

LIFE CHANGING PRAYER

Praying with Faith

Genuine prayer is powered by the Holy Spirit of God.

As followers of Christ, we are thrilled when ‘yes’ answers to our prayers come just when we expect them and just the way that we expect them. If we are honest, there are even times when an answer comes so quickly we are surprised. However, be advised that a ‘yes’ to our prayer may not come when we expect or how we expect. Christian evangelist Luis Palau gives the following examples.

Sometimes, the answer is ‘yes, but you have to wait.’

*Isaiah 40:31 (ESV)*³¹ *but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

Phil Callaway didn't know what to say when his young children asked if Mommy was going to die. His wife, Ramona, suffered horrible seizures. Hundreds of friends and relatives prayed, but Ramona's condition worsened. Medical specialists tried everything, but by the fall of 1996, the seizures were occurring daily, sometimes hourly. Phil rarely left Ramona's side. He wondered if she would even make it to her 30th birthday. One evening, when things looked utterly hopeless, Phil paced their dark back yard, then fell to his knees. "God!" he cried out. "I can't take it anymore. Please do something!" Suddenly a doctor's name came to mind. Phil called the doctor, who saw Ramona the next morning and diagnosed a rare chemical deficiency. Within a week, Ramona's seizures ended. Her eyes sparkled again. The miracle was so incredible Phil says, "God gave me back my wife."

Sometimes the answer is ‘Yes, but not what you expected.’

*Proverbs 3:5-6 (ESV)*⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.*⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

Have you ever asked God to use you? If so, expect the unexpected! NFL running back Sherman Smith, the "Sherman Tank," stood six feet four inches tall and packed 225 pounds of solid muscle. His reputation for bowling over defensive linemen raised his celebrity to near-cult status in the Pacific Northwest, where he played for the Seattle Seahawks. Then, without warning, the Seahawks traded their most popular player to the San Diego Chargers. He wasn't with the Chargers for more than a few weeks when he seriously injured his knee. Everything changed overnight for this running back, whose Christian faith was as rock solid as his abs. While in rehabilitation, he wondered, *Lord, why did you ship me to San Diego?* But while his knee mended, Sherman had the opportunity to lead one of his teammates to the Lord. That converted

party-guy, Miles McPherson, has since become an outstanding youth evangelist who reaches tens of thousands of people each year.

Sometimes the answer is ‘no’.

The Apostle Paul received a ‘no’ to a personal request and he explained how his ‘no’ came to him.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)⁹ *But he [meaning the Lord] 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 of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

Yes, God’s matchless grace is sufficient. Sometimes when God says, ‘No’ to a prayer, He may be saying, ‘No, because I love you too much.’ I think we all have received ‘no’ answers that in hindsight we are so thankful that the Lord did NOT answer with a ‘yes.’

Finally, the answer may be ‘I can’t hear you.’

Isaiah 59:1-2 (ESV)¹ *Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; ² but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*

When we recognize sin in our hearts, we must immediately acknowledge it, confess it, and forsake it; otherwise, the Lord cannot work on our behalf. **Psalm 66:18 (ESV)**¹⁸ *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*

Understanding the different types of answers we receive, helps to strengthen our faith and rebuke Satan’s lie when we think, or when others tell us, that our prayers are not being answered because we do not have enough faith.

Pray faithfully and keep trusting in God!

2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)¹⁷ *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.*

Another of the Devil’s lies is that praying with faith takes some kind of ‘secret formula’ give only to a chosen few – those who faith is strong.

Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)¹ *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

This is a description of what faith does and how it works. True faith is not blind optimism or a ‘hope-so’ feeling.

Recall how Job's 'friends' accused him of secret sins in his time of distress – things they believed he had done in the flesh that were the cause of all his problems. Job was so upset with them that he was ready to go to God to defend Himself. **Job 13:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ *Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face.*

Job would never be able to defend himself before Almighty God. He needed an Advocate. An advocate is someone to defend us and hallelujah God provides His children with the Advocate we need. **1 John 2:1 (ESV)** ¹ *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

When we go the Father, we don't have to worry about whether we have enough faith to receive an answer because our God is faithful. – and as our Advocate, Christ represents us before the throne of grace while the Holy Spirit within us helps us pray prayers of faith.

Romans 8:26-27 (ESV) ²⁶ *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.* ²⁷ *And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

At times it is difficult to concentrate on prayer if our bodies are filled with pain or we are numb from anxiety or grief. Because of circumstances, there will be times when we literally do not have a clue how we should pray. These are moments to remember that when *we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words* And on those nights when we are weary and forget to pray and those mornings when we are in a hurry and skip morning prayers, the Spirit within us is still interceding to the Father. But please do not make it a habit of forgetting God and the Spirit who dwells within you. **Ephesians 4:30 (ESV)** ³⁰ *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

In your times of agony do not make the mistake of believing the Devil's lie that God does not care about your problems. God is concerned about the trials of His people. When He was ministering on earth, Jesus groaned when He saw what sin was doing to mankind. Today the Holy Spirit groans with us and feels the burdens of our weaknesses and suffering. But the Spirit does more than groan. He prays for us in His groaning so that we might be led into the will of God. We do not always know God's will. We do not always know how to pray, but the Spirit intercedes so that we might live in the will of God in spite of suffering. The Holy Spirit shares our burden.

Christianity is Christ Alone!

1 Corinthians 2:2-5 (ESV) ² *For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.* ³ *And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,* ⁴ *and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the*

Spirit and of power,⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

In order to pray with faith we must trust in Christ Alone! During the days of the Protestant Reformation, the Reformers cried, ‘Sola Christos’ – Christ Alone. Today, true followers of Christ may say ‘just give me Jesus’! Jesus is all we need! Our Lord of Salvation is sufficient not only for our eternal salvation but for all our needs.

When we think of the Apostle Paul and his faithful ministry, we are amazed that the man who was first known for his persecution of Christians became such an influential instrument for the spreading of the gospel of Christ. He explained that he came to his hearers in weakness, in fear, in trembling. That certainly does not sound like a formula for success. But, those humble qualities opened the door for a *demonstration of the Spirit and of power*.

It was not Paul’s skills, knowledge or ability that gave his ministry its power; it was the work of the Spirit of God. The same Spirit of God is available to us.

Often when difficulties arise we say, ‘well, I can’t do anything but pray’. What a weak way to approach the throne room of God. Praying should never be our last resort – it should be our first. There is power in prayer – taking our problems to God and trusting in Him to answer. Jesus said in **Mark 11:24 (ESV)**²⁴ *Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.*

Be careful! Do not interpret **Mark 11:24** to mean, ‘If you pray hard enough and *really believe*, God is obligated to answer your prayers, no matter what you ask.’ That kind of faith is not faith in God; rather, it is nothing but faith in faith, or faith in feelings. True faith in God is based on His Word. **John 15:7 (ESV)**⁷ *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* His Word reveals His will to us and when our desires become His desires we will discover that we are praying prayers that God will honor and will answer.

What is the answer for a dead or weak prayer life?

It is the answer for all the Christian life: live, work, and pray in the Spirit.