

The Kind of Prayer God Answers

Luke 11:5-13

1) I read about a small Kentucky town that had two churches and one distillery. Members of both churches complained that the distillery gave the community a bad image. To make matters worse, the owner of the distillery was an outspoken atheist.

a. The two churches decided to hold a joint Saturday-night prayer meeting to ask God to intervene and settle the matter once and for all. The church folks gathered on the designated evening and began to pray.

All through the prayer meeting, a terrible electric storm raged. To the delight of the church members, lightning struck that old distillery and burned it to the ground. The next morning, the sermon in both churches was on the power of prayer.

b. Insurance adjusters promptly notified the distillery that they wouldn't pay for the damages. The fire was caused by an "act of God," and that was an exclusion in their policy. The distillery owner was furious. He decided to sue both churches, claiming they had conspired with God to destroy his building and business. The churches denied they had anything to do with the cause of the fire.

c. The judge in the case opened the trial with these words:
"I find one thing in this case most perplexing: We have a situation here where the plaintiff, an atheist, is professing his belief in the power of prayer, and the defendants, all faithful church members, are denying the very same power."

d. Most of us wouldn't deny that there is power in prayer. A recent survey found that 76% of Americans say they pray, and more than 50% pray every day.

e. For many years the hottest selling Christian book was *The Prayer of Jabez* by Bruce Wilkinson. It was only 92 pages and based on the daring prayer of an obscure man in the Old Testament. It sold several million copies and made the New York Times bestseller list. Why was it so popular? I'm sure there are several reasons, but one is that people sense there is a power in prayer and that they haven't fully tapped into that power.

f. James talks about the prayer that is
"powerful and effective" (James 5:16).

The Greek word for effective is the word from which we get our term energy. Prayer can energize your life, but the Bible makes it clear there are certain conditions that must be met first.

2) James says that a prerequisite to powerful prayers is that they be
"in the name of the Lord." (James 5:14)

Jesus said,

"The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."
(John 15:16)

There is power in the name of Jesus. But that doesn't mean Jesus' name can be used as some kind of magical incantation. There is power in the name of Jesus because of what is being communicated.

a. When you pray "in Jesus' name," you are defining which God you're praying to. You are not praying to Baal, Allah, Buddha, or some pantheistic force. You're praying to the God who manifested himself in Jesus Christ. The power of prayer comes in praying to the one true God, the one who was incarnate in Jesus and who commanded us to pray in the name of his Son.

b. When you pray in Jesus' name, you're also communicating to God that you acknowledge the authority of Jesus in your life. You're saying, "God, I'm coming to you as a citizen of your kingdom. I'm a follower of Christ. I'm one of your children."

c. We usually end our prayers with, "In Jesus' name, amen." The word *amen* simply means "so be it." We're saying, "In Jesus' name, may it be so." When you pray in the name of the Lord, you're submitting your will to his will. You're acknowledging that if both parties don't agree, you want God's will to prevail. You're saying, "May it be so, Lord, as long as this prayer is in accordance with the name, the will, and the character of your Son, Jesus Christ."

3) It only makes sense that another prerequisite to answered prayer would be **faith**. If you don't believe God can answer your prayer, either you're not going to offer the prayer at all, or you're going to offer a halfhearted, hypocritical prayer. God cannot be mocked. He knows your heart.

Jesus said,

"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

(Matthew 17:20)

a. If you want God to answer your prayer, begin with the confidence that there is a God who created you, loves you, and wants to respond to your prayer.

b. Does that mean if you have any doubts, your prayer won't be answered? No. A man once asked Jesus to heal his demon-possessed son. Jesus said to the distraught father:

"Everything is possible for him who believes." (Mark 9:23)

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed:

"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

Jesus didn't refuse to help the man because he had doubts. Jesus commanded the spirit to leave the boy, and from that point on, the boy was healed.

c. Everyone has doubts. God doesn't expect perfect faith, but he does expect sincere faith. God wants you to come to him with a genuine heart, believing that he is good and has the power to answer your prayer.

4) It shouldn't be surprising that the person more likely to see answers to his prayers is the **righteous person** – one who has a right relationship with God and with others. The Bible says,

"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (James 5:16)

a. By commanding that we confess our sins to one another, James insinuates that a person who wants God to hear his prayers must be in a right relationship with others. The Bible makes it clear that we cannot have a right relationship with God if we're full of hatred for our brother or sister. (I John 4:20-21; Matthew 5:23-24)

b. When you are at odds with another Christian, you are at odds with God, and you are not ready to pray. God make things right with your brother, then offer your prayer to God.

5) **Sincerity** is also necessary for pray to be answered. James cites Elijah as an example of a person who was heard because of his sincerity:

"Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops." (James 5:17)

a. Elijah warned the nation of Israel that their idolatry and immorality would bring God's judgment. He begged God to bring a severe drought on the nation to awaken them from their spiritual slumber. God granted his request, and a drought set in. Elijah's prayers affected the weather! When the nation repented, Elijah prayed again, and the rains came.

b. James says that God heard Elijah's prayer because Elijah prayed earnestly. In the original Greek, James' words were, literally, "He prayed in prayer." Do you pray your prayers, or do you just lazily say words and your heart is not in them.

c. Jesus said,

"When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words." (Matthew 6:7)

d. Prayer should be an intimate conversation between two beings who care about each other. Jesus said,

"When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."
(Matthew 6:6)

e. God is not concerned with verbosity – he's concerned with **intensity**. It's not the length of your prayer or the cleverness of your words but the sincerity of your heart that matters to God.

6) Pray fervently. God is more likely to answer your prayer if you ask fervently. James 5:16 in the King James Version reads,

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16)

Practical steps we can take to pray with greater intensity are: kneeling, praying aloud, and fasting. Kneeling helps your concentration in the short term, but fasting helps for a longer period.

It's a demonstration of your seriousness. You are communicating to God that you're willing to give up food because your request is more important. It's a reminder of your priorities – spiritual things are more important than physical things.

7) Pray **persistently**. Don't quit praying just because your prayer isn't answered on the first request. In Luke chapter 18, Jesus told a parable about a wicked judge and a persistent widow who kept coming to the judge for justice. He told this parable to help us to remember to

"always pray and not give up." (Luke 18:1)

Even a pagan judge who doesn't care about people will eventually give in to a persistent, poor widow.

8) In Luke chapter 11, Jesus told another story about prayer. He said, ***"Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.'***

Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because his is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs." (Luke 11:5-8)

Jesus said the neighbor responded because of the man's **boldness**. It takes a lot of nerve to try to wake up your neighbor in the middle of the night so you can have a midnight snack with a visitor. That's audacious! We need to pray boldly.

a. I'm convinced we don't pray big enough. We don't usually ask God for big things. We choose the little requests, which seem easier to fulfill – and less disappointing if they go unanswered. They demand less faith from us too.

b. There's a great verse from John Newton that we ought to commit to memory about asking largely of God:

*Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much!*

9) Shortly after Dallas Theological Seminary was founded in 1924, the school came to the point of bankruptcy. Its creditors had banded together and threatened to foreclose at noon on a particular day. That morning, the founders of the school met in the president's office to pray that God would provide. In the meeting was a well-known preacher from Chicago named Harry Ironside. When his turn came to pray, he did so in a characteristically refreshing manner:

"Lord, we know that the cattle on a thousand hills are Thine. Please sell some of them and send us the money."

While they were praying, a Texas cattleman came into the business office and said, "I just sold two carloads of cattle in Fort Worth. I've been trying to make a business deal go through, and it won't work, and I feel that God is compelling me to give this money to the seminary. I don't know if you need it or not, but here is the check."

A secretary, knowing something of the financial seriousness of the hour, went to the door of the prayer meeting and timidly tapped. Dr. Lewis Chafer responded, took the check out of her hand, and saw that it was for the exact amount of the school's debt. When he looked at the signature and noted that it was a cattle rancher, he looked at Dr. Ironside and said, "Harry, God sold the cattle!"

Dallas Theological Seminary has remained open for the past 85 years and has trained hundreds of effective ministers and Christian leaders for the kingdom of God, including our own Associate Pastor, Ben.

God still answer prayer!