

17. How to Get Answers to Prayer

IF MY people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now Mine eyes shall be open, and Mine ears attend unto the prayer that is made in this place." 2 Chron. 7: 14, 15.

One of the most astounding facts of the spiritual life is that God hears and answers prayer. The Bible abounds with the testimony of those whose prayers have been signally answered, and every sincere Christian can add his own personal experiences in which God has opened the windows of heaven and granted his petitions.

Prayer puts man in touch with God. It forms the connecting link between human weakness and God's omnipotence. Out of weakness men are made strong. See Heb. 11: 34.

When the sinner, through repentance and conversion, becomes a son of God, he thereafter has a right to approach God just as a child would approach his earthly parent. He belongs to God's family. He has the rights of son ship, and he has before him a standing invitation to bring his petitions and present them before his Father in full expectation that they will receive attention.

In fact, God desires His children to come to Him in prayer. The Bible shows the picture of Him bending His ear that He may hear the faintest cry of His children. His greatest joy is found in granting the requests of those who come to Him for help and succor.

Prayer brings definite results. It was when Daniel prayed that God sent the angel to shut the mouths of the hungry lions. It was when Paul and Silas prayed that the doors of the prison were opened, and they were set free. It was when Elijah prayed-that-God shut up the heavens, so that there was no rain. (See James 5: 1) It was when Joshua prayed for victory for Israel over her enemies at God lengthened the day by causing the sun to stand still in the heavens, thus giving Israel time to win the victory. It was when Christ prayed on the banks of the Jordan that the heavens were opened, and the Father's voice was heard acclaiming Him to be His Son.

Concerning the efficacy of prayer, the Apostle James declares: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." James 5: 16.

We Must Ask

God has established a law to the effect that men must ask if they would receive, seek if they would find, and knock if they would have the door opened unto them. See Matt, 7: 7. God's blessings are never forced upon His children, but they are freely bestowed upon those who reverently come to Him and request them from His hand.

"For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened." Matt. 7:8.

"And all things, whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." Matt. 21:22.

"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He hears us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." I John 5: 14, 15.

Prayer, therefore, is the Christian's greatest and highest privilege. Through this means he is able to hold constant communion with the King of the universe. He is in touch with God. To him heaven's store of eternal riches is open. And to him is the promise: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Phil. 4:19.

From the Heart

Prayer, to be effectual, must, however, come from the heart. It cannot be read out of a book. It cannot be composed by another and placed in the hands to be read to God. Prayer consists not of reading to God, but of talking to Him-pouring the heart's inmost desires into His sympathetic ear, and then being still to hear His gracious answer. He tenderly entreats His children: "Turn you even to Me with all your heart." Joel 2: 12.

The reason many so-called prayers receive no answer is the fact that they are made all too

casually. They are said, perhaps repeated, but not prayed. Prayer to be real must become the breathing forth of the inner spiritual longings of the soul into the ear of One' who is recognized as the heavenly Father.

Faith Is Essential

In order to receive answers, prayer must be made in absolute faith. Otherwise, it becomes altogether meaningless.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” Heb. 11: 6.

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.” James 1: 5-7.

This is why Jesus said to His disciples:

“Therefore I say unto you, What things so ever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them.” Mark 11: 24.

Must Obey Him

Another condition of answered prayer is implicit obedience to God's Word. Unless we are willing to follow His instruction and live in conformity to His will, we have no claim whatsoever upon the least of His mercies.

“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” I John 3: 21, 22.

“If I regard iniquity in my heart,” declared the psalmist, “the Lord will not hear me.” Ps. 66: 18. Solomon made it even stronger. Said he, “He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” Prov. 28: 9.

This of course, is only reasonable. If men will not ally themselves with God by following Jesus' example of obedience to God's requirements, they are actually enemies of His and not disciples. “He that is not with Me,” said Jesus, is against Me.” This is the test. If we are with Him, He is also with us to bless and keep. “He that hath My commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves Me: and he that loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.” John 14: 2 1.

Secret Prayer

No one can possibly be a true Christian without engaging in secret prayer. Jesus realized this when He gave the earnest admonition:

“And when thou prays, thou shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prays, enter into thy closet, and when thou has shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which sees in secret shall reward thee openly.” Matt. 6: 5, 6.

This is the real life of the soul. -Enter into thy closet.” No experience in Christian living is as sacred as a quiet hour spent with God alone. Power to live for Christ in the crowd is gained in the secret audience chamber with God.

If daily the Christian will practice the habit of withdrawing into some retreat where just he and God can meet in quiet holy communion, he will find there the source of spiritual power. He shall be rewarded openly. When the stress of temptation comes in his struggle with the

enemy. he will find within himself a power of resistance born not of earth but of heaven. He is in touch with God, and God's power is manifest in his life.

Family Prayer

One of the greatest bulwarks of Christianity is the family altar. There can be no substitute for family prayer, if the family unit is to count for Christ and to hold its members loyal and true to God and the church. One thing radically wrong in the world today is that in most Christian homes family prayer is no longer a part of the daily program. The family altar has been abandoned.

It was not always so. A half a century ago many Christian people had family worship. The children were gathered by the parents at the hearthstone, either in the morning or the evening (sometimes both). A portion of Scripture would be read, and then together all would kneel and pray. In this way the children learned to pray. Prayer became a regular habit in their lives. By the holy influence of the family altar the hearts of all were bound together as well as to Christ and the church, and spiritual fervor was at high tide.

But this tide has gradually been ebbing away. Life now is too busy and complicated for family prayer. Prayer is so easily crowded out. No longer do the children of Christian homes hear their parents praying for them, as at the family prayer circle each one is presented before God. Thus, a mighty Christian influence is lost, and this is one of the causes for the church's becoming weak and impotent.

Oh, the pity of it! When a loving and gracious God, possessor of the riches of the universe, so longs to bestow His blessings upon His children, why should they become so careless about coming to Him in prayer? Why should their lives be so destitute of the power He is so ready to bestow!

Someone may inquire, "Does God always give His children what they ask for?" No, not always. Every prayer that is made in simple faith is answered, but the answer is given according to God's understanding of the needs, and not according to the asking. His wisdom is infinite, and His love is boundless. He loves His children far too well to give them things that would be injurious to them. Therefore, in His great love He sometimes says, "Yes," and at other times He says, "No."

A child may see a beautiful, gleaming knife and plead with his parent for it. His desire is intense, and his plea is insistent. But the parent sees that the bestowal of this gift would be a definite danger to the child. In love, but with firmness, the parent says, "No, you cannot have that. You would only injure yourself with it. It is not for your good or happiness that you should receive it, but, here, I will give you this toy. It is even more beautiful, and also it is entirely harmless."

Just so it is with God; He withholds from His children those things that, though desired, would prove hurtful to them, and from His abundant supply substitutes those things that He knows are for their best good and eternal happiness.

In My Name

In coming to God in prayer it is essential that all realize the fact that this contact would never have been possible had not Jesus opened the way. Sin had cut man entirely off from God and made him unfit to approach His presence. It also reduced man to a condition in which he was not, worthy of God's notice.

But Jesus opened the way back to God's presence. Through the Savior it again became possible for sinners to approach unto God. It is because of this fact that Jesus said: "And whatsoever you shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you shall ask anything in My name, I will do it." John 14: 13, 14.

A story is told of two boys who served in the American Confederate Army. One, Edson Rogers, was the son of a wealthy southern planter. The other, Robert Sawyer, was an orphan, and poor.

In the service these boys were drawn to each other and became real friends. They were inseparable. They fought together; they played together; they bunked together.

Months of such close association only tended to cement and deepen their friendship, and they decided that when the war closed they would go into business together.

One day, however it became painfully evident that their plans were to be frustrated. Edson was mortally wounded in battle. Calling his pal to his side, he said: "Robert, my time has come; I can live but a few minutes more, but before I die I want you to promise me that when the war is over you will go to my Virginia home and visit my parents. I want them to know and love my best friend. And I want you to tell them of our friendship in the army."

"But," replied Robert, "they will think I am an impostor. They will neither receive me nor

believe my story. After all, I am only a poor orphan boy, and I would not even know how to approach such people as your parents.”

“I have thought of that,” said Edson, “and it will not be difficult. When you meet my father, just mention my name. Tell him you were with me during my last hours. Here is a letter of introduction which I have hastily written and which you will hand to him. When he reads this in my own handwriting and with my name signed to it, I am certain that he will receive you and be kind to you.

Months later the war came to a close, and Robert Sawyer remembered his promise to his friend. He traveled to Virginia, and seeking out the Rogers' mansion, he tremblingly approached the door and knocked. An aged man with a sad countenance came to the door and seemed annoyed that any one so weather beaten and tattered should have presumed to knock.

“What do you want?” said the old man.

“I came to fulfil a promise I made to your son Edson as he lay dying upon the field of battle,” replied Robert.

“What! You knew my son? You were with him when he died? Ah, but how can I know that this is true?”

“Here,” replied Robert, “is a note he asked me to give to you. It is the last message he ever wrote, and I am sure you will recognize his signature.”

With trembling hand Edson's father took the note and eagerly read every word. Yes, it was Edson's handwriting. The note was genuine. This lad standing before him was a friend of his son, of whom he was bereaved.

It mattered not that the attire was shabby and the social background known. He had been a friend of Edson. That was enough. No other credentials were needed.

“My boy,” said the old man, “Edson was all we had. He was our only child. Our lives were bound up in him. Now that he is gone, nothing could make us so happy as to have his best friend come and take his place in our hearts and our home. Won't you stay with us and be our son?”

What had opened the door of the Rogers mansion to this lad who had no home of his own? What had opened a father's heart to him? It was the name of Edson Rogers. He had gone in Edson's name.

And just so it is when we go to God the Father in prayer. We are all poor orphans. Yes, we are worse; we are sinners and rebels. We have nothing to commend us to God. We have no claim on His love. But Jesus, the friend of sinners, has bidden us go in His name. And His promise to us is that whatsoever we ask the Father in His all-prevailing name shall be given to us.

When the Father is told that we are friends of His only begotten Son, who died for our sins, and that we have accepted Him as our Savior and great High Priest, our appeal becomes irresistible. Our unworthiness is a matter of no consideration. Jesus is worthy, and He invites us to come claiming His worthiness as ours. Our poverty also is of no consequence, since with God are stored all the boundless resources of omnipotence; and, by becoming friends of His Son, we shall also be made heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Coming in Christ's name, the Father receives us into His heart and home and loves us just as He loves His own Son.

God Hears Prayer

God's promise. is that when we pray, He will hear our prayers. “Then will I hear from heaven.” (2 Chron. 7: 14.)

But to many, prayer does not seem real. When they kneel down and begin to speak to God, they wonder whether He really hears. Heaven seems far away. How can their prayers reach God?

Some years ago the writer was in Chungking, China, and needed very urgently to communicate with his wife, who was in the city of Shanghai, some one thousand miles away. The war between China and Japan was raging, and there were no telephone or telegraph connections between East and West China. The possibilities of immediate contact seemed nil.

Learning of my desire, a Chinese friend who owned and operated an amateur radio set volunteered to establish contact with my wife by radio, and permit me to speak with her. Calls were immediately sent out over the air, and in a short time I heard a familiar voice. It was my wife in faraway Shanghai, who had been notified that her husband was calling, and who had responded to the

call. Her voice came in clearly and distinctly, as though she were in the same room. In an instant my message had reached her in Shanghai, and in another instant I had her reply.

It all seemed impossible. Yet it was so just so it is with prayer. If man can invent an instrument that projects the human voice thousands of miles through space, how then shall we question God's ability to hear prayer! His power, wisdom, and knowledge are omnipotent. With Him nothing is impossible.

God Answers Prayer

'We are to send our petitions through the darkest clouds that Satan may cast over us, and let our faith pierce to the throne of God encircled by a rainbow of promise, the assurance that God is true, that in Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. The answer may appear to be delayed, but it is not so. The petition is accepted, and the answer given when it is essential for the best good of the petitioner, and when the fulfillment of the request will work most for our eternal interest.'" - E. G. White, Review and Herald, November 19, 1895.

Yes, God hears prayer. He hears the faintest cry of His own children, when they go to Him for help. Not only so, but He can read and interpret the unspoken longings of the hearts that in humility and penitence are lifted up to Him. And he will turn away none who come to Him in sincerity and truth. On one occasion, after hearing Jesus talk to His father through prayer, His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." This should be the heart longing of every Christian. We need to learn to pray, not casually, nor occasionally, but it should become a habit of life. We should pray without ceasing - that is, daily at regular periods, and whenever the soul feels the need of divine help. There is no time or place when or where it is inappropriate to pray. Some prayers should be audible, while others may be only the whispered pleadings of the soul, as the heart turns to its God for strength and heavenly guidance.

Night and day, hour by hour, Jesus our High Priest and Advocate stands before the throne in readiness to present our petitions to God. He is waiting there today, just now, He is ready to bear your name and mine before the mercy seat, and secure from the Father just those things that are needful to us. Coming to Him in full assurance of faith, we shall receive of His boundless supply all that we need. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Heb. 4: 16.

Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence would avail to make!
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take,
What parched grounds revive as with a shower;
We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;
We rise, and all, the distant and the near,
Stands forth a sunny outline brave and clear.
We kneel, how weak! we rise, how full of power!
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others, that we are not always strong;
That we are ever overborne with care.
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled, when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee?
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