



Daily Verse and Comment

James 5:15-18

(15) And the prayer of faith shall save the sick one, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

(16) Confess *your* faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. *The* supplication of a righteous man prevails much, being effective.

(17) Elijah was a man of emotions like ours, and he prayed earnestly *that it* would not rain, and it did not rain upon the earth *for* three years and six months. (18) And again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain, and caused the earth to sprout its fruit.

A Faithful Version

To many people, it is a head-scratcher to consider the vagaries of answered prayer—or should I say "unanswered prayer"? That is precisely the puzzler: Why are some prayers answered and some not? Why are some people miraculously healed of a dreaded disease, while others with the same [affliction](#) suffer ghastly declines and die? Is there rhyme or reason to having one's prayer answered, or is it just the luck of the draw?

So far, we have not mentioned [God](#), yet it is our understanding of Him that either provides us the answer or leaves us confused, dejected, and perhaps in doubt. In fact, to true believers, prayer is a prime example of God's existence and providence. On the other hand, skeptics almost invariably bring up the "prayer question" when spreading their disbelief, saying, "How can a loving God allow those who pray to Him to suffer so much?" Or, "Statistically, praying people are only a little more fortunate than non-praying people when it comes to overcoming normally fatal illnesses." Or, "There is no proof whatsoever that one's prayers rise any higher than the ceiling. Didn't Solomon say, 'Everything occurs alike to all' in [Ecclesiastes 9:2](#)? So how can we know that a so-called 'answer to prayer' is more than mere happenstance?"

No one who knows God would utter such cynical things. The Supreme Being revealed in the pages of the Bible is not capricious, uncaring, distracted, respecting of persons, or absent without leave, as these doubting comments suggest. To the contrary, Scripture shows Him to be reliable, loving, alert, just, and involved in the affairs of His creatures. If not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without His notice, how much more involved is He with the well-being of humanity—and individual humans? Thus, the mystery surrounding the answered-prayer question cannot be solved by finding fault with God or by doubting Him or His existence.

The fault lies in us, in our understanding of His purpose and in our expectations of what He will do.

At its most critical level, the solution to this prayer conundrum begins with the fact that God tells us to pray to Him. If we believe that He is reasonable and purposeful, we must conclude that He has determined that praying is meaningful and helpful to us. By itself, praying to God benefits us whether or not any of our requests are fulfilled. This has little to do with such things as whether we live longer or are healthier or happier because we pray. All things considered, God is less concerned with our length of days or our *joie de vivre* than He is with our eternal life and spiritual character, though He certainly wants us well and joyful. Therefore, the reason God commands us to pray to Him is fundamentally spiritual in nature and so the benefits of praying are also mostly spiritual.

Jesus teaches in [John 17:3](#) that eternal life is knowing "the only true God, and [Jesus Christ](#)." This informs us, then, that true spirituality, true religion, revolves around a relationship with God the Father and His Son.

Communication is vital to the success of any relationship, and prayer is fundamentally a form of communication. Through the sacrifice of our Savior and the facility of the Holy Spirit given to all true Christians, in prayer we have an open line of communication with the very God of the universe! Prayer allows us to maintain and deepen our relationship with our Father and Elder Brother despite the distance and the differences in our natures.

In addition, Jesus came to reveal the Supreme Being to mankind as a Father ([John 1:18](#)), and He instructs us to come before Him in prayer as children to

their Father ([Matthew 6:9](#)). This sets the basic bounds of the relationship: of a loving, faithful Father to his obedient and adoring children. It is not a relationship of equals, nor is it a business partnership or trade association. It is a family relationship, in which God is the ultimate Superior and the other, the Christian, a humble subordinate. In all relationships of this kind, the will and purposes of the superior always take priority. As even Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, after asking for His cup of suffering and death to pass from Him, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done" ([Luke 22:42](#)).

These are not the only principles we need to understand about prayer, but they are among the most important. What do they imply?

First, prayer is not simply a means of getting things from God. In fact, if that is our approach to prayer, we are working counter to God's purpose for us, for He is trying to instill His giving, outgoing character in us. Until we change our motives for praying, we will find prayer to be frustrating and ineffective.

Second, prayer is just one facet of a far larger, spiritual relationship. It must be seen in its place in God's purpose in our lives. We may be praying from morning until night, but it will be just a string of empty words if we are not also conforming the rest of our lives to the will of God.

Third, prayer requires [faith](#). The world's view of faith is cheap and simplistic, but biblical faith—real confidence in God's [goodness](#) toward us—is an essential part of Christian prayer. A Christian who prays in faith makes his petitions known to God and trusts that he is not only heard but answered to his ultimate good. Whether the answer is "positive" or "negative," he can smile and say, "What You decide on this request is the best for me right now."

This final point is what Paul concludes in [Romans 8:23-30](#): God knows best what will bring us to eternal life and glory in His Kingdom. So, in the end, to those who know God, there really is no prayer conundrum. Our prayers are heard and answered, and all things will work out for the good of those whom God has chosen to have a loving relationship with Him.

— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[The Prayer Conundrum](#)

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