

San Juan church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About...

Prayers

Prayer is communication with God. Paul wrote, "I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men" (1 Tim. 2:1). "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). The word "supplication" refers to a request regarding a personal need. A "prayer" is active worship to God. "Intercessions" are requests made on behalf of another. Finally, "thanksgivings" are expressions of gratitude.

Prayer is the time we take to communicate with God requesting our needs. We express our thankfulness to Him for the aid he has given us in the past. We also tell God about our weaknesses and failings, asking Him for forgiveness of our shortcomings. Yet, in all of this, we understand that God already knows about our requests before we ask (Isa. 65:24). God does not expect fanciful prayers, only heartfelt prayers. "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes [mediates] for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26-27).

If God knows everything and makes up for our shortcomings, then why should we bother to pray? Prayer is not for God's benefit, but for our own benefit. How can a person face his weaknesses and work on improving himself if he cannot admit his weaknesses exist? If we do not recognize our dependency on God, then we would soon believe that everything that happens to us is by our own abilities (Dan. 4:30-32).

Unfortunately, far too many people act as if God is the provider of the requests on our "wish list," and we pray only when we need something. When Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane before He went to the cross, He asked in prayer, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me..." However, Jesus knew that death was not His will but His Father's will (Matt. 26:39).

When we pray we must truly believe that God will answer. In fact, God expects us to look for the answer to our prayer. "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened" (Luke 11:9-10). To look for God's answers shows we are truly needing God's aid and not just repeating some ritualistic phrases.

If we do not believe that God will answer our prayers, then why ask? Jesus said, "all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you" (Mk. 11:24). James said we must ask of God with faith and without doubting (James 1:5-8).

There are conditions to answered prayer. We must be disciples of Christ (John 9:31). Why should God give aid to those who oppose His will? David tells us that we must love God (Psm. 91:14-15). The followers of God, who have been tried by fire, will be given an answer (Zech. 13:9). It is the prayers of the righteous that avails much (James 5:16). But to be a follower of God, we must be obedient to His will (1 John 3:21-22; John 15:7). We must have forgiven others before the Father who is in heaven will forgive us of our transgressions (Mk. 11:25). If husbands do not live with their wives in an understanding way and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, then the husband's prayers will be hindered (1 Pet. 3:7). When we ask God for help, we must be willing to give aid to others who need our help (Isa. 58:3-11). How selfish can a person be to expect aid for himself, and not help others in turn?

Whatever we ask from God, it has to be according to His will, and with the proper intentions (James 4:3; 1 John 5:14). In our prayers we must always keep in mind that God is first, others are second, and the one requesting favors from God should be a distant last (Phil. 2:3-4).

Please send any comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to:
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