

“no” after some time passes, you must accept His answer and continue to worship and seek God (2 Samuel 12:14-23).

**Recognize God may answer your prayer differently than you expected.** When you pray, you must not put God in the box of what your mind can conceive concerning the possible answer(s) to prayer (Ephesians 3:20-21)! For example, the apostle Paul prayed that he would be able to visit the Christians in Rome (Romans 1:9-12; 15:31-32). Although he had been hindered up to that point (Romans 15:22), he was making plans concerning going to Spain after he traveled to Jerusalem (Romans 15:23-29). But, instead of this, Paul would be imprisoned in Jerusalem and spend two years in prison in Caesarea before he would appeal to Caesar and be transported to Rome as a prisoner, where he would spend at least two more years under house arrest (Acts 21-28; 28:30-31). Yet, God opened various doors through these prison years for the gospel. Therefore, you must have your mind open to your prayers being answered in ways you do not expect or you may miss out on what God makes available!

**Test everything.** If you are not careful, you may reach a conclusion about how God has answered your prayer that really is not God’s answer and may not even come from God! For example, although God can work to open and close doors in our lives, Satan is also pictured in Scripture as being able to hinder plans (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18). And, there are some people who interpret various things that happen in their lives to be a sign from God that He wants something from them that goes against what He has revealed in the Scriptures. Therefore, you must learn to put everything about your life to the test (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22), including what you think may be the answer to prayer. Since God’s word is true, you can know He will not give you an answer that conflicts with His truth!

### Conclusion

You should find great comfort in knowing that God answers prayer and determine that you will make the best use of prayer you can! But, you must recognize that God answers prayers in various ways and you must not put God in a box (unless He has said He puts Himself in that box). While I cannot possibly explain everything about how God answers prayers, you can use these principles to help you search for His answers.

Discovering God’s Word Bible Study Series

Written by Eric Krieg

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## How God Answers Prayer

Prayer is powerful (James 5:16)! This is a basic truth that many Christians know. However, knowing that prayer is powerful and understanding how God answers prayer are two different things altogether. Although we will never know all the depths of God’s working (in prayer or anything else, Romans 11:33-36), there are some things we can understand about how God answers prayers. And, gaining a better understanding of these should help us trust more in the power of prayer and not be so discouraged and frustrated when we pray.

The purpose of this lesson is to learn how God answers prayers by considering how God intervenes in human life, the different answers God gives to prayer, and how to know God’s answer.

### God Intervenes In Human Life

**God’s intervention is essential for prayer to be effective.** The Bible clearly teaches the concept that God is sovereign over all (1 Chronicles 29:11-12). God’s sovereignty refers to His supreme power over all. While God does *not* actively, intentionally, and purposefully cause everything to happen that happens on earth (like a puppet master, Ecclesiastes 9:11), God can and does get involved in the affairs of people (without taking away free will)! If He did not do so, then there would be no reason whatsoever to pray (because there would be nothing that God can or will do). Consider two ways God can intervene in your life.

**Direct intervention.** When you pray, you need to believe that God can and will *directly* intervene in your life at the times and in the ways God knows to be appropriate. Consider when Hannah prayed to God, asking that God would give her a son (1 Samuel 1:10-11). The Scriptures

teach that God remembered her and she conceived and gave birth to a son (1 Samuel 1:19-20). Also consider when King Hezekiah prayed to the Lord for his life to be extended (Isaiah 38:1-3). The Scriptures teach that God added 15 years to the king's life (Isaiah 38:4-6).

**Indirect intervention.** When you pray, you also need to believe that God can and will *indirectly* intervene in your life at the times and in the ways God knows to be appropriate (i.e. through other people, circumstances, etc.). Consider when King Ahasuerus had approved the proposal made by Haman to annihilate all the Jewish people (Esther 3:12-13), that resulted in all the Jewish people weeping and crying bitterly (surely including prayers, Esther 4:1-3). Yet, God's hand can be seen working through a series of events that had brought Esther to be queen and to save the Jewish people (Esther 4:13-14). So, while God did not rescue the Jewish people through some spectacular show of direct involvement against the king, God was working "behind the scenes" to bring about their salvation! The same thing can be seen in the life of Joseph. God allowed Joseph to endure many terrible experiences before bringing Joseph into a high position of authority to deliver the Israelites from starvation (Genesis 50:20).

### Possible Answers To Prayer

**Yes.** You must not conclude that God always answers prayer according to what, how, and when you ask. Rather, the Scriptures show a few different ways God answers prayer. This certainly includes that God can and sometimes does answer prayer according to what is being requested. This was seen in the examples of Hannah and King Hezekiah. And, God can certainly grant requests made to Him in prayer today (Matthew 7:7-11; James 5:15-16).

**No.** God does *not* always affirmatively answer every prayer – even when a righteous person is praying! Look no further than Jesus's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane shortly before His arrest and crucifixion to see this point (Luke 22:41-45). Though He was the Son of God, the suffering was not taken away from Him (as His sacrifice was necessary to save us all)! Then, consider Paul and his thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul pleaded with the Lord three times that this would leave him (vv. 7-8). But, this was not taken away from him (vv. 9-10). Therefore, God will sometimes answer your prayers with a "no." However, you must continue to trust that God knows better than you do, even when you don't like the answer (Isaiah 46:9-10; Romans 11:33-36; 1 Corinthians 1:25)!

**Wait.** While there are certainly times in which it may seem God is not answering our prayers, it may be that God is delaying the answer to a later time. For example, it may have seemed to Zechariah and Elizabeth (who were both righteous people, Luke 1:6) that God had answered their prayer for a son as "no" (Luke 1:7). Yet, at the proper time of God's choosing, they would have a son – who would prepare the way for Jesus (Luke 1:13, 19-20)! In fact, even the Psalmist speaks of waiting patiently on the Lord when he cried out to Him for help (Psalm 25:3; 27:14; 40:1; 130:5-6). The implication is that God will not always answer in the ways you are seeking immediately. Still, we must learn to trust God enough that we will wait for Him and that He works everything out according to His will and in His time (Psalm 31:14-15) – and know that His timing is better than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9; Psalm 90:4)!

### How To Know God's Answer

**Expect God to answer.** If you pray without the expectation that God will hear and answer your prayer, you should not expect to receive anything from Him (James 1:5-8)! On the other hand, if you pray fervently to God and then expect Him to give you an answer, you will be looking for it and watching for how He may choose to intervene in your life. However, you still must not expect the answer to always be what, when, and how you want it to be and you must be open to receiving the other possible answers God gives to prayer.

**Look for God's answers to be according to His will.** It is easy to quote verses that seem to promise God will always answer our prayers according to what, when, and how we ask (i.e. Matthew 7:7-11). However, not only should these passages be studied carefully themselves to arrive at the proper conclusions, but we must also harmonize these with other Scriptures that show God not giving people what they ask for. The conclusion we must reach is that God will grant the request of our prayers when they are in harmony with His will (1 John 5:14-15)!

**Be willing to wait and accept God's answer.** God may choose to delay the answer to your prayer. This is where you must learn to wait on God's answer and not act presumptuously. While this can be extremely difficult, we have seen that this idea occurs frequently throughout the Psalms. At this time, though, you must not become discouraged. Rather, you must pray even more persistently, while you wait for God to give you an answer (Luke 11:5-13; Luke 18:1-8). Then, even if the answer is clearly