



“Divine Dialogue” Pt 5 ***Promise and Problems Regarding Prayer***

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IV. PROMISES REGARDING PRAYER

The Bible reveals an expectation that God hears when we call on Him. The Bible also acknowledges the fact that God has no obligation to answer and indeed sometimes does not answer our prayer. We touched on some of the reasons God may not answer last week in the section on prayer boosters and blocker. Today I want to touch on some passages that affirm the fact that God does hear and wants to answer our prayer. He works in our world in response to the prayers of His followers. The fact is that God has ordained prayer as the means by which He accomplishes His plan in time and space.

He could have stopped and started the rain in Elijah's time without prayer. He chose to do it through Elijah's fervent prayer.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. James 5:17-18

Paul did not demand deliverance from impending death from God but trusted that if God granted deliverance it would involve the prayers of the Philippian believers.

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance...Philippians 1:18,19

God's people expected God to hear and answer.

I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words. Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand. Psalm 17:6-7

By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation, the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas; the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might; Psalm 65:5-6

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me. Psalm 86:5-7

God's people prayed for God to answer.

But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness. Psalm 69:13

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you! May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion! May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices! Selah May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans! May we shout for joy over your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banners! May the LORD fulfill all your petitions! Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. O LORD, save the king! May he answer us when we call. Psalm 20:1-9

God promises to answer those who called upon Him.

Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. Isaiah 65:24

Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. Jer 33:3

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." Psalm 50:14-15

God promised Solomon at the dedication of the temple He would answer their prayer of repentance.

Then the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. (See chapter 6 for Solomon's prayer.) When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. 2 Chronicles 7:12-15

God assured Solomon that He would bring discipline on the nation for their sin. However, if they would fulfill certain conditions, He would respond to their prayer. The conditions were humbling, prayer, seeking God, turning from evil. Only then would He remove the agents of discipline on the land.

The other condition for this national prayer is that they would keep focused on God.

"But if you turn aside and forsake my statutes and my commandments that I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will pluck you up from my land that I have given you, and this house that I have consecrated for my name, I will cast out of my sight, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. 2 Chronicles 7:19-20

This is not a universal promise. This was a promise made to God's covenant people. The elements of repentance are applicable in restoring right relationship with God.

Humble yourselves
Pray
Seek God's face
Turn from wicked ways

Peter quoted a passage from the Psalms about God hearing our prayer.

For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of

the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” 1 Peter 3:10-12

James promised God would answer a prayer for wisdom.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. James 1:5

The condition is to ask in faith. God promises to generously and enthusiastically give wisdom.

Paul promised peace to those letting their requests be made known to God.

Do not be anxious about anything, but let your requests be made known to God in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

Jesus’ Promise to answer.

In Jesus’ final hours with His disciples, Jesus offered a most powerful promise concerning answered prayer. The gist of the promise is that if you ask, God will answer. Lest they missed it, He repeats it seven times in His final hours with them. It appears that prayer would be the key element regarding the building of His church in His absence. Some limit these promises to the disciples present at the time. The “whoever or one believing in Me” broadens the scope beyond the disciples.

The promise.

FIRST TIME

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the one believing in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. John 14:12-13

SECOND TIME

If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. John 14:14

THIRD TIME

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:7-8

FOURTH TIME

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. John 15:16-17

FIFTH TIME

In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. John 16:23

SIXTH TIME

Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, (in My name) and you will receive, that your joy may be full. John 16:24

SEVENTH TIME

In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. John 16:26,27

Observations

First, the privilege of working Jesus’ works after His departure through prayer applies to believers only. “*the one believing in me*”

Second,

Jesus indicated that “the one believing” would duplicate and surpass the work He had thus far done. The “works that I do” and the “greater works” requires some deeper thought. The “works that I do” is clear enough although the disciples didn’t duplicate all the kinds of things that Jesus did.

It’s the “greater works” that seems problematic. Numerous commentaries suggest that Jesus referred to “works” greater in number through the ongoing ministry of the believers who would continue Jesus’ work. That would be an easy resolution were it not for the fact that Jesus used a word whose focus was not on greater in **number** but greater in **substance**.

Many of the works Jesus performed during His earthly ministry were temporary and physical in nature.

There would be more storms.

Lazarus would eventually die of something else.

The sick would most likely get sick with something else.

The demonized could open themselves up to future strongholds.

The blind could lose their sign again.

These signs validated Jesus claim to be Messiah. The key to understand this hinges on why the “one believing” would do “more significant” work. “Because I go to my Father.”

The ascension followed the death, and resurrection of Jesus which accomplished the more significant spiritual work in the hearts of people. From His ascended position and the subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would bring about through His followers, a work **greater** than any work He carried out during His earthly ministry; the New covenant work of a changed heart.

*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, He has become new. 2
Corinthians 5:17*

We don’t DO the work but God does the work through us through the ministry of prayer.

Third, it appears that whatever work they would accomplish after Jesus’ departure would come by means of prayer.

Fourth, notice the all-inclusive nature of the promise.

Whatever you ask.

Ask anything.

Ask whatever you wish.

Whatever you ask.

Whatever you ask.

Ask.

Ask.

Fifth, note the basis on which we ask. All but one of these verses requires asking “in My name.” The verse that doesn’t mention “in Jesus name” includes a similar qualifier “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you.” So, what does it mean to pray “In Jesus name?” Requests “in Jesus name” transcend a mere tagging our requests with the words. It intends more than some rote incantation of Jesus’ name at the end of our prayers. To ask in Jesus name infers that what we ask is in harmony with the clear will of the one in whose name we ask. If my kids come and ask me to do something in “mom’s” name, implies that they are expressing something that mom wants not what they want. To ask in Jesus name implies that what we are asking reflects the will of Jesus.

John clarified this concept in his letter.

*And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything **according to his will** he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. 1 John 5:14-15*

Paul prayed that Colossians be “filled with the Knowledge of God’s will”.

Not only must our prayer be in accord with Jesus’ will, but the purpose is that,

“the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

“by this (bear fruit through Jesus focused prayer) my Father is glorified.”

These two factors certainly narrow the scope of our asking. Many pray in ignorance of the will of Jesus. To discern what Jesus would do or want requires that we know what Jesus did!

Sixth, God’s promise to respond is clear.

“This I will do.”

“I will do it”

“It will be done for you.”

“The Father may give it to you.”

“He will give it to you.”

“You will receive.”

“The Father Himself loves you.”

The implication in these verses is that we may present our requests to either the Father or the Son and they will respond.

Seventh, answered prayer is a source of joy. “That your joy may be full.”

Other promises

*And whatever you **ask** in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” Matthew 21:22*

*I tell you, whatever you **ask** in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24*

*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 receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Luke 11:9-10*

*If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall **ask**, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. 1 John 5:16*

Now to Him who is able

Able to do far more

Able to do far more abundantly

Able to do far more abundantly beyond

Able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask

Able to far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think

according to the power that works within us,

to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus

to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21

The entire New Testament testifies to the outworking of these promises regarding prayer. Due to the mind-bending nature of these promises, the wonder is not that we don’t pray more but that we ever stop praying.

Effectual followers of Jesus in the early church and all through church history wove prayer into the fabric their life and ministry.

Prayer is not an option.

And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Luke 10:2

Pray without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 5:17

I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 1 Timothy 2:1

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. James 5:13

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Romans 12:12

Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, Ephesians 6:18

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. Colossians 4:2

That is exactly what the early follower of Jesus did.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. Acts 2:42-43

V. The purposes for unanswered prayer.

Other than the things discussed under prayer blockers, there are some other possible reasons for unanswered prayer unrelated any fault of our own.

1. Delay for a better deal.

ZECHARIAH

But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. Luke 1:13

ISRAEL

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. Exo 2:24 The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. Exodus 3:7

LAZARUS

When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. John 11:6

BLIND MAN

Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. John 9:3

2. Accomplish a Higher priority.

Paul prayed that God would remove his thorn in the flesh. He wanted to be rid of this devastating demonic influence in his life.

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

God was much more interested in Paul's spiritual health than his physical health and thus did not answer his prayer for healing but provided the grace to endure.

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. 3 John 1:2

God may have a different aspect to work than what we imagined. We so often become too absorbed in the physical when God, for now, is much more concerned about the regeneration of the spirit and the transformation of the soul. Therefore, He may delay or deny a request based upon His priority and plan.

3. Demonic interference.

Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Daniel 10:13
because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. 1 Thessalonians 2:18

Part of our prayer life must include bold advancement against the gates and fortresses of hell.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the

*knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5
In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house. Mark 3:27
And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:18-19*

4. Develop faith and maturity.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6

Many of us want to enjoy the delights of answered prayer without enduring the difficulty of unanswered prayer. Hebrews tells us that those who wait with patience that inherit promises. Often times, God delays answers until we are at a maturity level to receive those answers. Wisdom is based upon applied knowledge, practice and maturity. If we have not matured to a certain level of understanding, God must wait to answer our prayer until we are ready. We don't give a ten-year-old unlimited access to the family finances. He is simply not yet able to manage money to that extent. God won't trust us with His unfathomable spiritual riches until we are ready to receive. When we are faithful in little, He will trust us with much.

5. Avoid personal entanglement.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, Heb 12:1

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. 2 Tim 2:4

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 1 Tim. 6:9

When we have prayed to be all that God wants and to be greatly used by Him, He honors that prayer and will subsequently deny other requests that interfere with the answer to a previous prayer. If we trust God to do what is best, we should thank God when He answers no or wait.