Whenever someone asks the Lord for forgiveness and surrenders their life to Him, He answers by saving their soul and writing their name in the book of life.

Romans 10:9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

God has also promised to answer when we pray according to his will.

1 John 5:14 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.

If we ask God for His will, He responds. That's why Jesus teaches us to ask for His will when we pray:

Matthew 6:10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Now this piece makes prayer absolutely fascinating. God is so intent on interacting with us and building our faith by accomplishing his will through us that he waits until we pray about some things before he acts. What did James write?

James 4:2b ... You do not have, because you do not ask.

And on the other hand, God has a lot to say about how he will accomplish his will through us when we do ask ...

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

Ok, I'm calling a pastoral pause. Take a moment and consider what God is saying. God has things he wants. God wants his people to talk to him about those things. In fact, God may not act on certain things until we pray and ask Him. Amazing! And we thought prayer was something we "should" do. God almighty has told his followers to ask, to knock, to seek, He will respond.

All through scripture we see this delightful interplay between God and those who love Him. Trouble comes in its various forms, God's people pray, trouble is resolved according to God's wisdom and will.

Barren Hannah prays and is blessed with Samuel.

1 Samuel 1:10 She (Hannah) was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly.

1 Samuel 1:20 And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the LORD."

Isaac prays and Rebekkah conceives.

Genesis 25:21 And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

Hezekiah prays and is granted fifteen more years of life.

2 Kings 20:2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, **3** “Now, O LORD, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

2 Kings 20:4 And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: **5** “Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, **6** and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David’s sake.”

And on and on it goes. We don’t know what God’s will is in every situation. That’s what makes it such an adventure to continue to pray to Him as He opens the flood gates of blessings in answer to our prayers.

Someone once said that prayer is the slender nerve that moves the hand of God. Can you imagine having such a promise? God will move at your request according to his will! How can we have such a promise and not participate with Him by praying?

Now there are a few things that will keep God from listening to us when we pray. We can do things that will short circuit our prayer life.

Proverbs 15:8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.

We’ll talk about those in detail in the next lesson. For today, focus yourself on one of the simplest verses in scripture:

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing,

Understand this: God listens to those who follow Him. God answers according to His will. You have access by prayer to move the hand of God. Let’s get to it. God waits to hear from us today.

Study Guide Questions (please support your answers with Scripture):

- 1) Define prayer.
- 2) Why should we believe that God listens when we pray?
- 3) What kind of requests will God answer?
- 4) Does God wait for us to pray before He moves in certain situations?
- 5) What did Jesus teach us to ask for in Matthew 6:10?