

Wisdom of the Bible ~ Prayer ~ Discussion Questions

1. There are more than 200 specific reference to prayer in the Bible. In Ephesians 3:14-21, Paul says that God loves you and can do immeasurably more than you can ask or imagine. Why does he say that? Can we experience this?
2. So, we are told to pray boldly, actually audaciously, *and* to pray continually, without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5:17, Psalms 55:17, Psalms 145:1-2, Acts 2:42, Ephesians 6:18) What does that really mean?
3. Have you ever prayed for something absurd like “Lord, let me win this next game of computer solitaire” or “don’t let it rain today.” Let’s say you win the game of solitaire or that it didn’t rain, do you think that God answered your prayer or was it just random chance?
4. Before a sports contest of some sort (softball game, tennis match, etc.) have you every prayed alone or with the team to win the game or match? Do you think God answers prayers like this? What if both teams are Christians and pray for a win?
5. How often do your prayers have to be answered (in the way that you want) before you are convinced that God hears and answers them? Do you ever “test” God with your prayers? (Judges 6: 36-40, Deuteronomy 6:16, Matthew 4:5-7)
6. When a prayer is *not* answered in the way that you want, do you think God is trying to teach you a lesson? The Bible says that God answers prayers. In some cases, he says, “yes,” in some cases, “no,” and sometimes he says, “wait.” Do you think some prayers are not answered because they are not heard by God? Dale Robbins has a list of 11 common reasons that God does not answer prayers. Can you think of some reasons?
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 3. _____
 4. _____
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 11. _____
7. How often or long would your prayers have to go unanswered before you are convinced that God is ignoring you?

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1. There are more than 200 specific reference to prayer in the Bible. In Eph 3:14-21, Paul says that God loves you and can do immeasurably more than you can ask or imagine. Why does he say that? Can we experience this?

Ephesians 3:14-21 – For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Paul is on his knees. He is interceding for the brothers and sisters in Ephesus. He is asking God to do something more than fix their problems. He is asking God for a greater blessing than financial prosperity or physical health or mental and emotional stability or a happy life. Paul prays that God might “strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” He prays that “you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” A commentator, Armitage Robinson wrote, “No prayer that has ever been framed has uttered a bolder request.” To pray that we who are finite might be filled with all of the fullness of the Infinite, with all of the fullness of God, is the most extravagant prayer that could ever be prayed.

Think of your most extravagant thought and then try to think of something way beyond your wildest dreams. Even if you have a vivid imagination, there will still be a limit to what you are able to comprehend. However, your Father does not have the same limitations that you have. He says that He is able to do immeasurably *more* than anything that you could ask or imagine.

The sky is the limit as far as He is concerned. He knows no earthly barriers or boundaries that will keep Him from fulfilling the best plans and purposes for His children.

Okay, but you might say, that was Paul—his experiences with God were pretty extraordinary> he gets bowled over when Jesus speaks to him audibly and blinds him with bright, white light. From that day on he’s a totally different guy—no wonder he thinks God is mind-blowingly amazing.

But what about us? You? Me? Do we get to experience God in anything like the same way? My answer: we absolutely can experience God to be one who does far more than we can ask or imagine. Firstly because our imaginations and asking are quite limited—but also because God is constantly and consistently out to break into our world in ways we can't possibly engineer ourselves.

2. So, we are told to pray boldly, actually audaciously, and pray continually, without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5:17) What does that really mean?

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 – Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Psalms 55:17 – Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.

Psalms 145:1-2 – I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. ² Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.

Acts 2:42 – They [the believers] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Ephesians 6:18 – And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

[From AllAboutPrayer.org] Praying without ceasing is mostly an attitude of the heart. How does one pray continually? We cannot always be on our knees. With the daily demands on our busy lives, we are fortunate to kneel in prayer even a few minutes each day. However, the context of 1 Thess 5:16-18 gives us a clue. This passage focuses on your attitude. "Rejoice always" is an attitude of joyfulness. Giving thanks in everything requires a mental attitude of thankfulness. How do we rejoice and give thanks? Through prayer! Therefore, effective prayer is a proper heart attitude: a mental outlook of joyful thanksgiving. It expresses itself throughout the day with silent prayers of vital communication with the LORD.

Maintaining a healthy relationship requires communication. Always be "on line" with God so when the Spirit moves you to pray, you can instantly agree with Him. The Holy Spirit prays for us with inexpressible groans (Romans 8:26). When in agreement with the Spirit, we are praying continuously. The heart attitude of praying without ceasing means an ever-open heart to the Lord's leading.

If we are praying without ceasing—even while driving, washing dishes, mowing the lawn, or having a smoke—we can be open to the leading of the Spirit when He urges us to pray for something or someone. Maybe pray right then or make a mental note to add that concern to a more formal prayer at a later time.

Praying without ceasing doesn't take the place of time alone in prayer with God. However, it is a joyful experience to unite with the LORD who lays burdens on our hearts. We can't always stop and kneel, but our heart attitude can still be

“praying without ceasing.”

Praying without ceasing is sometimes really difficult when it seems like God is not answering. We’ll get to that later.

3. Have you ever prayed for something absurd like “Lord, let me win this next game of computer solitaire” or “don’t let it rain today.” Let’s say you win the game of solitaire or that it didn’t rain, do you think that God answered your prayer or was it just random chance?

4. Before a sports contest of some sort (softball game, tennis match, etc.) have you every prayed alone or with the team to win the game or match? Do you think God answers prayers like this? What if both teams are Christians and pray for a win?

5. How often do your prayers have to be answered (in the way that you want) before you are convinced that God hears and answers them? Do you ever “test” God with your prayers? (Judges 6: 36-40, Deut 6:16, Matt 4:5-7)

Judges 6:36-40 – Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—³⁷ look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.”³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew.”⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

This is discussed at www.billmuehlenberg.com in the section, “Difficult Bible Pasages.” He asks, is it ever appropriate for Christians today to say something like this? “God, if you make someone knock on my door in ten minutes time, inquiring about our house, I will then know it is your will to sell this house.” Is this a valid method? Or is it improperly putting God to the test?

In the story of Gideon, the Lord says he will use him to defeat the Midianites. In response Gideon asks for a sign. God agreed and performed a clear revelatory sign for him. Emboldened by this, at God’s command, Gideon tore down some pagan altars which never should have been there. The Midianites then crossed the Jordan and it was clear a battle was coming. It is at this point that Gideon asks for the sign of the fleece, which God gives him—twice!

In chapters 7 and 8 we read about how Gideon defeated the Midianites, after of course he greatly pared down his numbers so that God would get the glory, not him. So his original army of 32,000 men was shrunk to just 300.

But what about the signs he asked for? K.L. Younger remarks, this incident “is nothing short of a pagan divinatory test of the deity. The fleece incidents are far from a model for the discernment of God’s will. . . . Gideon’s problem is his lack of willingness to trust the LORD, to take him at his word. So this is about Gideon’s unbelief and stubbornness in response to God’s call. In such cases, God is not obligated to respond, and if he does, it is only by grace. Those who use this passage as a means of discerning God’s will are simply misapplying Scripture.”

In the New Testament there is no example of, or command for, such a test. Instead, we have Jesus and the apostles downplaying this, and at times getting upset when people asked for a sign. As Jesus complained, “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah” (Matt 16:4). Or as Paul said, “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:22,23).

Indeed, there are many passages about *not testing* God.

Deuteronomy 6:16 – “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.”

Matthew 4:5-7 – Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

6. When a prayer is *not* answered in the way that you want, do you think God is trying to teach you a lesson? The Bible says that God answers prayers. In some cases, he says, “yes,” in some cases, “no,” and sometimes he says, “wait.” Do you think some prayers are not answered because they are not heard by God? Dale Robbins has a list of 11 common reasons that God does not answer prayers. Can you think of some reasons?

One of the greatest benefits afforded to every Christian is the privilege of answered prayers. In the Bible, Jesus made this tremendous promise, “And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive” (Matt 21:22). However, despite the Lord’s willingness to answer prayer, it is obvious that some prayers have gone unanswered. Why is this? The following are the most common reasons why some prayers do not get results:

1. Lack of fellowship with God and His word

John 15:7 – “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

Jesus promised that if we would remain in His fellowship, and allow His Word to remain in us, this would produce results in prayer. Unanswered prayers are

sometimes a result of absence from fellowship with the Lord and His Word. What breaks your remaining in him? Sin!

2. Not seeking to please the LORD

1 John 3:21-23 – “Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. ²³ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”

Answers to prayer come when we seek to keep His commandments and please the Lord with our life. This is not to suggest that we “earn” answered prayers, any more than we can earn salvation which comes only by faith (Eph. 2:8-9). He answers our prayers from his “grace” and “mercy” (Heb. 4:16), not merely from our good deeds. However, keeping His commandments and pleasing the Lord is a product of our obedience to His word, which is faith in action (James 2:20). What are His commandments? He commanded that we are to love the Lord with all our heart, mind, and soul, and to love our neighbor as ourself (Mark 12:30-31). Further, Jesus said we are to love our brothers as He has loved us. “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Lack of love, bitterness, unforgiveness is the root of many unanswered prayers, since faith works by love (Gal 5:6).

3. Unconfessed sin in one’s life

1 Peter 3:12 – “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

There is no doubt that sin will disrupt the flow of God’s blessings and answers to prayer. David wrote, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear” (Ps. 66:18). All acts of rebellion and disobedience to God is considered sin. Sins of “commission,” are those overt acts which are done in disobedience. However, sins of “omission,” are those things we don’t do in obedience, but know we should (James 4:17). The remedy for all sin is to confess it to God, forsake it, and ask Him to forgive you (1 John 1:9).

4. Improper Motives

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 pleasures.”

Our motives in our prayer requests are of concern to the Lord. He wishes to help us in our time of need, but is not obligated to answer prayers which will merely feed our carnal, worldly appetites and (lustful) pleasures. Our motives and desires can be corrected by humbling ourselves, and drawing near to God (James 4:8-10).

5. Not asking in God’s will

Proverbs 21:13 – Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor will also cry

out and not be answered.

1 John 5:14-15 – “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: 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 what we asked of him.”

God will only answer those prayers that are in “His” will. When we ask anything that is in His will, we can have assurance that those requests are granted to us. God’s will is revealed through His Word, the Bible. Anything promised by His Word is His will, and we can be confident that He’ll honor our prayers based on His Word.

6. Don’t know how to pray

Luke 11:1 “...Lord, teach us to pray...”

Some lack effectiveness in prayer simply because they don’t know what the scriptures teach about prayer. Jesus gave His disciples an outline for prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Take the time to study it. Other passages teach that prayer is primarily to be a private, intimate time with the Lord (Matt. 6:6), to be intermingled with praise and thanksgiving (Acts 16:25, Phil. 4:6). Times of fasting with prayer are beneficial to strengthen our faith and power in prayer (Acts 14:23, 1 Cor. 7:5). Jesus often went to secluded places to spend prolonged periods in prayer (Luke 6:12, Matt. 4:2).

There are four components that should be in every prayer: ACTS.

A = Acclamation, C = Confession, T = Thanksgiving, S = Supplication

7. Lack of Faith

Hebrews 11:6 – “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

We cannot please God without faith. Prayer is not merely “begging” from God. It is “believing” God and His Word! Faith will come forth and grow as we devote our attention to the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Our faith can also be “built up,” by praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20).

8. Misunderstanding of Faith

Mark 11:24 – “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Many do not understand that faith is believing in the reality of things, even though we cannot see them (Heb. 11:1). Jesus said that “when” you pray, you must believe that you “receive” your answer at that moment. The word, “receive” comes from the Greek word, *LAMBANO*, which means “to receive now” (present tense). He then says we will “have” them. “Have” comes from, *ESOMAI*, which means “to possess later” (future tense).

So, when we pray we must believe in the finished results of our prayer, and we will eventually experience the tangible results sometime later.

9. Wavering faith

James 1:6-7 – “But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.”

There are those who allow every “wind” of feelings or circumstances to influence or discourage their faith. They vacillate back and forth, like the waves tossed about in the sea. One day they believe, but the next, they’re ready to give up, and so forth. Such persons usually base their faith on their feelings or emotions instead of God’s Word. They who waver in their faith cannot expect to receive “anything of the Lord.” Our faith must become stable, steadfast, and consistent to receive from God.

10. Failure to apply spiritual Authority

Mark 11:23 – “Truly [If you have faith in God,] I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them.”

There are times that some prayers may not get far until we incorporate the spoken authority of the name of Jesus. The reason for this is that the problems we face may *sometimes* be a product of an evil spiritual origin. As Paul writes, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). In such cases, our prayers may need to engage in what we call “spiritual warfare” to obtain results.

The need for this type of prayer is most obvious whenever Christians deal directly with demonic activity. For this evil operation to cease, our prayers need to include the exercise of spiritual authority against the devil in the name of Jesus, commanding him to leave (Acts 16:18). Therefore, as Jesus indicated, there will be times that we may need to literally speak to mountains (symbolic of obstacles and problems) and tell them to move in Jesus’ name.

11. Lack of Perseverance

Galatians 6:9 – “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Probably the greatest reason that some prayers go unanswered is because many give-up praying and believing before they receive their answer. As long as we have the promise of God’s Word, be patient and persistent—keep believing, and don’t quit, no matter how long it takes! God has a “due season” when He will bring the answer to pass.

Luke 18:1-8 – The Parable of the Persistent Widow

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³ And there was a widow in that town

who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

⁴“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”

⁶ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Back to Q 2 (pray continually). Does persistence in prayer mean: a) endless repetition, b) long sessions of prayer, c) attending daily [or weekly] prayer meetings, d) keeping our requests constantly before God, e) something else (what?) Just what does it mean to be persistent in our prayers?

Why did the judge eventually give in to the woman’s requests? (18:4-5)

How are God’s actions the same—and how are they different—from the unjust judge?

[Q6 answer adapted from <http://www.victorious.org/unprayer.htm>]

7. How often or long would your prayers have to go unanswered before you are convinced that God is ignoring you?

Summary:

Prayer blocker #1: Broken relationship with God.

Blocker #2: Broken relationships with others.

If you reestablish these relationships, your prayers *will* be answered.

Mark 11:25 – “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

You must forgive others. And it works the other way too when you need to be forgiven.

Matthew 5:23-24 – “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.