

## Paradise Lost and Restored: What is Prayer? (Part 3)

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA March 8, 2015

### I. Introduction

Is it OK to raise my voice when I pray? That is, can I actually yell at God or would that be totally offensive to God and make Him ban me from His presence? What if I'm still living in sin and ask Him for help, would He help me? Or would that make Him not want to have anything to do with me, at least not until I repent of my sin? Does prayer even work, i.e., will I see any actual results? And what if God doesn't answer me, what then?

### II. What other Etiquette is OK in Front of God and Does He Actually Answer our Prayers?

**Can you yell at God when you pray?** If your father had always been there for you but for some reason, this time he doesn't seem to be lifting a finger to help, when you got a chance to talk with him about your situation, would he be offended if you yelled at him as you vented your frustration about his apparent lack of help? It is true that we should have an attitude of gratitude whenever we talk with God but what if I'm frustrated with Him, can I raise my voice, can I yell? Some of the psalms (prayer songs) were written by individuals who were frustrated with God's apparent lack of help. David wrote such a psalm in which he yelled at God (Jesus yelled this same psalm as He was dying on the Cross), Psalm 22. And notice how the psalm ends, with David (and Jesus) praising God, 22:21b-31. God understands our frustrations and pain better than we do. Thus, as a Loving Father He would never be offended as we scream because of our pain and frustration.

**Prayer will give you rest anytime you need it**, do you ever feel like no one understands what you're going through? Even more, do you ever wish you could find refuge and rest from it all? First, God is the one person who can sympathize with your struggles. He faced all of it and more and He faced it successfully, Hebrews 4:15. He also knows how difficult life is and how impossible things get when you don't enter into God's rest, Hebrews 3-4. Second, since He knows that life will get difficult and you'll need God's rest, He offers a listening ear and a word of comfort anytime you need it. All you have to do is go talk with Him. In fact, He says that you can enter boldly into His private throne room anytime you want, Hebrews 4:16. Why do we have a right to enter God's private throne room to talk with Him in prayer? Because His Son paid our way into God's presence; He entered as our forerunner and expects us to follow Him there anytime we need it, Hebrews 6:19-20, so that we can pray and "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

**Will God listen to us while there's unconfessed sin in our lives?** It is true that God tells us that He will not hear our prayers if we haven't dealt with the sin in our lives, Psalm 66:18. In fact, He says this specifically to husbands, 1 Peter 3:7. Does He ever make an exception to this rule? God is not a strict disciplinarian who won't help you until you get your life straight. He's your Loving Father. Thus, He understands that sometimes He has to make the first move in order to help us, especially when we're in trouble. In fact, Jesus, as He's dying on the Cross, asks His Father to make the first move towards those killing Him, Luke 23:34. Jesus asks us to do likewise, as He teaches us that God is merciful to those living in sin, Matthew 5:43-48. Another example is Adam and Eve: God knew that He would have to reach out to them first in order to save them, Genesis 3.

**Does prayer really work?** Is your experience with prayer that you pray and pray but nothing ever happens? Does talking with God make things better? We have numerous examples in the Bible of people who prayed to God and God answered them: Abraham's servant had the challenge of finding Isaac's wife from among Abraham's relatives. In order to be sure that he picked the right woman, he asks God for something very specific, so specific that things could've gone very bad. He wants the woman from whom he asks for water to be Abraham's relative and be willing to water all of his camels. Before he finishes his prayer, God answers it, Genesis 24:10-27. We have a similar example in the New Testament. Herod put Peter in prison with plans to kill him. But the church kept praying over and over for his freedom and God miraculously answered their prayers, Acts 12:1-17. Can prayer really work for us today? God promises that it will work for us as it worked for Elijah, who was a human being just like us, James 5:13-18.

**What should I do when God fails to answer my prayer?**

First, are you asking the right question? We often ask God "Why?" But this is a question God rarely (if ever) answers. Perhaps the best candidate ever who deserved to ask this question was Job. He was the most righteous man on the planet and yet God took everything away from him. So Job asks Him why (Job 7:20), but God never answered his question. Even in the end when God restored everything to Job, God never explained to Job why He did all these bad things to him, Job 1-2, 40-42. A better question to ask God is "What?" or "How?", "What am I supposed to do now?" "What am I supposed to learn from this?" or "How am I supposed to fix this?" Asking God "Why?" is not going to help us move forward, but "What?" and "How?" will.

Second, keep asking and in the meantime, don't doubt Him. If God hasn't answered your prayer, He wants you to keep asking, Luke 18:1-8—if an unrighteous judge would grant a petition, how much more will your Heavenly Father grant your request. Why doesn't He just answer you? There's that "Why?" question again. It's not for us to know why God does things. But it is our right as His children to seek His help and He assures us that He hears us, 1 John 5:14. But if you begin to doubt that He's even listening, then that's when your prayers won't work: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him," Hebrews 11:6. When we doubt, we don't actually enter His presence. And if you're not in His presence, then you're having a very skeptical conversation by yourself.

Third, sometimes God's answer is "no." If He answered "no" and He promised to grant our every request, what's the problem? He promised to grant us everything *according to His will*, 1 John 5:14-15. What's God's will for us? He wants to give us everything that is good for us. So, did you ask for something that really isn't good for you? If you did, then He will not give it to you. Sometimes His answer is "Wait." Why would He make us wait? Because everything has its timing and God's timing is perfect. So if He makes you wait, it means that you or the circumstances aren't quite ready to receive what you asked for.

III. Conclusion

*Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*