

From Our Lips to God's Ears: How God Answers Prayers

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 March 2024

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 00] So just before we begin the sermon this morning and lead into that a little bit, I am dealing with, I counted, six different health issues simultaneously right now.

So Sherwin asked me, how are you doing? And I laid that on him and he went, oh. And he said, nothing too serious, I hope. And I said, well, serious, but not terminal.

So there's that. So if you would keep me in prayer, I would appreciate it. And Michelle as well, because she has to listen to it all the time. But yeah, it's a lot.

So I would certainly appreciate your prayers. So welcome here for this Sunday morning, March 10th, 2024. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here.

So we're continuing in our sermon series, From Our Lips to God's Ears, Living a Life of Prayer. So we've been exploring many different aspects of prayer.

[0 : 58] We've been reminded week over week of why it's so critical that we seek to be people of prayer, praying people. And so far in this series, we've looked at the purpose of prayer.

Why do we do it? The power of prayer, the effect and impact it can have. The privilege of prayer, what it means to come before the creator of the universe, humbly and recognizing who he is and that he will answer.

The principles of prayer, the ways in which we can pray. The persistence of prayer. Why it's important that we don't just do it once, but it becomes a habit.

And we've talked about how to make it a habit and that it's okay to develop prayer as a habit. Then over the past two weeks, we've looked at the practice of prayer.

We've looked at the how, the when, the with whom and for what of prayer. So as we begin this morning, I want to consider a few things that may help frame the sermon.

[2 : 02] So why don't people pray more often? Or maybe knowing, not knowing, maybe how God answers prayer, people have lost their faith in it.

They can't recognize when prayer is being answered. Just a quick survey, show of hands, who has had their prayers answered? That's almost 100%.

So it's with these things in mind, maybe not believing prayers are answered, or not knowing or understanding how God answers prayer, that we're going to consider that.

We're going to look at this specific topic of how God answers prayer. And I am no prayer scholar.

So, and I've shared with you before, I have challenges in my own prayer life, making it a habit, making it a consistent thing that I do.

Not, I think one of the things that has resonated with people is the idea of bringing our plans to God and saying, okay, Lord, I figured all this out. What do you think?

[3 : 07] Just stamp it, okay? Right? We tend to get it backwards a little bit. So this morning, we're going to look at at least four different ways when we pray that God answers prayer.

So we're going to actually look at this. So the first way God may answer prayer is request granted. And maybe you can relate to that in your life.

I think people have just indicated. So we can recognize that God may answer our prayers with a yes. And you've probably experienced that yourself.

And here's some passages we're going to look at. Psalm 118, verse 5 says, Out of my distress, I called to the Lord. The Lord answered me and set me free.

Psalm 138, verse 3 says, On the day I called, you answered me. My strength of soul you increased. So God often grants our requests.

[4 : 10] He grants our prayers. Matthew 6, verse 33 says, And you know this one, Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Seek first, And all these things will be added to you.

Proverbs 3, verse 5 and 10. Hopping around the Bible this morning. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. Be not wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.

It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce. Then your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine.

So as we hear in those passages, God will respond to your prayers, our prayers positively, particularly when we put him first in our lives.

[5 : 17] And I touched on that a minute ago. When we come to him with our plans first, that's the wrong order. When we make him our number one priority, that's the best way to begin before we bring our prayers to him.

So what needs to happen for God to answer with a yes? Well, there are some things we've considered already in this series in past weeks. But let's be reminded of them a little bit.

1 John 5, verse 14 says, And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, here the caveat there, he hears us.

And we've talked about this in previous weeks, that we must ask, we must pray according to God's will. 1 John 3, verse 22 says, And whatever we ask, we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

So we must be doing God's will, seeking to obey the things that he has asked for us in our lives. So that's way number one, request granted.

[6 : 34] So what's a second way God might answer prayer? Well, it is request granted, but not yet. Anybody experience that in their life?

Anybody experience that in their life, where down the road you can look back and say, I asked and asked and asked, and there was silence, and then boom! Can you think of times that's happened to you?

I certainly can. So God may answer our prayer with, yes, but wait. I have friends right now who are in a, yes, but wait moment.

They feel like God led them to a particular situation and circumstance, and now they're waiting. So they're saying, okay, Lord, you know, do we need to change direction?

And I said, sometimes, when the teacher gives instructions and doesn't say anything else, you need to wait. And I've experienced that, and I'm sure many of you have too.

[7 : 32] Ecclesiastes 3, verse 1 says, for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. And then continuing in Ecclesiastes 3, 11, he has made everything beautiful in his time.

Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. So God may grant our request, but in time, according to his timing, not ours, and according to his purpose, not ours.

Luke 18, verse 7 says, And will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?

So we may think God is saying no. When we pray for something and hear silence, are we, as Kathy and Vern talked about this morning, are we pessimistic?

Do we say, well, I didn't get the answer I wanted immediately, so that must be no. Have you ever felt like that yourself? I have. Didn't get, I want the answer now.

[8 : 45] Now, God. Right now. Oh. Not now. All right. So we may think God is saying no, but he is saying yes, but wait.

Yes, but trust me. Hebrews 6, verse 10 to 12 says, For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints as you still do.

And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who walk through faith and patience inherit the promises.

So it's important that when the answer seems to be wait, we need to be patient. Who is a patient master among us here this morning?

Not I. I am impatient. My mother in heaven is laughing right now. Mr. Impatient. Ever since I was a child, I want the answer.

[10:01] I need to know the answer. If you don't have the answer, I'll keep asking you until I get the answer. Ask Michelle. It's at times crazy making. Luke 11, verse 8 to 10 says, I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.

For everyone who asks, knocks, receives. And the one who seeks, finds. And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. My friends, we need to keep asking.

We need to keep seeking. We need to keep knocking. As I was reflecting on this idea of waiting, I remembered my first sermon series, when I very first thing I preached, which is still terrifying in my mind, when I came to Bramard, was a series on waiting.

So if you want to know what it feels like to wait in the will of God, you can check that out and be reminded. Prayer is not intended to be an instant, on-demand, vending machine of blessings.

[11:24] Can you see that? Can you understand that? We don't simply input a prayer and out pops our blessing. That's how we expect it to work, but that's not how it's intended to work or how we're to understand that it works.

Romans 8.24 says, For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

We need to remember that God's promise that he will never leave or forsake us. That's his promise to us. He sees us. He loves us.

And each of us matter to him deeply. When God seems to be saying, yes, but wait, it's a time for patience and trust that he will provide.

Do we believe that or not? It's a belief and a trust that he will show up. He's not forgotten you or me. So does that idea of waiting make you tense or annoyed?

[12:35] I can give you a first-hand example. I went to mail something yesterday afternoon and I'm a loop closer. So it's like, this needs to be mailed. I'm going to take it, do it, done.

Waited in line. Continued to wait in line. Continued to wait in line. Feel my impatience rising, my intolerance rising.

And I finally thought, nope, this is not the end of the world. I turned to the lady behind me and I said, nope, I'm out. I turned and I said, you take my spot. So that idea of impatience, right?

Is that something that you can relate to? Being impatient and sometimes even more associated with impatience is anxiety. If you want the answer right now, if you want the solution right now, if you want the problem solved right now, if you have to wait, do you begin to get anxious?

Isaiah 40, 31 gives us this important perspective on waiting, especially waiting for God. Because it says, they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

[13:50] They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall run and not, walk and not faint. So when we wait on the Lord in the understanding that He will show up, we can be renewed and restored in that time of waiting, in that time of peace.

God Himself reminds us of the peace that we can find in Him when we wait in the words of Psalm 46, verse 10. This is one of my favorites. And when I'm anxious, folks, I pray this short prayer in my head.

And I have a friend who is very anxious recently, and I shared this with her. I breathe in, be still, I think, in my head. I breathe out and know in that I out am God.

A few weeks after I told her that, she reached out to me and said, you saved my life with that. Not literally, because she wasn't ready to end things or anything like that, but she said, you helped me recenter myself.

And I said, thank God for that, because I said, it works for me. So, in anxiety, in worry, in overthinking, we can be reminded that God is still in control.

[15:15] We can be still and relax and rest in Him. A third way God may answer our prayers is, request granted, oh, this one drives people crazy.

Request granted, but not as expected. Does that one ever happen to you? That one just happened to us this week. So, many of you know that our car died over the trip down to visit Connor over Family Day weekend.

We had it diagnosed. The prognosis was not good. The prognosis was, engine dead, start looking for something else. So, I have looked.

I have, we have test driven. We have looked. We have weighed cost with mileage, with all these things in vehicles we've looked at. A few days ago, out of the blue, something popped into my head. So, I've been praying, Lord, provide a way. Make a way. Make this happen. I'm trying to make it happen on my own and I don't want to do that, so make a way. I believe God said to me, check on your old car again.

[16:23] Check on that car again. So, I reached out to a shop that we know and I said, so the engine that you found, really expensive, high mileage, can you look again?

And they said, about a day later, said, oh, we found an engine in Abbotsford with 140,000 kilometers on it, which is not bad. We can get it here, have it in your car in about a week. And I went, huh, new car was not the answer God provided. Same car, new beating heart was the answer God provided.

So, God may answer yes, but not in the way you expect. So, this is another time when our patience and trust may be tested or challenged.

We want an answer now. We perceive the specific response to our request to be X, Y, or Z. So, when it's not that, sometimes we just can't wrap our heads around that, that God works in mysterious ways.

[17:28] We say those things, but we don't always believe them, I don't think. Isaiah 5, verse 8 and 9 says, for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. So, it's critical as we pray that we don't come to it with predetermined expectations or even specific actions we're requesting God to do.

Do you see how that doesn't make sense when the God of eternity will respond, does care for us, does want what's best for us, but then we cram him into a box of expectations.

Doesn't make sense, really, does it? So, we should be careful to not seek to dictate how God will answer our prayers.

I think we all do it, usually, probably, with the best of intentions, but there are forces at work beyond which we can't even begin to understand.

[18:44] Is that fair? Does that make sense to you? So, remember that God's thoughts and methods are often very different, usually very different from our own.

Philippians 1, 29, and 30 says, for it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

So, when we ask God for the strength and ability to persevere, I'm going to talk a little bit more about this next Sunday, but he may give us trials to bear.

Romans 5, verses 3 and 4 says, not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings. Huh? We rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

Do you see the way God transforms and refines in our process? It's the very trials that may come our way that can help us to develop the very virtues that we're praying for.

[20:03] And again, we're going to talk about this more next Sunday. But when you ask for God, give me strength, give me hope, increase my faith, look out, because it may come again in the way that you're not expecting.

Romans 8, 28 reminds us of this because we know that in all things, they work together for those who love God. Sorry, I'm stumbling here.

Let's start over on that one. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. You know it better than I just read it.

We don't always know what to pray for ourselves or for other people, but God knows. God knows that. Ephesians 3, verse 20 says, Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think, according to the power at work within us.

As we pray, we need to trust that God knows what's best. He knows best what we need and how we need to receive it.

[21:20] We need to trust his will and his way and his timing, which is not always easy. I will admit that to you myself.

A fourth way God answers prayer, request denied. God may answer our request with a no. sorry, just one second, something popped into my mind. I asked God to take away my mom's cancer and I still don't understand why no.

So, there you go. There's a personal example. I trust that he knew what he was doing. I trust that we have seen not the benefits of her going, but a deeper appreciation for who she was and the legacy she left behind.

But I grieve the moments that we never had. I grieve the grandmother that she would have been to our kids, now as adults.

[22 : 35] Anyway, God may answer no. James 4 verse 3 says, you ask and do not receive because you asked wrongly to spend it on your passions.

There may be times when God denies our requests, and that may be in part due to the orientation of our heart. So, in other words, when you are praying and asking God for something, what is your motivation behind that?

Habakkuk 3 verses 17 to 19 says, though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food, sorry, I'm struggling this morning, the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

Do you see the perspective there? I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God the Lord is my strength and he makes my feet like the deers.

He makes me tread on my high places. So, that perspective is on display there. We must trust that God, who knows what's best, will only say no if granting our request may not be ultimately in our best interests, or the best interests of someone for whom we are praying.

[24 : 14] So, maybe, again, you can relate to this in your own life. Have you ever felt like God said no to something that you asked for, perspective is so great, only to realize later that ultimately what he did give you, or how he acted for you on your behalf, was far more than you ever could have imagined?

Have you ever prayed for something that you were convinced was the best thing for you, the best thing for your family, the best thing for your circumstances, and there was silence, and you thought, rats, God, why won't you give this to me?

See, there's that perspective again. God, why won't you let me have this, and then see down the road, ooh, if I had gotten that, then this, and this, and this, and this, and this would not have happened.

Or, so, here's another person example. I desperately wanted a career opportunity. God said no. Actually, God was silent.

I kept asking. Silence continued. I finally said, okay, well, I guess it is what it is. Someone else got the job, this position at another organization.

[25 : 36] Years later, I heard from that person who got the job that I would have gotten that it was a nightmare. Bullet dodged.

So, do you see that? There's an example. I desperately wanted an opportunity. I thought, God, why will you not give me this? Why will you not bless me in this way? And he blessed me by protecting me from my own desire.

1 Corinthians 10, verse 13, talking a bit about temptation. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability.

But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it. 2 Corinthians says, and this is Paul talking about his thorn, which we've talked about in past weeks.

2 Corinthians 12, verses 7 to 9, says, so to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

[26 : 56] Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, say it with me if you want, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. When God seems to say no, we may not fully understand, but we can still fully and always trust him.

Even in, often especially in, times when we're facing challenges and we may be begging God to take them away. As I said a little while ago, remember, when we ask God to grow our faith, to grant us trust, to give us the ability to endure, sometimes that comes through trial.

But, God will provide the grace and mercy for us to persevere. He will give us the ability and the alternatives to do without what we have asked for.

Have you ever thought of that? That's another way God provides. He gives us alternatives to the things that we have asked for or helps us dodge the things that we want, that are not the best for us.

[28 : 32] But, God will provide in the way that he will provide. So, this morning we have considered four ways that God answers our prayers.

Request granted. Request granted, but not yet. Request granted, but not as expected. And, request denied.

So, no matter how God may choose to answer our prayers, your prayers, and my prayers, we can be confident that the response he gives us will always be for our good.

And that we can always be encouraged as we pray that in the words of Psalm 6, verse 9, the Lord has heard my supplication. The Lord will receive my prayer.

Amen.