

What if God Doesn't Answer My Prayer?

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As Jesus-followers, we grasp the importance of bringing our requests to God. We read in the Bible that we can give Him our worries because He cares for us (see 1 Peter 5:7). But what do we do when it feels like our prayers are going unanswered? How do we honor God in those seasons of life?

The first thing to remember is that **God is good and that every good thing comes from Him** (see *James 1:17*). He will withhold no good thing from those who live with integrity (see *Psalms 84:11*). We can trust that all things will work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (see *Romans 8:28*).

Then we must wrestle with if God is so good, why isn't He answering? We are praying for miracles of healing in our bodies, in relationships, in our mental health, in our finances, for a loved one, etc. These are good things to ask for, so why is God silent?

Friend, **God is doing something, even if we don't understand what that something is**. His ways are above our ways, and His thoughts are above our thoughts (see *Isaiah 55:8-9*). We don't know what He is doing or thinking or planning. We may think we know what we need, but God knows what we truly need (see *Matthew 6:8*). We can trust Him in all things (see *Proverbs 3:5-6*). We may be praying for healing, and in the meantime, God is teaching us patience. We may be praying for restoration in our family, and God wishes to teach us how to be peaceful.

The most important truth to cling to is that **God is faithful**. He hears our cries, and He will answer (see *Psalms 55:16-17*) even if He doesn't answer the way we thought we wanted Him to. Even in these times when we feel frustrated or alone, may we pray for the God of hope to fill us with joy and peace as we believe so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (see *Romans 15:13*).

Why Do We Pray?

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“Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything;
for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”
1 Thessalonians 5:16–18, CSB

Jesus came to earth to open the pathway of adoption to us by becoming our Savior. While showing His disciples how children of God should live, one of the things He modeled was prayer.

Prayer is how we communicate with God. It allows us to share our lives with Him, express our gratitude for His provision, confess our sins, and ask for help to overcome those sins. Prayer is also an act of worship and obedience.

Jesus demonstrated the importance of daily prayer in the way He was in constant communication with the Father. We follow His example and come to God in prayer because we have His promise that our prayers are rewarded, even if we do not specifically receive what we have asked for (see *Matthew 6:6*). Sometimes, He delays His answers according to His wisdom and for our benefit. In these situations, we must be dedicated and persistent in prayer (see *Matthew 7:7; Luke 18:1–8*). Prayer should not be seen as a way of getting God to do our will but of having God’s will done on earth. Jesus prayed in the Garden, not My will but Yours be done (see *Matthew 26:39*). We follow His example because His wisdom far exceeds our own.

We are encouraged when we pray because we remember that if the Syrian woman whose daughter was oppressed by a demon had not prayed to Jesus, her daughter would not have been delivered (see *Mark 7:26–30*). If the blind man had not called out to Jesus, he would not have been healed (see *Luke 18:35–43*). God has said that we often go without because we do not ask (see *James 4:2*).

As we go forward, we can know some reasons why we pray. We pray to follow Jesus’ example, to communicate with God, to learn to defer to God’s will, and to ask for God’s hand in our lives.

Building Habits of Prayer with Your Children

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Prayer is an integral part of our relationship with God, and we want to share it with our children. Choosing habits that get the kids involved and excited enriches the experience.

As busy parents, we benefit from intentionally planning our schedules. This planning can, and should, include prayer. As we think through our daily schedule, we can select moments when prayer naturally fits in. For many of us, this can include time for quick prayers, such as at mealtimes and before our kids' sporting events. But **it should also include dedicated prayer time when we don't feel rushed to finish.** This time could be during our car ride to school while we have our kids' undivided attention or during the quiet bedside moments as our day wraps up.

It is also important to let our kids know that not all prayer time needs to be planned. It is okay, and even desirable, to talk to God at random moments; when we are scared, worried, mad, lonely, or even super happy about something. Praying one-minute prayers out loud, so our kids see and hear that example throughout their day, is a method of teaching by example—something our kids are likely to internalize and copy when needed.

We can also consider things that will excite and involve our kids. This will vary by personality and age. Here are a few ideas to kickstart the process:

- For young kids, we use a visual resource like a poster or a picture book of children's prayers. We encourage them to follow along as we memorize short prayers together: easy rhyming mealtime prayers and simple bedtime prayers such as "Now I lay me down to sleep."
- For our older kids, we can add a prayer journal, paper or electronic, to encourage them to write down prayer requests for others and themselves. Answers to prayers can be kept in a "thankful jar" that is opened later in the year (like on Thanksgiving). Memorizing prayers is good at this age as well: prayers such as The Lord's Prayer, the Serenity Prayer, and even Scripture verse prayers (like passages from Psalms).
- Another idea is to write our prayers for our kids and put them in their lunch boxes for them to find.

These intentional items can make prayer time with our kids more enjoyable and more impactful.

If we have never prayed with our kids before, we don't have to worry. It is never too late to start. We can let our children know that we are learning and growing with them. We can encourage them to see this as good family time as well as time to talk to God.

How to Pray When You Don't Know How

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Sometimes we have the desire to come to God in prayer, but we are at a loss for words or have trouble identifying a feeling. What do we do when we want to pray but don't know what to pray? **Here are a few biblical reminders for this situation.**

First, remember, in our faith in Christ Jesus, **we were gifted with the Holy Spirit who intercedes on our behalf** (see *Romans 8:26*). The Holy Spirit resides inside every believer and is there to guide us and help us through our Christian journey (see *Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13–14*). When we find ourselves not sure what to say in prayer, we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us.

Second, keep in mind that God does not require lengthy, long-winded prayers. Sometimes we feel like our prayers need to be lengthy to fully convey our thoughts. **But Matthew 6:7 reminds us that it is not the length of our prayers that makes them more worthy to God.** A prayer as simple and short as "Jesus, see me through this storm" is just as powerful when it comes from the heart.

And lastly, **Jesus gave us an example of how to pray in Matthew 6:9–13, commonly referred to as "The Lord's Prayer."** We can use this prayer as a model and guideline if we don't know where to start in prayer. He starts by referring to God as "Our Father in Heaven." What a great reminder that the God we serve views us as His children and desires a personal, intimate relationship with us! Jesus continues the prayer by praising God, asking to be in alignment with His will, for provisions and forgiveness, and for help to live righteously.

Let us always have peace knowing that our heavenly Father hears us and loves us (see *Psalms 4:3; 5:3; 55:16–17; Romans 8:39*). He gave His only Son so that in Christ Jesus we can have healing, comfort, and peace in any situation (see *Philippians 4:7*). Jesus wants a relationship, not performance. He wants open hearts that He can mend together, transform, and heal.

Examples of Prayer in the Bible

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The Bible says a lot about prayer. We're told to **"pray constantly"** (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*) and to **"be persistent in prayer"** (*Romans 12:12*). We're encouraged to **pray when we're worried** (see *Philippians 4:6*), and **when we're suffering, cheerful, or sick** (see *James 5:13–14*). Most simply, we're called to **"pray at all times"** (*Ephesians 6:18*). To help us put prayer into practice, let's look at a few biblical examples.

In Matthew 6:9–13, we join Jesus in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount as He instructs the crowd, "Pray like this." Often called "The Lord's Prayer," this prayer includes four key components: **praising God, repenting of our sins, making requests for others, and making requests for ourselves.** We should include these components in our own prayers, just as we see them reflected in the examples that follow.

Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, offers us two contrasting examples of prayer. In 1 Samuel 1:9–18, we find Hannah discouraged. She visits the temple to pray, asking God to give her a son and vowing that, if He does, she will give her son back to Him. In 1 Samuel 2:1–10, Hannah's tone shifts to praise. She is confident God will answer her. "There is no one holy like the LORD," she says. "There is no one besides you! And there is no rock like our God." In her highs and her lows, Hannah turns to God in prayer.

The Psalms serve as beautiful, poetic examples of prayer. Many of them remind us that God hears our prayers and faithfully answers them (*i.e., Psalms 4, 5, 34, and 86*). Other Psalms remind us of God's justice (*i.e., Psalm 2*), help shift our perspective when we're down (*i.e., Psalm 22*), or offer encouragement (*i.e., Psalms 23 and 91*). **If we don't know what to say, the Psalms give us good places to start.**

In Matthew 26:36–46, we see Jesus sharing His sorrow with His disciples. He knows He will soon be arrested and crucified, so He invites three of His disciples to pray with Him. Though the disciples fall asleep, this passage still highlights the importance of asking community to join us in prayer. If Jesus needed support, so do we. So, as we grow in prayer, let us do so together.

For further reading, check out:

- Daniel's prayer for his people (*Daniel 9:3–19*)
- Jonah's prayer from the belly of the fish (*Jonah 2:1–10*)
- Abraham's conversation with God (*Genesis 18:16–33*)
- Moses' intercession for Israel (*Exodus 32:11–15, 30–34*)
- Mary's own poetic and praise-filled prayer (*Luke 1:46–56*)
- The apostles quoting a Psalm in their own prayer (*Acts 4:23–31*)
- Paul's prayerful encouragement (*Ephesians 1:18–19; 3:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:11*)

Praying With a Hesitant Spouse

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Praying with a spouse is a fundamental and wonderful way to deepen intimacy in marriage. The proper depth of relationship we desire is not attainable without praying together. God designed us for relationships with Him and our spouse. However, it may come with challenges. One of us may be hesitant to pray, we may not know how to pray together, or we may be unsure of when we should pray.

The good news is there's no perfect way to pray together; there's no specific set of rules and no unrealistic expectations. So don't give up; **sharing this aspect of the Christian life is a worthwhile objective that can be such a blessing for our marriages.**

Working from the right frame of mind is important. **Our aim is to keep God at the center of our relationship.** With our spouse, it's important that we're honest, patient, and kind as we discuss desires, expectations, and concerns regarding prayer. While this may make some feel vulnerable at the onset, we continue to encourage and uplift one another to strive for this honorable goal.

Over time, this will likely become a comforting and encouraging element of your marriage. Having the goal of praying together is important and worthwhile. **Be uplifting. Start small. Don't give up.**

It's okay to start small. For example: before we go to sleep at night, we can ask each other what we need prayer for and spend five minutes taking turns praying for each others' needs. Setting a consistent time and place will also help each of us grow in our prayer time together.

Why Does God Want Us to Pray?

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What does God want us to pray? Because He wants us to communicate with Him.

God the Father is in constant communication with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. He is a God of communication. He spoke, and the world came into existence (*see Genesis 1:1–25*). He spoke, and His promises and covenants were made known (*see Genesis 12:1–3 and Hebrews 9:15*). He spoke, and we were created (*see Genesis 1:26–27*). We were created in His image, and part of that means that we are created to be communicators—with others and with God. He wants us to communicate with Him. One of the best ways we communicate with God is through prayer.

God already knows everything about us (*see Psalm 139:1–4*), **but He wants us to know more about Him and the great things He has planned for us.** He is not a non-present parent who dropped us off on planet earth and then left us. He has made himself known through His creation and through His Word (*see Romans 1:19–20*). He is here with us and active in our lives. But so many times, we get wrapped up in what our five senses take in we miss what God has to offer when we are in relationship with Him. He wants us to develop a closer relationship with Him through communication (prayer) because then we can see how much good He desires for us.

God tells us that there is so much reward for being in relationship and in communication with Him—and he wants those things for us! Take a look at what He wants to do for us when we are in communication with Him:

In Philippians 4:6–7, He wants to give us peace, He wants to guard our hearts and guard our minds (how awesome is that), and all we have to do is pray with thanksgiving and present our requests to Him.

In John 17, He wants us to be one with Him, to have protection, and to have joy.

In Galatians 5:22–23, He shows us the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc.) that we can have when we are His and allow the daily filling of His Holy Spirit.

As we can see, God wants good for us, not bad (*Jeremiah 29:11*). He wants us to be in communication with Him through prayer so that we know Him, His character, and His promises. He is our God, and He loves it when we pray and communicate with Him!