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God Responds to Prayer

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God Responds to Prayer

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It's very common for Christians to know about prayer, study prayer, memorize prayer verses, read books about it, and still not believe that prayer makes any difference. When we don't actually pray, we prove we don't really believe what God says about it.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals a simple but profound three-step process to help us pray:

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals a simple but profound three-step process to help us: ask, seek, and knock.

When we are looking for something, we usually change this sequence. First, we begin by seeking. Then we knock on various doors to see if any will open. And then finally, we ask a person hoping to get the answer we desire.

Did Jesus make a mistake with this sequence? Why did he begin with "ask"? The answer is actually quite obvious. Jesus is not talking about asking a person. He is telling us to ask God before we even begin seeking and knocking.

Ask

Have you ever asked someone you didn't know for something significant? If so, deep down you probably doubted you would get what you wanted. That's because the depth of the relationship needs to be in proportion to the size of the request.

Jesus tells us to ask our heavenly Father (see Matthew 7:9-11). We begin by asking him for the things we desire. We go to him because we know he cares. We go to him because he wants to be involved in our lives.

Prayer changes things in the spiritual realm when we ask according to God's guidelines (see 1 John 5:14-15; Matthew 21:22; James 4:3; 1 John 3:21-22; John 15:7; John 15:16; Luke 18:1, 6-8).

However, it may take time before that change becomes noticeable in the physical realm. By faith, make it a habit to thank God for his answer while you wait for its manifestation.

Seek

Why does God want us to seek after asking him for what we desire? Seeking implies faith and expectation. Do you believe in God's ability to fulfill your desire? Are you trusting that he cares enough about you to follow through? Are your motives for the request according to God's standards?

Work through whatever issues you may have so that you can actively watch and expect God to act on your behalf. The apostle Paul tells us, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2, NIV).

Look for possible ways through which God may answer your prayer. With an attitude of expectation and anticipation, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Stay alert; if you believe God has answered your prayer, you will be looking for its manifestation.

Knock

God doesn't just want you to watch for opportunities expectantly, he also wants you to put feet to your faith. As the Holy Spirit makes you aware of possibilities, be faithful to pursue them. Knock on the door of a possibility to see if it will open wide or slam shut.

What God doesn't answer immediately he will answer eventually. As you walk by faith, continue to thank God for his answer. Although you do not know when it will arrive, it will be on schedule according to his timetable. Keep on thanking him for his promise: "For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:8, NIV).

As we ask, seek, and knock for God's next steps for us, here is how we can be ready to receive his guidance.



Receive God's Guidance

1. Prepare your heart to hear God.

By getting right with God

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” —1 John 1:9, NIV

By surrendering your will to God

“We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will.” —John 9:31, NIV

By humbling yourself before God

“And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” —Micah 6:8, NIV

By renewing your mind with biblical truth

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” —Romans 12:2, NIV

By having a mindset of faith, trust, and expectancy toward God

“We live by faith, not by sight.” —2 Corinthians 5:7, NIV

By being patient and willing to wait on God

“Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.” —Psalm 27:14

2. Monitor God’s channels of communication.

God directs our steps through his Word, the Bible.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” —Psalm 119:105, NIV

God directs our steps through the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.” —John 16:13, NIV

God directs our steps through other people.

“Make plans by seeking advice.” —Proverbs 20:18, NIV

God directs our steps through providential circumstances.

“But Joseph said...‘You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.’” —Genesis 50:19-20, NIV

3. Make sure the direction is from God.

Does it comply with the directions given in God's written Word?

"Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me." —Psalm 119:133

Does it make sense when you use sanctified reasoning that is based on God's truth?

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." —Romans 12:2, NIV

Does it seem to fit with the surrounding circumstances?

"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." —Ephesians 1:11, NIV

Does it concur with the advice you have received from wise godly counselors?

"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." —Proverbs 15:22, NIV

Does it generate a supernatural inner peace and calmness that cannot be attributed to your circumstances?

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." —Philippians 4:6-7, NIV

You do not have to be able to answer "yes" to all of the preceding questions to confirm the direction as being from God. However, if you answer "no" to any of these questions, wait on God to give you more confirmation before taking action.

4. Trust God to guide you.

Believe God will give you the wisdom you need.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." —James 1:5, NIV

Rely on God to show you the right way.

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.” —Psalm 32:8, NIV

Expect God to confirm or redirect your steps.

“In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.” — Proverbs 16:9, NIV

Discovering God’s will and discerning his direction is more dependent on your relationship with him than a process of steps. He wants to guide you. Stay close to him. Hear his words. Notice his signs. He will reveal his plan to you at the right time.

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