

## “Why Does God Not Answer My Prayers?”

Texts: Psalm 22:2, Luke 11:1-13, John 15:7, (James 4:1-10)

August 14, 2011

Two students with exams before them, stop to pray. One prays, “Dear God, if you are there, I know I should have been studying last night instead of partying, but please allow me to at least make a C on this exam so I can pass the course.”

The other student prays, “I thank you God that you helped me study the things I needed for this exam as I asked. Help me to remember them and do my very best by your grace, in Jesus’ name.”

Which one’s prayer was answered? Right; the one who studied. How do I know that? Because, they both were me at different times in my life. The first was when I was college after high school, and NO, partying is not conducive to passing exams or courses. The second was later after Lou and I married and had become committed Christians. I had been reading the Bible, including the parts about prayer. Amazing how much better things go when you read the instruction book. I like what our Baptist friends used to say about the Bible.

**“B-I-B-L-E, Basic –Instructions –Before –Leaving –Earth.”**

Someone turned in this question they would ask God, **“Why does God not answer my prayers?”** I have felt like asking God that many times; I would guess most of us have sometime in our lives. It can be discouraging to not **“see”** an answer to a prayer we have prayed for a long time. I have things I have been praying about for many years that I can’t see evidence of them having been answered... YET. But, I believe God **WILL** eventually answer them his way. If you don’t have much experience with asking God for things, it may be discouraging if you don’t see answers quickly. Can we learn better ways to pray to get more answers? **YES!** The Bible is our instruction book for relating to God.

In Luke 11 we see Jesus praying, and when he finishes, his disciples are impressed enough to ask him to teach them how to pray too. First he gives them an outline for prayer that has come to be known as “The Lord’s Prayer.” I believe he used it himself in his prayer life. We have shared earlier that it is really an outline for categories of prayer rather than just a rote prayer. It has become one of the elements shared by most branches of Christendom. Rather, today I would like to talk about what leads to praying successfully. After Jesus taught them the outline he told them a funny story about what you would have to do to get your neighbor, Joe, to loan you a few slices of bread in the middle of the night, no Quick Stops open at that hour. When you go pound on his door, all you hear is “go away...we’re all piled up in bed watching a movie.” And, you thought Joe was a friend, didn’t you? Well, if you don’t want to hear about it from your mother-in-law for the rest of your life how you had

nothing for her to eat when she was unbelievably late getting to your house because her car broke down, you better keep pounding until you see Joe at the door with the bread, no matter what you have to do. Prayer is like that, he said. You have to **keep it up** as long as it takes, **FIRST RULE**.

There are some other important points that can help us improve our prayer scores. **It has to do with WHAT you ask for.** The next story Jesus told was about a child asking her father for something to eat. What is the **WHAT** in the story? The child is asking for what she needs. That was no accident; **Jesus is suggesting the WHAT of our prayers should be WHAT WE or OTHERS NEED.** That may seem foolish or childish to us. The Bible says God knows what we need even before we can think or ask, so what's the point? It is all about the nature of the **relationship**. The child in the story was clear who the **Provider** was, her father. Are we clear when we pray? I have known people who refused to ask God for anything because they didn't want to bother God claiming they weren't worthy. **But, that may be false humility!** What they may really have been saying was that they didn't want to humble themselves by having to ask anyone, especially God to provide for them. They felt they were perfectly capable of providing for themselves, thank you very much. Now, I don't want to make this ridiculous by suggesting that we should pray for each and everything little they need or want. What I am saying is that God wants us to **stay** in relationship with him, a relationship in which we are clear who is the Provider, and who is the creature. He isn't trying to beat us up or treat us like babies, **just to know who our SOURCE really is, and it isn't ourselves.** **THE SECOND RULE.**

**The THIRD RULE** is the **HOW** in prayer. That doesn't mean, praying on my knees, or while lying in bed, eyes closed or open, etc. **It means we must be sure what is in our hearts when we pray.** In John 15:7 we heard Jesus say, **"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you."** This is one of the **BIGGIES** for people who want to pick apart the Christian faith. It is very important we know what he meant by that. **He was saying that if we remain in a close relationship with him through repentance asking forgiveness in prayer, constantly remembering his words, we will gradually grow to want the same things Jesus and the Father want.** We will share the same **will**, in a general sense. That may sound impossible, but I can show you mature saints in the faith, regardless of their actual age, who really **KNOW** Jesus in a very personal way and usually have a very good idea of what God wants and is expecting. They pray for things they are convinced God wants. God even listens to children and answers their prayers too. The more we study Him the more we will love Him, and the more we will know his will. The more we **communicate** with Him, the more we will love him. He made us that way. The more we love Him, the more we will love Him and want to be like him.

On Aug. 5 at Long Beach, Washington, a twelve-year-old boy, Charles Dale Ostrander, with his church youth group, was wading in knee-deep water in the ocean when a rip current pulled him out to sea. You probably heard or read the story in the news. He was getting farther and farther from the shore when a twelve year old girl, Nicole Kissel, pulled him onto her boogie board and tried to paddle to shore. But, when they were tossed off by a big wave her dad told Nicole to come back to shore as he went to get help. When word reached the church group, pictures show his friends on their knees in the sand praying and crying out to God to save him. The rescue workers found him two feet the cold water after 15 minutes. After they got him to shore they started giving CPR. Over a half hour later, miraculously, they finally got a pulse. We now know that he not only survived, but is recovering well but they do not know yet about any brain damage.

This kind of thing has been known to happen a few times due to cold water and especially with children of small size. But, I ask you, "What were his odds? How many things could have gone wrong in that situation? How many other children and adults have been lost in the very same way?" **I know this:** people sincerely **prayed** for him, others did wonderful work rescuing him, and **he was saved**. **His parents are convinced of the power of faith and prayer. They said, "We trust in (God) no matter what."** His grandmother said, "The first thing (his mother) said (on the phone was), 'Just pray.'" When she began praying she heard God say, "Wait," and she knew he would be OK.

We may have a pile of questions which only God can answer. "Why are some not saved who are prayed for?" we may ask. No one can know that every time. **But, God does answer prayer.** I know from many years of experience, when we try to understand God's will and ways and we try to stay in intimate communication with God through the Holy Spirit, we can have a reasonable confidence of what God will and won't do in certain circumstances. Then we can pray in faith that God will do as he said. Does that mean it will turn out like we want or expect? NO! God is still God and can do what he wishes. **God does say "NO"** sometimes for reasons none of us can grasp from our point of view. And, sometimes **God says "WAIT."** Much growth can be achieved while faithfully waiting for God to bring an answer to prayer. There is a powerful passage about how our motives affect our prayers in James 4. Are we praying **selfishly** or **pridefully**? I hope you will read it today for more on that.

If we want to improve our score on having our prayers answered remember these three rules:

**RULE ONE: ASK and Don't Give UP**, persistently asking, beyond good manners.

**RULE TWO: WHAT...** Get to know what God wants. Get to know His **WILL** if we want to improve our asking. **"Father, not my will, but yours be done."**

**RULE THREE: HOW**...examine our heart to find the motive behind our prayer. Want or Need? Selfish or unselfish? God may answer our "Want" prayers if they don't interfere with his will. **But, we KNOW God will meet our NEEDS and those of others we pray for. DON'T GIVE UP!**