

Why Our Prayers are Not Answered

Part 1

Introduction

"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." (Matt. 17:20, 21)

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened."

(Matt. 7:7, 8)

"...if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us - whatever we ask - we know we have what we ask of Him." (1 John 5:14-15)

Having our prayers granted sounds so simple. Jesus seems to be saying that all we have to do is ask and we will receive whatever we ask for.

Why then do many of our prayers go unanswered? Why can we follow the principles laid down by Jesus for answered prayer and still see the doors remain unopened?

The whys of unanswered prayer remain one of the great mysteries of our spiritual life. In this study, we will attempt to explain why many of our prayers go unanswered and show how we can receive what we pray for.

Our Study

Lack of Faith

The Scripture: Matthew 21:22

"If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

1. What does Jesus tell us is the key ingredient to answered prayer? _____

Yes, believing or having faith. Time and time again, Jesus tells us that in order for us to receive what we pray for we must have faith.

Following the Transfiguration, Jesus, along with Peter, John, and James, were met by a distraught father who brought with him his epileptic son. The father said that the other disciples had prayed for his son's healing - without results. Later, when the disciples questioned Jesus, He told them that the reason they could not heal the boy was because of their lack of faith.

What do we mean by faith? Jesus defines it when He talks about confidence in Him - personal faith in the character of God - that He is merciful, just and forgiving, that we can trust Him

Time and time again, Jesus emphasized the necessity of faith for answered prayer.

The Scripture: Matthew 7:7, 8

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened."

2. What do these verses promise us? _____

The Scripture: Matthew 17:20, 21

"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."

3. How much faith is necessary to have our prayers answered? _____

It would appear that it is not the quantity of our faith that is at stake here, but the quality.

James, too, emphasizes the importance of faith.

The Scripture: James 1:6, 7

"When he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord, he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."

4. How does James describe a person who doubts? _____

But as important as faith is, is it the only prerequisite to answered prayer? The Bible gives us other essentials as well.

Not Praying In The Name Of Jesus

The Scripture: John 14:14

"You may ask Me for anything in My name and I will do it."

5. What does Jesus say our asking must be? _____

Our praying must never be amiss. For it to be in Jesus' name, it must be according to His spirit. How often do we pray for something that would never meet with Jesus' approval or would be wrong for us or for someone else involved?

A young husband is unfaithful to his wife. The two separate. A short time later he is accused of embezzlement at his bank where he works. With much faith, the wife prays that he will be found guilty. When he goes to trial, however, the jury finds him not guilty. Why didn't the Lord answer the wife's prayer? What does it matter whether or not he is guilty? He's a low life adulterer and he deserves to go to prison whether or not he is guilty of the crime for which he was accused.

A prayer that is prayed out of revenge can never be prayed in Jesus' name, no matter how much faith it is prayed with. The wife's prayer for this man should be for his reconciliation with God and perhaps even for the restoration of the marriage.

We have the mind of Christ. If we are in relationship with Jesus, our hearts and minds should guide us.

A teenager is caught shoplifting (not the first time) and has to go on trial. "Oh, Lord," his parents pray, "have mercy. Make the judge give him another chance."

Their prayer goes unanswered and the child receives what to many seems like a harsh sentence. Why wasn't the Lord more merciful? Why didn't He give the child another chance? Now their son has a record - he may not even be able to go to the college of his choice.

Perhaps if we could know God's thinking, we would realize He did the most merciful thing He could. By allowing the child to be punished, He prevents him from committing more serious crimes in the future. God's ways are not our ways.

Wrong Motives

The Bible gives many reasons why our prayers go unanswered. The apostle James speaks very bluntly.

The Scripture: James 4:3

"When you ask you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasure."

6. Why does James say some prayers go unanswered? _____

Behind each prayer it would seem is the unspoken question: What is our motive for the request? Before we pray, we should always ask Jesus: "Is my prayer selfish? Am I asking only for my own satisfaction?"

The apostle Peter also touches on the question of selfishness.

The Scripture: 1 Peter 3:7

"Husbands...be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers."

7. How does Peter counsel husbands? _____

8. Why? _____

9. What will happen if they do not follow Peter's counsel? _____

Of course, the same principle applies in the case of the wife.

Neglecting the Poor

God has always been concerned for the poor. From the time He began to prepare the Israelites for their homeland, He made special provisions for the poor, the widowed, and the orphaned.

The Scripture: Isaiah 58:7-9

"Share your food with the hungry and... provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked,...clothe him and [don't] turn away from your own flesh and blood. Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you,

and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you call for help, and He will say, 'Here am I.'"

10. What are we commanded to do? _____

11. What will happen if we follow these commands? _____

The Scripture: Proverbs 19:17

"He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will reward him for what he has done."

12. What is the person who is kind to the poor doing? _____

13. What will the Lord do in return? _____

Proverbs 21:13

"If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered."

14. What happens to the person who shuts his ears to the cry of the poor? _____

In the second part of this study, we will look at more reasons why our prayers are not answered.

The Answers

1. Believing
2. If we ask, we will receive; seek, we will find; knock, the door will be opened.
3. Faith as small as mustard seed
4. Like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. He is double-minded and unstable and shouldn't expect to receive anything
5. In His name
6. Because we ask with wrong motives
7. To treat their wives with respect
8. Because they are heirs with them of the gracious gift of life
9. Their prayers will be hindered
10. Share our food with the hungry, provide shelter for the wanderer, clothe the naked and not turn away from our own flesh and blood
11. Our light will break forth like the dawn; we will be healed quickly; our righteousness will go before us; the glory of the Lord will be our rear guard and when we call for help the Lord will answer.
12. Lending to the Lord
13. Reward him
14. When he cries out (prays), the Lord will not answer his prayer.

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