

International Women's Day of Prayer

March 6, 2010

“Crumbs from the Master's Table”

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*Prepared by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist
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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
About the Writer	4
Order of Service	5
Children’s Story	6
Sermon	8
Suggested Program for Sabbath Afternoon	15
Why Doesn’t God Answer My Prayers?	18
God answers prayer—but why not the way I want Him to?	22



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My Dear Sisters:

Joyful greetings to you. It has been one year since our last Women's Ministries Day of Prayer. During this year I know that God has been working in our lives and hearing and answering our prayers. The answers may not have always been what we wanted but they have always been for our best good. How do we know that? Because we serve a God who knows the future and knows what is best for us. The question I want to ask you today is – "Do you believe that God is working for your good?"

For many of us, prayers that are answered in ways different to our requests sometimes cause us to become discouraged and even angry with God. If we are in a daily abiding relationship with God (John 15:1-7), then we have the assurance that God is working in our lives for our good and so that His name will be praised.

Our sermon this year deals with the issue of prayers that sometimes seem to go unanswered for a long time, or prayers that seem to be unheard by God. The sermon deals with our faith in God to answer our prayers as He sees best. It deals with persistent prayer, our attitude to prayer, and our response to God's answers. Do we trust God? Are we willing to surrender to His will for our lives or do we pray asking God to answer in our way?

Solomon tells us to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to our own understanding..." Proverbs 3:5, 6. With this kind of trust in God, we will pray with the knowledge that He is God and He is able to answer our prayers and deal with our challenges, trials, and pain.

So my sisters, be encouraged. We serve a God who is able to do all things. But even more than that, He promises that together we can do all things (Phil 4:13).

Blessings and joy to you,

Heather-Dawn Small
Director

About the writer

Joy Gashaija is director of the Women's Ministries and Children's Ministries departments of the East-Central Africa Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She is married to Venant Gashaija, a retired civil engineer with the Uganda Government, who is currently self-employed.

She strongly believes that every woman has the potential to serve God using her talents. In her ministry as a woman leader, she enjoys motivating women to be their best in whatever they do and to fully trust God with their lives. Joy also believes raising happy children who know Jesus is a God-given privilege. She therefore devotes time to presenting parenting seminars, children's meetings, and counsel to teenagers.

In her free time, she finds pleasure in chatting with friends, taking prayer walks, and reading spiritual, medical and parenting books. Passionate about prayer, she encourages prayer groups and is a member of a strong prayer cell in her local church in Entebbe, Uganda. She finds encouragement in her favorite Bible verses—Romans 8:28, Jeremiah 29:11, Isaiah 43:2, and Psalms 27:4.

SUGGESTED ORDER OF SERVICE
Women's Ministries Day of Prayer
March 06, 2010

Prelude

Call to Worship:
"Trust and Obey"
Seventh-day Adventist Church Hymnal # 590

Invocation

Hymn of Praise:
"'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus"
SDA Church Hymnal # 524

Scripture Reading:
1 John 5:14-15

Pastoral Prayer:
(During this time, special prayers should be offered for those in our communities who are suffering due to extreme poverty, wars, and diseases, and for those living a lonely life due to abusive relationships or loss of loved ones)

Offering:
(Special music should be played or sung during this time, if possible by women.)

Children's Story:
"God Knows the Way Home"

Special Music

Sermon:
"Crumbs from the Master's Table"

Closing Hymn:
"Trust and Obey"
Seventh-day Adventist Church Hymnal # 590

Benediction
Postlude

CHILDREN'S STORY
"A Refuge in Times of Trouble"
Scripture Reading: Nahum 1:7

Introductory Questions:

- Which of you children are 7 or 8 years?
- How many have a grandmother?
- Have any of you ever run away from home?
- Why might someone want to run away?

Our story today is about two children, a brother and sister named Naomi and Steven. Naomi was 8 years old and Steven was 6 years old. Their father and mother had died when the children were very young, and they went to live with their grandmother. One day they went to school, and on their way back home they stopped to play with their classmates. They played until it was almost dark, and their grandmother started getting worried. When they got home, they were so dirty their grandmother knew they stopped on the way home to play with friends. She was very angry because she had warned them before not to do this, so she decided to punish them by caning them.

When Grandmother went to the store to buy a cane, Naomi and Steven decided to run away from home. They sneaked out the door and started to run. They kept running, hoping they would reach their friend's home, but they lost their way. A mean woman found them and realized they were lost. She acted friendly and took them to her house. But she really was not nice. She wanted them to do housework for her. The next day she would not let them go to school. The woman gave them very little food and a lot of hard work to do. They had no extra clothes to change into, and they became very dirty. The children were scared and very unhappy.

Naomi and Steven wanted to go back home to their grandmother, but they did not know how to get there. Then as they talked, they remembered that their Sabbath School teacher had told them that God is love. She told them that He loves children and listens to their prayers. Steven reminded Naomi too of the memory verse in Nahum 1:7, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust him."

Naomi and Steven decided that when the mean lady was not listening, they would pray to God. Late in the night they woke up to pray.

They asked God to forgive them for running away from home, and they also asked God to show them the way back to Grandmother's house. They also promised God that they would be good children and not run away from their grandmother again.

Naomi and Steven woke up early the next morning. They had decided to try to find their way back to their grandmother. Although they did not know the way to their grandmother's place, they trusted God to show them the way. They walked for a long distance, but they got hungry, thirsty, and very tired. Steven began to cry, but Naomi encouraged him to stop crying and suggested that they pray again.

This time they said, we will pray loud so that God will hear us. They knelt under a tree and prayed that God would help them and show them the way home.

After praying, they began walking again. Soon a kind man met them. He asked them where they were going, and they told him their story. The man bought them some cakes and milk from a nearby kiosk, and after they felt strong enough to walk again, he took them to the police station. The police had been looking for them because Grandmother had reported that they were missing. A policeman helped the children find their way back home to their grandmother who was very happy to see them again. She had been searching for four days. They asked Grandmother to forgive them, which she did, and she prayed that Jesus would help them to be good children. The children also prayed and thanked God for helping them find their way home.

Questions after the story

- What bad things did Naomi and Steven do?
- What good things did they do?
- What would you do if you were in trouble?
- What is your memory Verse?
- Who promises to trust in the Lord?

Closing prayer: (You can ask a child to give a closing prayer)

Note: Both the introductory and concluding questions are just suggestions

SERMON

“Crumbs from the Master’s Table”

By Joy Gashaija

Welcome and Introduction to the sermon

Scripture Reading: 1 John 5:14-15

Cathy received rejection, rebukes, and abuse from both her husband and her in-laws, and sometimes a beating from her husband. This was because she had been unable to bear children for the 12 years of their marriage. To her, and to many other women in a similar situation, the pain is great, especially in the African society where women who do not bear children are considered to be the ones at fault.

Being a Christian, she was sure prayer would work for her within months as had been the case previously in her encounters with God. But the answer she had hoped to receive in months did not come. Instead, the delay turned into long years of waiting. She claimed the promises in the Bible as she prayed “With God all things are possible” (Mathew 19:26); “Ask and it will be given to you...” (Luke 11:9); and “For I know the plans I have for you... plans to prosper you and not to harm you...” (Jeremiah 29:11).

When nothing happened, she remembered the promise which says “Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them” (Mathew 18:20). She joined a prayer group and shared her problems. She prayed consistently and solicited prayers from prayer warriors of different denominations. She told friends she had asked God to give her a child even if she lost it in the process. Then at least her husband and in-laws would appreciate her capacity to conceive a baby.

Many women who did not believe in God realized her desperate need and advised her to seek the intervention of the gods in the African shrines, but she remained focused on Christ.

Then a major crisis befell her when her husband decided he was going to marry another wife, one who would give him children. Cathy did not fight or even object to it; instead she intensified her prayers to God by listing all her blessings despite her discouragement. She gained more faith to pray and to claim more promises. To her surprise, two months before the African traditional wedding for the second wife was to take place, Cathy conceived, and in February, 2008, she gave birth to a baby boy. The plans for the second wife’s traditional wedding were put off, and now Cathy is expecting her second child.

Cathy never took God's timing as a "no" answer; she instead intensified her prayers each day. The worse the situation seemed, the closer she drew to God through prayer. She is a woman of great faith.

Matthew 15:21-28 tells us of another woman who, because of her humility, endurance, persistence, and great faith, compelled Jesus to heal her daughter. The story which will be the focus of our sermon today, on this International Women's Day of Prayer, remains a great lesson of hope for the multitude of Christians who await answers to their prayers.

Matthew 15:21-28 (NIV)

The conversation between Jesus and the Canaanite woman

The conversation between the Canaanite woman and Jesus as recorded in Mathew 15:21-28 goes as follows:

21- Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

22- A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon possession."

23 -Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged Him, " Send her away, for she keeps crying after us."

24 -He answered, "I was only sent to the lost sheep of Israel."

25 -The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said,

26- He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

27- "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat crumbs that fall from their master's table."

28- Then Jesus said, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted," and her daughter was healed from that very hour.

The knowledge of the Master's deeds

The woman's decision to seek Christ must have come from a background of knowledge. It was certainly the cry of one expecting positive results. She must have been acquainted with Jesus' deeds. Why didn't she just go to one of the disciples? Why didn't she ask one of the disciples to plead for her when Jesus' response did not seem positive as she had hoped? But no, she came straight to Jesus. Why did she address Jesus as the son of David? She was a heathen woman, a pagan, a descendant of those who did not worship the God of Israel. A Gentile! She

had no claim on the God of the covenant. How could she address Jesus by that title? Yes, the woman had knowledge of Jesus.

Stories of the wonderful deeds of Jesus had long been circulated by the Jews who lived in Phoenicia. Deeds such as feeding the five thousand people, rebuking the storm (Matthew 8:26), healing the sick, “healing every disease and sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23-25), and restoring sight to the blind (Matthew 9:28-30). She may have also heard that Jesus defended those who are victimized, and she must have known that Jesus healed. She also may have known that the disciples had sent away children from seeing Jesus. Thus she could have realized that they were not the best way to reach Christ.

We in the church have not only heard of the miraculous deeds of Jesus from the Bible, but we have also seen miracles happen to people we know. We too have endless lists of answered prayers, of big and small requests made to Him over the years.

Today we have what may be bigger challenges, yet we allow hopelessness to trap us whenever there is a delayed answer to our prayers. We may give up on prayer, get tired of waiting for God’s timing, and we may look elsewhere for solutions to our problems. We sometimes feel we have waited too long for an answer from the Master! We too need to be well acquainted with Jesus’ deeds, power, and methods.

The Canaanite Woman’s prayer

“Lord, son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession,” (v. 21) cried out the Canaanite woman. It must have been a terrible demon to have brought this woman to such a high level of stress and trauma. Perhaps her child had suffered for a long time. The woman may have tried many doctors and medications. We don’t know where else she had tried to get help before she came to Jesus.

She lived in Phoenicia, in the area of Tyre, a major port city of the ancient world. She was part of the Greek world, surrounded by pagan beliefs in gods and goddesses. We can only imagine how many sleepless nights she had endured before she concluded that this case could be solved by none but Jesus, the Son of David.

We have no record of how long she had been waiting for Jesus to come to Tyre. But we know that “As soon as she heard about Him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at His feet.... She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.” (Mark 7:24; Matthew 15:22).

This woman knew Jesus had the power to cast out demons. She may have heard of Jesus’ encounter with the two demon-possessed men recorded in Matthew 8:28-34; the healing of

the paralytic in Matthew 9:2; the widow of Nain's son in Luke 7:13, 14; the woman with a hemorrhage in Mathew 9:20; or even Simon Peter's mother in-law Mark 1:29-30. Her knowledge of some of these miracles could explain her motivation.

“Man looks at the outside appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (I Samuel 16:7)

But what was the response she received? “Jesus did not answer a word, so his disciples came to him and urged him to send her away” (v. 23). Today you have heard this story from the Bible; you have come to the Master's feet in this church today. Why don't you, like the Canaanite woman, cry out to Jesus, telling Him exactly what the problems are in your life? What demon has possessed you or your loved ones over the years?

Demons come in all forms. One thing we know is that demons cause hurt and harm, and undesirable and disturbing behavior. It could be a demon of greed, selfishness, possessions, or pride; a demon of alcohol; a demon of adultery, stealing or cheating; a demon of neglect or abuse; or a literal demon such as the one possessing the Canaanites woman's daughter. Why don't we choose to ignore all the wrong advice and suggestions that come our way from the enemy, just as this woman ignored the discouraging voices of the disciples and remained focused upon Jesus for an answer? He is the one who knows our case, the one who knows the extent of our problems, the depth of our pain.

When the woman cried out to Him, Jesus did not answer a word. We don't know how long Jesus was silent, but His silence was long enough for the disciples to conclude that Jesus was not interested in this case, and they urged Him to send her away, saying, “Send her away for she keeps crying after us” (v. 23). It is easy to believe that Jesus had already observed the attitude of His disciples, and the woman's faith and her determination.

In our prayer life God knows our level of endurance, and He still seizes the opportunity to teach us lessons, even if the cost may be pain. There are still obstacles as we cry out for Jesus' help. Many will try to discourage us by offering alternate solutions, but like the Canaanite woman, let us remain focused on Jesus. Even if the reward is merely the crumbs from the master's table, they will be sufficient for our needs.

“Even the dogs eat the crumbs from the Master's table” (v. 27)

Some today may judge us by our past lives or our background and consider us unworthy of His blessings, but Jesus will judge us by our faith in Him and grant us the desires of our hearts, as it is written in Matthew 15:28. Jesus sees all of us as His children, the ones He redeemed with His precious blood, and what touches us will be of concern to Him. No matter how other people may see or judge us, He sees us as worthy in His sight.

We are told in *Desire of Ages*, “Jesus had just departed from His field of labor because the scribes and Pharisees were seeking to take His life....They manifested unbelief and bitterness, and refused the salvation so freely offered them. Here Christ meets one of an unfortunate and despised race, that has not been favored with the light of God’s word; yet she yields at once to the divine influence of Christ, and has implicit faith in His ability to grant the favor she asks” (p. 401).

Matthew 15:23: When Jesus did not answer, the woman did not get angry; she waited for Jesus’ response. As she waited, she kept crying out to Jesus because she knew that the healing of her daughter could come only from Him. Finally, Jesus responded to the woman in a very provoking manner “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (v. 24). The Bible does not tell us that the woman was shocked or even discouraged at Jesus’ response but instead we read that the woman was humbled by Jesus’ words and remained persistent in prayer, accepting her status as a Gentile.

Jesus responded further in an even more provoking and insulting manner, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs” (v. 26). Many women might have given up in anger or responded in the same measure to Jesus’ statement. The woman may have been shocked at these unkind words, knowing Jesus’ history of compassion for hurting and desperate people, probably from her Jewish neighbors, but she had no time for shock. She had an opportunity she did not want to lose and a mission she had to accomplish. She may not even have been shocked, given the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles at the time. She quickly fell to her knees as a worshipper and not as a claimant, responding in a humble and appealing manner. “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table” (v. 27). This woman was able to accept any level of humanity Christ assigned her. It was her faith which allowed her to continue pleading with the Lord.

God’s silence is not God’s rejection

In matters of faith, knowing to whom we are praying means we should not give up. We should keep hoping and doing what we must do to the best of our ability, leaving the rest to God. We should have faith that He will respond in His time. God is never early or late, but He is always on time. He was on time for Cathy, on time for Hannah, and He was on time for the Canaanite woman. We can trust that He will be on time for you and me. We should not assume that God’s silence means “no,” but it may mean a test of our faith. It could be a lesson to our neighbor, or protection from an unseen danger, or our desires may not be in harmony with God’s will.

When challenges and troubles come our way, though we may be weeping and praying for God’s intervention, we should remain humble and focused on Jesus. Our humility will be more appealing to our Heavenly Father than our anger and discouragement. No matter how bad a

situation may seem, and no matter how long God may remain silent, God is always on our side. “And we know that in all things God works for good to those who love Him” (Romans 8:28).

Why did Jesus respond in such an insulting manner to this hurting woman?

The Bible is clear about temptations that come our way: “... and God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Jesus must have seen that the faith of this Canaanite woman was able to endure the test; otherwise He would never have brought the test to her.

Our relationship to God’s and His plans for His children are made clear in Jeremiah 29:11-12. “For I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you.” The test you may be going through today will not bring you to total despair. You can have faith, and God will provide a way so that you can endure.

The answer to a faithful prayer

“Then Jesus answered, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted,’ and her daughter was healed from that very hour” (v.28).

The woman’s daughter was healed because of the mother’s faith. Notice that Jesus did not go to the woman’s house in order for her daughter to be healed. The woman who referred to Jesus as “Son of David” had great faith as she prayed. She had total trust that this Son of David had the secret to healing her daughter. She only informed Jesus of the situation and asked for His mercy. She did not allow anything to divert her attention from the master. She remained focused on Jesus. Although Jesus did not respond immediately, she endured to the end.

Conclusion

The Canaanite woman’s situation was not an ordinary one. It was a case of desperation, a case of a hurting mother and sick daughter, probably a dying daughter. But this mother trusted that nothing was impossible with Jesus. Her humility and unflinching faith brought her the victory and saw her demon-possessed daughter healed.

Your situation, regardless of its nature, may seem hopeless today, but you know the One who restores life and hope. Come to Him in faith, and He will restore your hope and give you and your loved ones life.

“There is no power like that of prevailing prayer...Abraham pleading for Sodom, Jacob wrestling all night, Moses standing in the breach, Hannah intoxicated with sorrow, David

heartbroken with remorse and grief, Jesus in sweat and blood. Add to this your personal observation and experience; always therefore such prayer prevails. It turns ordinary mortals into men of power. It brings power. It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God” (Samuel Chadwick).

“Christ now grants her request, and finishes the lesson to the disciples. Turning to her with a look of pity and love, He says, ‘O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.’ From that hour her daughter became whole. The demon troubled her no more. The woman departed, acknowledging her Saviour, and happy in the granting of her prayer. “(The Desires of Ages, 401-402)

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ” (1 John 5:14-15). (NIV)

Suggested Program for Sabbath Afternoon

(You may adapt it accordingly)

ACTIVITY I— Prayer Ideas

When people hear that a day is set aside as a special day of prayer, they expect to be prayed for in a special way. The nations, leadership, families, and individuals all hope the prayers will focus on their needs. Christians know that there is power and a promise in group prayer. It would be good for the Women's Ministries Day of Prayer for this year to involve everyone by inviting them to put their prayer requests in specially prepared Prayer Request boxes.

If possible, the prayer boxes should be put in the church on Friday before vespers. Announcements will be made on both Friday evening and Sabbath morning inviting people to put their prayer requests in the boxes. Announcements will be made regarding the afternoon special prayer session. People to lead the group prayers on Sabbath afternoon should be selected and informed in time for them to prepare adequately (at least 2 or 3 weeks in advance).

Scripture: *"For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*

Mathew 18:20 (NIV)

Prayer Idea #1

1. Select four medium boxes and decorate them attractively with colors of your choice.
2. Label the boxes for Prayer Requests as follow:

Box 1: "Waited for long" —Prayer requests for those who have waited for prayer answers from God for a long time and are still waiting. (jobs, babies, marriage, healing, etc.)

Box 2: "Hurting right now" (illness, relationships, loss of a loved one, living under very difficult circumstances)

Box 3: "Our communities" —Churches, leadership, nations (war, famine, disaster, conflict), etc.

Box 4: "Spiritual lives" —Confession; thanks giving; protection of our children, spouses, parents (all our loved ones); and guidance of the Holy Spirit

Prayer Idea #2

Similar to Idea #1, but use just one large box (depending on the membership of your church). Invite everyone to put their prayer requests in the box. Invite two or more people to pray. (Try for diversity in age, gender, etc.)

ACTIVITY 2—Bible Characters

**Scripture: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”
Isaiah 40:31 (KJV)**

The focus of this activity is on learning to *wait* for God’s answer. Have an appropriate number of church members act out the following characters who *waited* upon God and received their answers in God’s timing. (The number of actors will depend on time available at your church)

Below is a list of possible characters, followed by a sample speech for Hannah. The other characters could be acted in a similar way. Try to create simple costumes if possible.

1. Hannah
2. Abraham
3. Sarah
4. Mary (mother of Jesus)
5. Elizabeth
7. The father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)
8. If desired, a member could also be selected to give a brief testimony about a long-awaited answer. This should be rehearsed and should be brief!

Hannah (sample character)

My name is Hannah. You may have read about me in the book of 1 Samuel. I had a loving husband, but I was childless and considered a misfit in my society. I was mocked because I had no children. This hurt me deeply. I was considered very unfortunate.

But I did not allow pain to cause me bitterness toward God (1 Sam. 12:20). Instead I developed a more intimate relationship with Him. After my encounter with God, my attitude changed. I believed God and found rest in Him. God blessed me with a son, and before he was weaned, I kept my promise and gave my son Samuel to God. God rewarded me with more children. God is faithful! Trust in Him.

ACTIVITY 3—Testimonies

If there are people in the congregation who wish to give testimonies on answers to prayer, invite them to do so. Encourage them to keep their testimonies very short (1 or 2 minutes) and to the point. An announcement could be made the previous week inviting those who have testimonies to register.

ACTIVITY 4—Busy-day prayers

Several women could create and act out a skit on prayer that shows what happens on a typical day as women try to fit prayer life into their hectic schedules.

Music: Special music or congregational singing can be included between activities to enhance the program.

Be selective: All these activities cannot be done in one afternoon. Each church can choose what best suits their needs and schedule.

Why Doesn't God Answer My Prayers?

The Frustration of Unanswered Prayer

How many times have you earnestly prayed for something, only to wait in vain for an answer from God? You don't have to be a Christian long to recognize that we don't always get what we pray for! Why does it seem that God doesn't answer our prayers? Is it because we aren't praying properly, or have we simply failed to recognize the fact that God has already answered our prayer?

Our ideas about prayer and God's ideas about prayer are sometimes very different. Look at Jesus' model prayer offered in the Gospel of Luke

Luke 11:2-4

He said to them, "When you pray, say: " 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

Now let's take a deeper look at Jesus' model for prayer and see if we can learn something about the nature of prayer and the nature of the God who answers prayer.

Recognizing the Holy Nature of God

Notice here that Jesus begins by praising God and recognizing His holiness. He wants God's will to be accomplished first, even before asking for anything for Himself. Now honestly, are your prayers like this? The Bible tells us that we must put God first if we want our prayers to be heard:

Ezekiel 14:3

Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces. Should I let them inquire of me at all?

John 15:7

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

We are called to remain in God first and to put aside all other idols in our lives before we come to our Holy Creator to ask Him for something. How often are we truly able to do this? (How often do we even WANT to do this?)

Recognizing Our Desperate Need Related to Forgiveness

The last part of Jesus' prayer is centered entirely on the truth about each of us as believers. Jesus recognizes our need for forgiveness and our need to forgive others. And more importantly, Jesus recognizes our natural fallen tendency to slip into sin and the need we have for God's help. Do your prayers recognize the reality of who you are? The Bible says that we must be honest about our sinful condition if we want our prayers to be heard

Isaiah 59:1-2

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

Honest confession is often missing from our conversations with God, but the need for forgiveness was not omitted by the only perfect man who ever lived, Jesus Christ. If He is modeling this for us, it must be important to God. But more critically, our need to examine our fallen nature is important to us because it helps us to see God for who he really is (especially when compared to us!)

Recognizing the Simplicity of Our Material Needs

And right in the middle of the Lord's prayer, Jesus submits a simple request: "Give us this day our daily bread." Simple, immediate and humble. The request is focused on our needs rather than our wants, and it asks for no more than what is required in the here and now. Jesus asks for more than His own needs; His prayer is concerned with the needs that all of us have.

Proverbs 21:13

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

Are your prayers this humble and self-sacrificial? The Bible says that we must be concerned with the needs of others if we want our prayers to be heard.

So Why Doesn't He Answer?

Even if you do pray the way Jesus taught us to pray, you may sometimes feel God hasn't answered your prayer! That's because most of us think that the only acceptable answer to prayer is "yes." If you are a follower of Christ, you can have confidence that God will always say "yes" to your request for wisdom, forgiveness, or salvation.

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Romans 10:13

for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

But there may be times when God will say “no” or “not yet” to other requests. It’s not because He doesn’t love you or isn’t listening. Remember, God sees the end from the beginning.

Isaiah 46:10

I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please."

God has a complete understanding of what is good for us, even if it doesn’t make sense to us at the time.

Isaiah 55:8-9

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Given this reality about the knowledge (omniscience) and kindness (omni-benevolence) of God, we are simply called to pray as Jesus taught us, expecting God to answer us.

Matthew 7:7-11

"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. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

We are called to trust God, even when the answer to our prayer isn’t what we were hoping for.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

There are many times when we don't get what we ask for in prayer and then years later are glad that we didn't get what we first wanted. Has that ever happened to you? As a parent, I've had the experience of having to say 'no' (or remain silent) to a request made by one of my children, even when I so desperately wanted to make my child happy in the short-term by simply saying "yes." But I knew there was something more valuable in store if I could just help my son or daughter understand the value of waiting, or the danger of actually getting what they were asking for. In those situations, my children needed to trust my wisdom even if they couldn't understand my response at the time. I was confident that they would someday understand why I said "no." In a similar way, we need to accept patiently whatever answer we get from God, knowing that we will someday understand why He responded the way He did.

Unknown Writer

God answers prayer—but why not the way I want Him to?

God answers prayer! The beauty of God's answering prayer is just that: He answers us! God, in His ultimate and unfailing love, desires nothing less than our absolute best. Sometimes, what we think should be done is definitely not beneficial for us. Often, we aren't able to understand this until time passes and we can look back and see how the situation played out. Then we realize God knew what was best for us all along!

If a father takes his daughter to a candy store and tells her she can have anything she wants, we can imagine the little girl will walk wide-eyed into the store, eyeing all the sweet treats. However, the father, knowing his daughter is allergic to chocolate, wouldn't let her have a chocolate bar even if she asked for it. Does the father not care what his daughter wants? No, the father is bearing the responsibility of parenting and doing what is best for the child.

In this same way, God always answers our prayers with our best interest at heart. God stands to gain nothing from us, but we stand to gain everything from Him!

So, next time you fail to get the answer you want, or the next time you feel like God is simply being quiet, set your concerns aside and trust Him. With time, you'll see His protection and divine hand in your situation.

1 John 5:14-15 says, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him."

Unknown writer