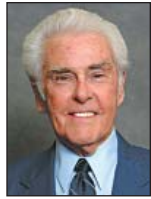


God's promise of answered prayer

In Luke 11:1, Jesus' disciples requested that he teach them to pray, as John the Baptist taught his disciples. Jesus responded by teaching them



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the Model Prayer, or as we usually name it, the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4), and giving them a parable (vv. 5-8) and some instructions (vv. 9-13). Both the parable and the instructions encouraged his disciples to persevere in prayer because of God's goodness and his willingness to answer from those who trust and believe in him.

It is not to be assumed that these Jewish disciples had not been taught to pray for God's intervention in their history. As far back as dealing with the plagues in Egypt, prayer was a vital part of their relationship to God. "So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. And the Lord did as Moses asked; He removed the swarms of flies" (Exodus 8:30-31). After being delivered from Egypt, three annual festivals of prayer and worship were established for them (Exodus 23:14-17).

We are not told how John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray, but we know that prayer was customary for the disciples (Luke 10:3). However, because of the disciples' desire to pray more effectively, they asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." From that question, we received the Lord's Prayer, which has affirmed God's will for present-day prayer life as individuals and in fellowship with each other, even as we have fellowship with God.

Perseverance in your prayer life (Luke 11:5-8). Dr. T. B. Maston, my major professor in Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, emphasized that prayer "is not just asking God for ourselves or for others or even expressing gratitude to him for his blessing. It is basically communication between God and man" (God's Will and Your Life, p. 70).

In this communication, as reflected in the Lord's Prayer, we can pray for God to hear and respond to our petitions. We seek his forgiveness for our sins even as we forgive those who have hurt us. These objectives require that we be open to knowing and fulfilling the purpose of God for our lives.

The apostle Paul provides the most intuitive statement of our calling in Romans 8:28: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (NASB). The late Professor Morris Ashcraft, who taught at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, helps us understand how this verse may apply to our lives.

"The beautiful promise of God is that he will 'work with us for good' in everything and in every situation. God not only has a will [purpose] for us but he also works with us to achieve that will. This means that no adversity, whatever its origin or intensity, is beyond the reach of God" (The Will of God, pp. 69-70).

The Lord has been with his people in all sorts of situations where individuals can feel that he has assisted them in their particular period of stress. A member of my men's Bible class works regularly with a group of men in a local prison who are seeking to open their lives to Christ while in prison. The class member who leads this work is inspired by the attitudes of the prisoners who speak of the help they have received.

Persistent prayer, therefore, is not simply asking for our own needs, it involves personal intent that the redemptive love of God will be expressed to those around us.

The response of these prisoners reminds me of the affirmation of Benjamin W. Farley, who remarked that this kind of ministry "requires courage, an inward peace and equanimity that is only possible because one trusts in God rather than self" (The Praise of Virtue, pp. 123-124).

When we persevere, God will answer (Luke 11:9-13). Three key

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Scripture: Luke 11:5-13

words are in Jesus' application of the parable: seek, knock, open. The application is addressed to "every one," such that he "who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, to him who knocks it will be opened." Probably the reader may have trouble when the application applies to every one who communicates with God since many devout believers do not receive what they call an answer to their prayer.

"God always answers true prayer in one of two ways — 'no good prayer ever comes weeping home.' For either he changes the circumstances or he supplies sufficient power to overcome them; he answers either the petition or the man" (Ernest F. Tittle, The Gospel According to Luke, p. 125).

The answer we receive may not be the one we wanted but we need not fear how God answers because we can trust his goodness for us. Jesus' declaration that the Father who gives the Holy Spirit to us in both good and testing times has his best interest for our fulfillment of his purpose for us. God is not reluctant to hear us or answer us, but he knows our hearts and knows what his purpose is for us.

The classic example of authentic prayer is Jesus' prayer for deliverance from the cross (Mark 14:32-42). "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." After his third intercession with the Father, Jesus said to the disciples, "It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinner."

The will of God for the salvation of mankind would be fulfilled on the cross of Calvary and Jesus agreed to be that sacrifice for all.

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