



How Do You Pray to Get Answers?

“I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking to me about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!” (Isaiah 65:24, NIV)

Do you think that “answer” means that you will get exactly what you want? That isn’t necessarily so. Answer means “to reply” or “to respond,” which can mean to simply pay attention to your request. God may give a “no,” “wait,” “yes,” or give an explanation or a promise. Often answers come in unexpected ways. When you pray, you should not demand something of God or try to convince him; simply trust that he knows what is best for you and the world. Remember that prayer is not about just getting things for you, but is to move God’s hand to work in those things he wants to accomplish.

A delayed answer

Sometimes God delays his answer. A great example of a delayed, unexpected answer is in John 11:1-44. The story is told of how Mary and Martha, special friends of Jesus, sent word to Jesus that Lazarus, their brother, was very sick. Jesus loved Lazarus but deliberately waited two days for Lazarus to die before heading for Bethany. His Father had something far greater planned than curing Lazarus of a sickness. He planned to raise him from the dead! When Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus had been in the grave four days. There was no doubt he was dead. Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!” Lazarus came out, still bound by his grave clothes. Jesus’ demonstration of power over death caused many to believe in him. Sometimes he delays our requests to carry out a greater purpose.

Be specific

When you ask God for something, be specific. In a captivating story in Genesis 24:12-20, Abraham sent his servant, Eliezer, to find a bride for his son Isaac. Imagine having a servant choose your wife or husband! Now Eliezer knew that without God’s help, he didn’t have a chance of finding the right woman. He asked God to reveal the bride to him in a specific way. He prayed, “Lord, I’m standing by this spring, and when I say to a woman, ‘Please give me a drink of water,’ have her say, ‘certainly, and I’ll water your camels, too.’ Let that one be Isaac’s bride.” God answered just as Eliezer asked. He also gave Rebekah the desire to leave her family and marry a man she had never seen. Wow! (Read Genesis 24) No matter what your age, it is not too early to begin praying for the wife/husband God has for you. Whatever your needs or the needs God lays on your heart for others, be specific in your prayers. God will answer what is best for you and others.

Pray for God's will

When God wants to accomplish something, he moves someone to pray. The Old Testament book of Nehemiah tells a fascinating story of God accomplishing his will through prayer. God wanted to rebuild the broken walls and gates of Jerusalem and began to move in Nehemiah's heart to help. Nehemiah, the king's cupbearer (he made sure the Kings' wine and food were safe to consume) lived in the palace at Shushan. He and his people had been captured, and Jerusalem had been destroyed because the people worshiped idols. One day some men brought Nehemiah sad news: the people of Jerusalem were in distress, the walls of Jerusalem, God's holy city, were broken down and the gates burned. For days, Nehemiah wept, fasted, confessed his sins and the sins of idolatry and rebellion of his people. Then he asked God to move the king's heart to answer his request to let him go to Jerusalem and re-build the walls. The king granted his request. In spite of many enemy attacks, God answered Nehemiah's prayers as he rebuilt the city. He completed building the wall in fifty-two days! It is a fascinating story. You will want to read the book of Nehemiah. Read 1 John 5:14-15 and discover why God answered so generously.

A "no" answer

Sometimes when we ask, God says "no." In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, the Apostle Paul tells how he was given a thorn in the flesh (possibly an eye disease). He pleaded three different times with God to make him well. Each time God said, "No." He told him, "*My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9, NLT) Paul accepted God's "no" answer. He said he was glad to boast about his weaknesses because God's power works best in weak people.

God always helps you

God does not always answer your prayers by removing trials and problems but helps you through them. In Luke 22:39-46 (NLT), Jesus prayed fervently to the Father about going to the cross. "*Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine.*" God did not take the cup of suffering away but answered by sending an angel from heaven to strengthen him for the trial and cross he faced. Sometimes God's will for you is tough. It may mean rejection from your friends or suffering an illness. If God says "no," count on him to give you strength and courage to cope. God often sends someone to encourage and pray with you. Trust him.

Hindrances

Sometimes when you pray, it seems that God is not even listening and certainly not answering. If so, check out this list. Obedience brings answers!

- Be quick to confess known sin – *“If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, my Lord would not have listened.”* (Psalm 66:18, NIV)
- Ask for the right reason – *“And even when you do ask, you don’t get it because your whole motive is wrong - you want only what will give you pleasure.”* (James 4:3, NLT)
- Remove idols in your life (anything you put before God) – *“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 [pray to me]?”* (Ezekiel 14:3, NIV)
- Help the poor – *“If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.”* (Proverbs 21:13, NIV)
- Hide God’s Word in your heart – *“But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted!”* (John 15:7, NLT)
- Believe God will answer – *“But when you ask, be sure that you really expect him to answer.”* (James 1:6-7, NLT)

Pray in Jesus’ name

Jesus said that when you pray to the Father, pray in his name. When you pray in Jesus’ name, it is the same as if Jesus prayed. Prayer is a great privilege and adventure. If you really believe that when you pray you are entering and kneeling in the throne room of God, and he is eagerly encouraging you to come and talk, you will want to pray constantly for those things he wants to accomplish. Read Philippians 4:6-7 for another prayer promise. Take everything to God in prayer. His answers may not be what you want, but it will be best for you.

Attitude Check:

- What changes in your attitude would you have to make to pray, “not my will, but yours be done?”

Explore:

- Read, “Pray Persistently.” (Luke 18:1-8) Plan a daily prayer time and pray short prayers during the day. Write in your journal what you have learned about prayer. Keep a record of your prayers and answers.

Talking with God:

- Father, thank you for the privilege of entering your throne room and talking to you about everything. Teach me how to pray for things that are on your heart. Thank you for listening and answering.