

## Palisades Community Bible Church

### Online Sunday School

# How Does God Answer Prayer?

March 14, 2021

How often do you get in your car, start it up, and drive down the road without knowing how the car works? How does it go when you press the accelerator? How does it stop when you hit the brakes? How do the windows go up and down?

Yet, you pray – expecting that God will answer you? And, when you are in dire need....you pray all the more fervently? When things are going well....not so much? How does God work, anyway?

It's interesting, isn't it, that we treat 'talking to God' as casually as we treat so many other things in our life; our fridge, the roof on our house, our health, etc.? It's just there. Yet, when our furnace, or our health, fails, it's not so casual. If we really, really, need something, we pray!

If it turns out our way, we praise God. If it doesn't, we assume it was not "His will." Worse, we may assume that God isn't listening, or that He isn't there. Please, don't think I'm criticizing. It's human nature. We humans are incredibly self-centered and we tend to let our emotions guide our actions.

For instance, how many of us were raised "wishing" for something and hoping Santa would bring it? What is Santa's stipulation for your wish coming true? You must be good! Santa is checking his list! I personally believe that Santa Clause has caused many of us to have an extremely warped view of what praying is.....praying is NOT WISHING! However, we were trained up from childhood to "wish" for the miraculous...the impossible....for what we cannot do for ourselves. Think on it; do we treat God just a little bit like we were taught to treat Santa Claus?

It seems that many of us have unrealistic expectations when it comes to prayer. Do we fully understand what prayer IS? Do we understand its PURPOSE? Do we

understand what it DOES? How does God answer prayer? What really happens when we pray? Let's find out.

### **What is Prayer?**

As a father of children, I tried hard to teach them to talk with me about a need. So often, they'd just do it on their own, then they'd fail, then they'd cry and ask me to fix the mess! How often are we this way with God? We choose a college, make a major purchase, get married, take a job....all without consulting our Father. Prayer is talking with God very much the same way we'd talk with a parent, grandparent, etc., about an important matter.

Why didn't my kids talk with me FIRST? I suppose it's because they feared I'd have said "NO." And, God often tells us "NO!" There are things we selfish, ignorant, prideful mortals THINK are wise and smart, that turn out to be disasters. If my kid wanted to jump off the roof using a bed sheet as a parachute, I'd stop them. Why? As an experienced parachutist, I KNEW that would end up in a trip to the ER. But, why would my kid – KNOWING MY EXPERIENCE – not ask me about it, first? What combination of pride and ignorance must there be brewing inside the child's mind? Don't they know I WANT them to do things that help them grow.....without getting maimed in the process?

**Proverbs 16: 25 "There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."**

On the other hand, if they wanted to try something that had elements of danger, I'd give them the freedom to experiment, but keep them from losing an eye or a limb. God gave us free will, but wants our free will to be guided by His wisdom, His intelligence, His temperance, His direction.

Here's an illustration:

A farmer asked his son to remove a tree stump from the field. The son loaded all the tools, chains, and equipment that would fit in the wagon and towed them out to the field with the tractor. The father walked out to quietly observe. As his son dug, chopped, pried, and pulled, he could not budge the stump. Not wanting to disappoint his father, the son repeatedly dug, chopped, pried and pulled until the dark hours of the evening.

Finally, utterly exhausted, the son slumped down by the stump and confessed; “Dad, I’ve used every tool we have, and have worked all day on this. I just can’t get this stump out!”

The father asked; “Have you done EVERYTHING you could do?”

Angered, the son replied; “You’ve watched me! I have every tool, all our ropes and chains, the tractor...I have tried everything I have available to me. It won’t come out!”

The father asked again; “Have you tried EVERYTHING? Really?”

The son finally gave in. “I don’t know. I THINK I’ve tried everything. What did I miss?”

The father smiled as he pulled a stick of dynamite out of his pocket. “You did not ask ME for help!”

Clearly, the father knew the son’s weakness lay in his confidence in HIS OWN strength. The father wanted his son to be strong, but needed to teach him how much stronger he’d be if only he’d look to his father, as well. This is a lesson for each of us; consult the Father in prayer, KNOWING that He will have both our success and our well-being as top priorities. You see, when we are successful inside God’s will, God’s kingdom advances **WITH US IN IT!!** When we use our own prideful independence and strength, even when we succeed, God is not honored....He is diminished.

If there is a “stump” in God’s field that He wants His people to remove, He will use the experience to strengthen his sons and daughters. He may even let us struggle in our own strength, experience failure from our own makings, and patiently wait for us to finally turn to Him. And, when God shows us the way, we can be sure it will work out. How much more successful will we be if we put prayer before our own efforts?

We can ONLY work within God’s will if we put our needs in His hands and trust that He will provide the way. We must seek God’s will in every matter KNOWING that He will lead and guide. That is the combination of faith and obedience. The first five Commandments give us great insight into prayer. Notice how disobeying any of these keeps us from communicating with God. From Exodus 20:2-12:

**1. I am the lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me.**

God wants us to look ONLY to Him for wisdom, guidance, help and protection. If we put our confidence in anything other than God; such as ourselves, another person, our job, money, the lottery, education, government, etc., we diminish God in our lives and we will not be successful in God's eyes. Success in the world's eyes is not the same as success in God's eyes.

**2. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.**

Do not make an idol out of anything this life offers you. An idol is a substitute for God. Idols separate us from God and result in self-destruction; money, fame, success, luxury, comfort, etc.

**3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.**

This is not just using God's name in profanity. It is claiming that you are a Christian, yet your actions show that you are anything but that. One may appear to be the 'model of Christian piety' but may engage in dishonest, deceitful, vulgar, or illegal things of which God clearly disapproves. With all the degradation of our society, many people are claiming to be "of God" yet they act quite the opposite. "I can be a XXXXX and be a Christian" is the claim. Note that there is a strong consequence to this commandment. If you cannot do it with God watching, you should NOT do it!

**4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.**

One day a week we are to honor God with worship, study of His Word, spending time with other believers, confessing our sins and seeking forgiveness, praying and consecrating ourselves to His service. One day per week we are to order the next six days in ways that God is directing us to live. (hint: if this seems like too much for you, you need it more than ever! Tell Satan to beat it!)

**5. Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.**

Note that this commandment has a blessing attached! Honoring your father and mother is a strong representation of your keeping the first four Commandments!! God knows that, if you honor your earthly parents,

you'll honor your heavenly Father. A rebellious child, who does not honor their parents will have a great deal of trouble bending their knee to their creator. God does NOT want us to be weak. He wants us to be filled with HIS might, NOT OUR OWN.

In short, prayer is communicating with God. If you truly love God, you'll talk to Him, AND listen to Him many times per day. Put the affairs of your life in His hands and talk with Him about it. If you don't feel you're getting a reply, keep it up. He may be allowing you to dig and chop until you finally REALLY turn it over to Him.

### **God knows us personally**

Are you a parent? If so, do you know your children? Do you know them well? Are you a sibling? Do you have a brother or sister? Do you know them well? How much more must God know you, since he knew you before you were even conceived?

**Jeremiah 1:5a "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you"**

Have you ever 'created' something? Perhaps you planted a garden, or built a piece of furniture, or authored a paper, or decorated a room. Once you did something like that, you KNEW it intimately. God created you! He knows you. He knows your intentions, your motivations, your inner thoughts (good and bad) and He loves you. And, when you love God, you are special to Him.

**1 Corinthians 8:3 "but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him."**

God created you with many unique talents and gifts – some you may not even know about. Putting your life, and the affairs of your life into God's hands several times per day will allow God to show you the potential He designed into you. What a wonderful thing it is when your creator, who loves you, puts you in the perfect situations for which He designed you. And, DO NOT be surprised if those perfect situations are nothing you anticipated.

**Proverbs 3:6 "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will direct your paths."**

"OK, come on! How does simply talking with God every day make any real difference?" That's a very legitimate question. If you are wondering this, it's

perfectly healthy. God does NOT want blind faith. He wants you to trust Him, but He also wants you to TEST him. God knows that if you truly, respectfully, test His ways, your experiences will cause your faith to grow.

**Malachi 3:10 “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”**

This kind of “testing” is not to be taken lightly. Remember the very irreverent song made famous by Janice Joplin: “Oh, Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz?” This is not an appropriate approach. However, putting the affairs of your life into God’s hands, trusting in His will produces experiences that you will recognize as only coming from God. Remember, as with the stump in the field, you may be surprised at what God works on first. That farmer’s son never expected that his own physical strength was the idol in his life!

### **God has designed most of His blessings INTO His creation**

One of the most amazing things about how God answers prayers is that they are ALREADY answered! Imagine you’re in a building and the fire alarm sounds. Smoke starts filling the room. You run to the window and see that there is a fire escape. You, and the rest of the people escape unharmed. This is an example of the kinds of blessings God has already designed into His creation....knowing that you will need it. Too often, however, we don’t have a relationship with God that leads to understanding just where these existing blessings are! Here’s an illustration:

My business is home improvements. Usually, I’m invited into a house because of a specific problem, or the homeowner wants to do an upgrade. In the course of working in their home, I find electrical problems that could lead to a fire, leaking pipes that can do lots of damage, rain gutters about to fall off, stains in the ceiling because of a roof leak, etc., etc. I address these things, since I’m already there.

The owner asked me in for something specific, but I see SO MANY other things that need attention – often, more important things. God is like this. You may pray for your kid to stop smoking pot, and God may help you see that your OWN

prayer habits are non-existent, and that you only read your Bible to the extent that your minister directs you to a passage during a sermon. These things are important to God because He knows how important they are to YOU. When you open your door to the expert on your life, expect that MANY things will be addressed.....and, don't be surprised when some of the things you DID NOT ask for are addressed first.

Many of God's answers to prayer are like the Prego Spaghetti Sauce; "It's in there." Here's an illustration:

A father showed his daughter the check stub covering half her college expenses, handed her a Bible, and sent her off to college. Enraged that Dad would not cover all the costs, she slammed the door as she left. The father did not hear from his daughter for weeks.

Finally, she called home demanding that Dad send her money. "I can't study because I'm working so hard! Plus, I never get to party with my friends! What are you doing to me?"

The father calmly asked; "Have you read your Bible?" She hung up on him.

As the years passed, the daughter called home when she was most desperate, and the father simply asked if she'd read her Bible, yet. The daughter always hung up angrily.

After graduation, the daughter came home and made a big display of her anger. "And, as for your Bible, you can take it back!" she said, throwing it on the floor.

The father calmly picked it up and opened it right under his daughter's nose. There, between the pages were many \$100 bills. More than the other half of her college expenses! Each \$100 bill marked a page with verses highlighted – things the father had wanted his daughter to learn!!

The illustration is that God has so many, many blessings already in store for you, if you'll only follow and obey Him.

What was this daughter trusting in? Her Daddy's money, right? Apart from that, her life was, in her view, HORRIBLE! Yet, had she simply trusted and obeyed her Father, she'd have had a far different experience. The money became an **idol** for her. An Idol is a substitute for God. The daughter wanted Dad's money, not his

wisdom! “Wishing for miracles or special circumstances” is a form of idolatry. It replaces faith in God with false and vain hope. Most of the things we wish for are what will satisfy our selfish desires. In our arrogance, we assume that WE know more than the one who created us. Idols are a barrier to God’s blessings in our lives. That which we pray for ought to be what is most in the center of God’s will for our lives. A life spent in obedience to God will be one which is satisfying in ways that only our creator can engineer.

My first career was in the corporate world. I thought getting a degree and putting on a suit would be the key to prosperity. It was my idol. It didn’t work out so well. I hit record sales goals two years in a row, leading up to 2000. But, in 2001, all our customers had purchased their tech products – in 2001, they needed to get them to work. Nobody was buying anything. So, my employer laid off most of the sales people who had worked so diligently to make them \$ millions! I was hired, and let go, by three more companies in the next year for the same reason; nobody was buying.

I became so desperate that I FINALLY prayed! Yes, it was THAT BAD! I prayed night and day for God to stop listening to what I wanted, and just lead me down the path HE wanted me to take. Once I was fully submitted to His will, He wasted no time in making His will clear to me. I started a small business. I was scared to death and dared not begin or end each day without fervent prayer!! My walk with Jesus improved dramatically. Soon, I was more fulfilled doing His will, rather than my own, and I was actually making enough money to support my family. It’s amazing what God will put into your hand when you unclench your fist!

Now, understand, these blessings were already there! God had simply led me to what He already had waiting for me. God did not supernaturally create a need for the kind of business He led me into. He let my own pride, arrogance, selfishness finally exhaust themselves in failure, then led me to the very thing for which he’d designed me to do! I had been the one standing in my own way. I’d been chasing an idol.

If we put a false god in the forefront of our lives (even if that false god is ourself!), our life will have a very unstable leader! Any leader of our life that is not the true and living God who created us is unstable.

**Matthew 7: 24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”**

**Man is shut off from God from birth. Jesus is the only way.**

God exists in 3 persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just as I am a mortal father, I’m also a mortal son. I also have an immortal soul – the life force inside of me. In these ways, I’m like my creator.

God created everything and gave life. Because of sin, mortal humans are born cut off from God. Also, because of SIN, we think, act and relate to others in sinful, ungodly, ways. God cannot have sin in His presence. So, God put on mortal flesh and walked with us in order that sin can be taken out of the way. The Son (Jesus) is God in human flesh, who takes away our sins, so that mortal man can have a relationship with God the Father. Without Jesus, we are entirely, completely, lost in sin, and our eternal doom is sealed. However;

**John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.”**

Until we receive Jesus as our one and only atonement (payment) for our sins, we remain cut off from God. If you have not received Jesus as your one and only savior – the sole remedy for your sin nature – you have no hope of relating to God. Your sin completely separates you from God.

**John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

If you are in this condition, your very first prayer should resemble something like this: “Jesus, I know that I am a fallen person, living a sinful life. I know that I’m separated from God and that your work on the Cross is the payment you made for

my sin. I ask you to come into my life, take my sin away, and make me a new person in Christ.” Once you have done this, you are now, as Jesus’ disciples:

**Hebrews 9:4 “It was not only because they heard the Word but because they had obeyed it. They obeyed and were purified by Christ’s blood.”**

Once your separation caused by sin is resolved:

**John 15:9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”**

### **God sends a helper when you accept Jesus**

Faithfulness and obedience unlock the limitless blessings God has ALREADY given you!

Once you know God through His son (Jesus) and through His Word (the Bible), you can truly KNOW God. The first step is exactly that; a first step. We continually communicate with God through Jesus; that is why Christians pray....”in Jesus’ name.” This constantly acknowledges Jesus as the forgiver of the very sin that separates us from God.

We read the Bible because it contains God’s loving words to us. It reveals His character to us. It gives us innumerable lessons in how He wants us to live, wisdom He wants us to have, lessons He wants us to know, etc. Here’s an illustration:

I’ve heard many criticisms of our God, Jesus, Christians, etc. When I ask them where they find their claims in the Bible, all the air goes out of their balloon. If one doesn’t know the Bible, they have an inaccurate view of God.

God has given us two very important ways of KNOWING him. He gave us His Word, the Bible.

**Timothy 3:16 “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness”**

**Proverbs 30:5 “Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.”**

**Romans 10:17 “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”**

He also gives us the Holy Spirit when we turn our sinful life over to Jesus.

**1 John 4:13 “This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.”**

**Romans 8:26 “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”**

**Romans 8:14 “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.”**

If you do not know God through Jesus and the Bible, you do not know God. No matter what you may think you know of God, what you may have heard, what you may WANT to believe about God, you cannot know Him apart from His Son and His Word. The Holy Spirit will guide your thinking, assist you in understanding God’s word and actions, and indwell you with wisdom.

Prayer is a daily conversation with God. It involves sharing your life issues with Him, listening and being influenced by both the Bible and the Holy Spirit. Most of God’s answers to your prayers are already waiting; unopened gifts, that you must be made ready to open. The farmer’s son was not able to discover the dynamite in his Dad’s pocket until he had completely exhausted his own strength.

The more you see how God answers your prayers, the stronger your faith will grow, and the more successful and fulfilled your life will become.

One final illustration:

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great and priceless works.

When the Vietnam-conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, there was a knock at the door. There, a young man stood holding a large package.

“Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly...He often talked about you, and your love for art. The young man held out the package. “I know this isn't much. I'm not a gifted artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this.”

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way it captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears.

He thanked the young man and offered to pay him. “Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift.”

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home; he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

When the man died, there was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection.

On the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. “We will start the bidding with this painting of the son. Who will bid for this first work?”

There was silence...

Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, “We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one.”

But the auctioneer persisted. “Will somebody bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200.”

Another impatient voice; “We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Gogh's, the Rembrandts. Get on with the REAL paintings!”

But still the auctioneer continued. “The son! The son! Who'll take the son?”

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give \$10 for the painting.." Being a poor man, it was all he could afford.

"We have \$10, who will bid \$20?"

"Give it to him for \$10. Let us see the masters!"

"Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!" The auctioneer pounded the gavel.

A man sitting on the second row shouted, "Now let's get on with the collection!"

The auctioneer laid down his gavel. "I'm sorry, the auction is over."

'What about the paintings?'

"I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will... I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son is to be auctioned. Whoever buys this painting inherits the entire estate, including the rest of the paintings."

"The man who takes the son gets everything!"

God gave His son over 2,000 years ago to die on the Cross. Much like the auctioneer, His message today is: 'The Son, the Son, who'll take the Son?'

Because, you see, whoever takes the Son gets everything!