

Praying According to the Will of God

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1 John 5:14–15 (NKJV) “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”

Most Christians acknowledge that prayer is important. Prayer is important for several reasons. First it acknowledges the existence of God; it is communication with deity. Second it brings us before the throne of God; it is an expression of divine protocol. Third prayer is characteristic of the people of God. Saints in the Old Testament prayed. Jesus prayed. Jesus taught His disciples to pray. The early church prayed. Saints throughout history prayed. Fourth, God’s people are commanded to pray; it is expected. Fifth, God’s house is to be known as a house of prayer; it is the fabric of public worship. Sixth, God works through our prayers; through it He accomplishes His will.

In his book *The Necessity of Prayer*, E. M. Bounds said, “Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the kingdom. ‘Ask, and ye shall receive’ (John 16:24). It is a rule that never will be altered in anybody’s case. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the elder brother of the family, but God has not relaxed the rule even for Him. Remember this text: Jehovah says to His own Son, ‘Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession’ (Psalm 2:8). If the royal and divine Son of God cannot be exempted from the rule of asking that He may have, you and I cannot expect the rule to be relaxed in our favor. Why should it be?”

While most Christians acknowledge the importance of prayer, many get frustrated with results in prayer. It is common to hear statements like: “God didn’t answer my prayer” or “God didn’t give me what I asked” or even “God let me down. I can’t trust Him”.

The problem is not prayer but our misunderstanding of the nature of prayer. We misunderstand the nature of prayer because we do not know the nature of God to whom we pray. God is not like us and does not think like us. God does not owe us anything. We err when we approach God based upon a sense of entitlement. We should approach God on the basis of Scripture and privilege rather than on the basis of rights. Everything God gives us is on the basis of His mercy and grace.

Prayer involves coming before a holy God at His throne for the purpose of relationship. Relationship has its privilege. Prayer is the privilege of relationship. Prayer is based upon our relationship with God.

Contrary to what some have believed, the Bible teaches that God will not hear every prayer. For instance, God will not hear our prayers when we stubbornly hold on to sin. Psalm 66:18 (NKJV) says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear.” Isaiah 59:1–2 (NKJV) says, “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” Neither will God hear the prayers of those who close their ears to the cry of the needy: “Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, will also cry himself and not be heard.” (Proverbs 21:13 NKJV)

Not only does God not *hear* every prayer but He also does not *answer* every prayer. God will not answer a prayer to rescue a person who has committed a sin unto death. (1 John 5:16) God will

not answer a prayer based upon wrong motives. (James 4:3) God did not heed Abraham's request that Ishmael be his heir. God did not honor Balaam's request to curse Israel. God rebuked Peter's request to build three temples to Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Jesus rebuked James' and John's request to call down fire from heaven. God denied Paul's request that a thorn in the flesh be removed from his life. God will not answer a request outside of His will.

On what basis then does God answer prayer? God answers prayers according to His will: *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."* (1 John 5:14 NKJV) Jesus taught us to pray that God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

If God answers prayer according to His will, then it is important to know His will. God wants us to know His will. How does God reveal His will? First and foremost, God reveals His will through His Word. The more we know of His Word, the more we know of His will. When God's Word abides in our heart, we will pray according to His will. (John 15:7) Therefore we must take heed. God will not violate His Word to answer prayer. We must not assume that everything that arises after we pray is an answer from God. People err when they fail to consider that the devil will usually offer a substitute to God's answer. The devil's offer always demands compromise with God's principles. What we compromise to keep, we will eventually lose. On the other hand, if we follow biblical principles of wisdom and an opportunity doesn't work out, then it was not God's will to begin with.

Second, God reveals His will through the guidance of His Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:9-16) There are many things in life in which we need specific direction, things that are not directly mentioned in His Word. In such cases, the Holy Spirit, in line with God's Word, will guide us into the will of God for our life. The Holy Spirit will help us pray according to His will. (Romans 8:26)

How does God answer prayer? First, God answers prayer according to His purpose. That is why God doesn't work like we often expect. Purpose speaks of God's predetermined outcome for us who are in Christ. God sees the bigger picture—the eternal picture. We see only the temporal picture. God answers prayer according to our greatest good and for His ultimate glory. (Romans 8:28) Joseph said to his brother who sold him into slavery, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." God is in control. He is even in the setbacks and delays. We must consider God's purpose in prayer.

Second, God answers prayer according to His plan and not ours. He is not obligated to answer prayers based on foolish expectations and presumptuous demands. We are often guilty of saying, "God, here is my plan. Please bless it." Instead we ought to pray, "God, what is Your plan?" knowing that it is already blessed. We must ask for and trust God's plan and not our own.

Third, God answers prayer according to His timing. We are impatient creatures. We live in a fast food world and expect God to accommodate our demand for instant answers. God's timing is not our timing. 2 Peter 3:8-9 (NKJV) says, *"But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* The Bible teaches us that God has a time for every purpose under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 3:17) God has made everything beautiful in its time. (Ecclesiastes 3:11) God has a timeframe by which He will fulfill all of His promises: *"And he said, 'Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be.'" (Daniel 8:19 NKJV)*

God always keeps His promises in the right time. Stephen the first martyr of the church referred to the *time* of the promise as approaching. (Acts 7:17-20) In Acts 8:26-39, the Spirit led Phillip in exact timing to meet the Ethiopian eunuch. Christ came in the *fullness of time*. (Galatians 4:4)

If we fail to understand the timing of God's purpose, we can become impatient and get discouraged in our faith. Remember, it took twenty-five years before God gave Abraham the

promised son. It took thirteen years before God brought Joseph's dream to pass. It took four hundred and thirty years before God gave Israel the land He promised to Abraham. It took four thousand years before God brought Jesus who He promised in Genesis 3:15 would come.

Understanding God's purpose and timing helps us develop patience between the time of promise and fulfillment. Hebrews 6:11–12 (NKJV) says, *"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end,¹² that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."* James 1:2–4 (NKJV) tells us, *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."* Again, E. M. Bounds in his book *The Necessity of Prayer* said, "Faith does not grow disheartened because prayer is not immediately honoured; it takes God at His Word, and lets Him take what time He chooses in fulfilling His purposes, and in carrying on His work. There is bound to be much delay and long days of waiting for true faith, but faith accepts the conditions — knows there will be delays in answering prayer, and regards such delays as times of testing, in the which, it is privileged to show its mettle, and the stern stuff of which it is made."

Fourth, God answers prayer according to our righteousness and godly fear. (James 5:16; Hebrews 5:7) Prayer is the privilege of relationship. Relationship with God is based upon a righteous life arising out of the fear of God.

Fifth, God answers prayer according to our faith. Often prayer is not answered because we do not believe. John tells us that once we have prayed according to the will of God, we can have confidence that God will hear our prayer and do it. That confidence is called "faith". (1 John 5:15) God requires faith in His people. Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV) says, *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."* Matthew 9:27–30 (NKJV) says, *"When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, 'Son of David, have mercy on us!'²⁸ And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.'²⁹ Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you.'³⁰ And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, 'See that no one knows it.'" Again James affirms, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.⁷ For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."* (James 1:5-8 NKJV) In another place Jesus said, *"Have faith in God.²³ For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.²⁴ Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."* (Mark 11:22-24 NKJV)*

What is the conclusion? God will not hear prayer when we regard sin in our heart. He will not answer prayers that are out of line with His will or based on wrong motives. God hears and answers the prayers of the righteous who fear Him and pray in faith according to His will. God is not obligated to fulfill our plans. He is not obligated to answer prayer the way we expect or in our time frame. God answers prayer according to His own purpose, plan, and timing. God answers prayer for our greatest good and for His ultimate glory. Therefore it is important to pray and not be discouraged. God has promised to do great things when His people pray!

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