

*Keys to
Answered
Prayer*



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Keys to Answered Prayer

Prayer is the most vital spiritual link between God and human beings. But there is much confusion on how to pray and how to have your prayers answered. Most religions, whether Christian or otherwise, feature some type of prayer. Many have forms of prayer where chants or a continual repeating of certain words are used. Sometimes “rosary” beads are devotedly utilized, where each bead is said to symbolize or represent something. People pray before idols, crucifixes, icons and pictures, hoping that these will somehow make their prayers more effective. In rare cases, people have been known to physically torture themselves in bizarre ceremonies, convinced that such bloody suffering is especially appealing to God.

In Judaism, pre-written prayers are recited at almost every occasion, and compulsory benedictions are uttered by devout Jews throughout the day. Prayer shawls are often worn in an attempt to appear more pious and to persuade God to hear their prayers.

Oriental religions, such as in Tibet, have for centuries utilized prayer wheels. A prayer would first be written on a wheel; then, every time the wheel was spun, the prayer was supposedly sent up to heaven. (Similarly, we have computer programs today that can repeat user-specified prayers all day long.) Catholics and Buddhists use candles, wherein prayers are believed to drift up to heaven along with the smoke of the burning candle.

But such *ritualized* pagan prayers go no further than the spinning of the prayer wheel, the smoke of the candle, or the electronic repetition of a computer. God is not interested in chants, endlessly repeated phrases, or the superstitious fingering of beads. Such methods are *mechanical* and have nothing to do with true biblical prayer. **In fact, ritual prayers are evidence that we are just too busy to really pray from our hearts.**

The *truth* is that God does not want us to pray in any of these ways. The keys for truly sincere prayer that God will hear

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and answer are contained in the Bible, not in the precepts, superstitions, traditions or inventions of men.

How *Not* to Pray

Jesus Christ, in whose name all Christians are to pray, gave precise instructions on how *not* to pray. After clearly explaining that Christians are not to do their “alms” or religious works before others, to be seen of them, He continued, saying, “And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, in order that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward.

“But you, when you pray, enter into a private room; and after shutting the door, **pray to your Father Who is in secret**; and your Father Who sees in secret shall reward you openly.

“And when you pray, **do not use vain repetitions**, as the heathen do; for they think that by multiplying their words they shall be heard. Now then, **do not be like them**; for your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matt. 6:5-8).

A vivid example of Christ’s instructions is found in the encounter of Elijah the prophet with the prophets of Baal. In this case, the people of Israel were following Baal, the supposed sun god, but clung to the idea that they could worship the true God by using pagan methods. Notice Elijah’s response: “And Elijah came to all the people and said, ‘How long will you vacillate between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him. But if Baal is God, then follow him.’ And the people did not answer him a word.

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“And Elijah said to the people, ‘I, I alone, remain a prophet of the LORD. But Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Now let them give us two bulls, and let them choose one bull for themselves, and cut it in pieces and lay it on wood. But place no fire under it. And I will dress the other bull and lay it on wood, and place no fire under it. And you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD. And it shall be, the God that answers by fire, He is God.’ And all the people answered and said, ‘The word is good.’”

“And Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, ‘Choose one bull for yourselves, and prepare first, for you are many. And call on the name of your god, but place no fire under it.’ So they took the bull which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, ‘O Baal, hear us.’ But there was no voice, nor any who answered. Then they leaped upon the altar which was made.

“Now it came to pass at noon, Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud with a great voice, for he is a god. Either he is meditating, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey. Perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened!’ And they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves with knives and lances until the blood gushed out upon them.

“So it came to pass when midday was past, and when they prophesied until the offering of Elijah’s oblation, there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor anyone who paid attention” (I Kings 18:21-29).

Next, Elijah called all the people near, had the altar built, set the wood and dressed bullock in order. Then he had four barrels of water poured over the sacrifice, three times, until it was drenched and the trench around the altar was full of water.

When Elijah prayed, it was not long, loud or bloody from self-flagellation; rather, it was short and believing. He said, “‘LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD

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God, and that You have turned their heart back again.’

“Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the burnt sacrifice and the wood, and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw, they fell on their faces. And they said, ‘The LORD, He is the God! The LORD, He is the God!’ ” (I Kings 18:36-39).

The same thing applies to us today. Do we really love, believe and have faith in the true God, or do we have a “religion” that is comfortable, allowing us to do anything we please. This account shows that God will hear and answer our prayers, and that *we need not pray like the heathen*.

Why Prayers Are Not Answered

In Isaiah 59 we find God’s reasons why some prayers are not answered. “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is His ear heavy that it cannot hear. But **your iniquities have come between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you**, that He will not hear, for your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perverseness. None calls for justice, nor does anyone plead for truth; they trust in vanity and speak lies. They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity” (Isa. 59:1-4).

People claim to believe in God and peace, but the results of man’s ways are death and mass destruction. Government leaders hold prayer breakfasts, religious masses and use the name of God as if He supports their efforts—while lying, corruption and stealing are the order of the day. Prayer is a controversial issue in public schools, while in too many schools sports, drugs, pleasures and immorality seem to be the major curriculum.

Many religious leaders legislate dogma and tradition as more important than God’s Holy Word, thereby promoting humanly-devised practices learned by rote: “And the LORD said, ‘Because this people **draw near Me with their mouth, and with**

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their lips honor Me, but their worship of Me is made up of the traditions of men learned by rote, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandments of men; therefore, behold, I will proceed to do again a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder, for the wisdom of their wise ones shall perish, and the wisdom of their intelligent ones shall vanish’ ” (Isa. 29:13-14).

All of these practices constitute sin. Sins and iniquities separate us from God and result in unanswered prayers. Most people do not know what sin is. Sin is the *breaking* of God’s laws and commandments (I John 3:4)! The world’s religions insist that God accepts their vain worship and vain prayers. But God detests such practices because *by using His name* they are making Him serve with their sins, as God warned Israel; “Yet you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; much less have you troubled yourself about Me, O Israel.... [But] **you have made Me serve with your sins; you have wearied Me with your iniquities.** I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and will not remember your sins. Put Me in remembrance; let us plead together; declare yourself, that you may be justified” (Isa. 43:22, 24-26).

We Must Worship God in Spirit and Truth

God is Spirit and there is no need to worship Him with the aid of physical things. God is interested in the *attitude* and *intent of the heart* of a person—not idols, beads or hypnotic chants.

Here is what Jesus said about worshiping God. “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father **in spirit and in truth**; for the Father is indeed seeking those who worship Him in this manner. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship **in spirit and in truth**” (John 4:23-24).

Jesus said that God’s Word was *the truth* (John 17:17). So if we are to worship God in *spirit* and *truth*, we must worship Him and pray to Him according to the instructions in His Holy

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Word. This is actually an extension of loving God with all of one's heart, mind and being.

Eight Keys to Answered Prayer

Below are eight biblical keys to answered prayer. It is important that you look up and *study* each of the passages listed, proving the *truth* from the Word of God.

1) PRAY ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL

Matt. 6:10	James 4:1-4	John 5:30
Dan. 3:16-18	I John 5:16-17	Luke 22:42

2) BELIEVE GOD AND WHAT HE SAYS IN HIS WORD

Heb. 3:12	Rom. 4:20-21	Mark 11:20-26
Matt. 8:5-13	James 1:5-7	Mark 9:14-29
James 2:5-26	Acts 17:11	

3) BE REPENTANT AND SEEK GOD FROM YOUR HEART

Isa. 1:15-20	Joel 2:12-14	II Chron. 15:2
Isa. 55:6-11	Acts 3:19	I John 1:6-10
Luke 18:9-14		

4) BE FERVENT AND ZEALOUS

James 5:16	Heb. 5:11-14	Luke 22:43-44
Hosea 7:14	Rev. 3:14-21	Eph. 6:18

5) HAVE GODLY FEAR AND HUMILITY

Psa. 111:10	Matt. 10:28	Heb. 4:1-16
Matt. 15:21-28	Luke 18:9-14	Isa. 66:1-2
I Pet. 5:5-10	James 4:6-10	

6) BE PERSISTENT AND NEVER GIVE UP

Luke 11:1-13	Luke 18:1-8	Eph. 6:18
Rom. 12:12	I Thess. 5:17	Col. 4:2-3
Col. 3:17	Phil. 4:6	

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7) BE OBEDIENT TO GOD'S LAWS AND COMMANDMENTS

John 14:13-24	Rom. 6:16	John 15:1-17
I John 2:3-6	I John 3:4	I John 3:18-24
I John 5:1-3	Acts 5:32	IPet. 1:14, 22
Prov. 15:8, 29	Prov. 28:9	I Pet. 2:1-2

8) PRAY TO GOD THE FATHER DIRECTLY IN CHRIST'S NAME

John 14:13-14	John 15:7, 16	John 16:23-27
Acts 4:12	Phil. 4:7-9	Rom. 8:9-39

The “Lord’s Prayer”—An Outline Prayer

Many new believers ask, “How do I properly pray to God?” That’s a fair question—even Jesus’ disciples asked Him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). In response, Christ gave what could be called a *model prayer*—the so-called “Lord’s prayer” found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4.

Contrary to popular opinion, the “Lord’s prayer” is *not to be repeatedly recited*; rather, it was given by Jesus as a *teaching outline* of what one should cover when praying to God. Indeed, each phrase of Jesus’ “model prayer” is instructive. (The true “Lord’s prayer” is one He actually prayed—John 17. The entire chapter is the prayer Jesus prayed just before His arrest. Notice that even John 17 follows the outline Jesus gave in His “model prayer.”)

If you will follow this model as a biblical *guideline*, your prayers will be answered. Always remember, “The sacrifice [or prayer] of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, **but the prayer of the upright is His delight**.... The LORD is far from the wicked, but **He hears the prayer of the righteous**” (Prov. 15:8, 29).

- **Our Father Who is in heaven.** We are to pray to God, addressing Him as our loving Father. We are to acknowledge His supremacy over all the universe, and express thankfulness for His calling us into a personal relationship with Him and His Son. It is

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important that we approach God just as a child would approach his or her human father—with respect and admiration, *eager* to share our lives with Him, looking to Him as one Who looks after our every need.

On the night He was arrested, Jesus instructed the disciples to pray *directly to the Father*—not to Jesus Himself, or to the “Virgin Mary,” or to any other supposed “saintly intermediary.” Notice: “And in that day you shall ask Me nothing. **Truly, truly I tell you, whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give you.** Until this day, you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.... In that day, you shall ask in My name; and I do not tell you that I will beseech the Father for you, **for the Father Himself loves you**, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God” (John 16:23-24, 26-27).

Jesus Christ is our high priest in heaven sitting at the right hand of God the Father to intercede for us. Paul writes that we are to approach God in humility, yet with boldness: “For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of both soul and spirit, and of both the joints and the marrow, and is able to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. **And there is not a created thing that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and laid bare before the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account.**

“Having therefore a great High Priest, Who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, we should hold fast the confession of our faith. For we do not have a high priest who cannot empathize with our weaknesses, but one Who was tempted in all things according to the likeness of our own temptations; yet He was without sin. Therefore, **we should come with boldness to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need**” (Heb. 4:12-16).

- **Hallowed be Your name.** We are to honor God for His greatness, asking that His *name* be made “hallowed” or holy in all

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the earth. Ultimately, when the Kingdom of God is fully established over the earth by Jesus, the Father's name will be made holy in the minds and hearts of all mankind. It should be our innermost desire that all come to revere the holy name of God.

- **Your kingdom come.** We are to seek *first* the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33). Accordingly, we are to pray that God will soon establish His kingdom through Jesus' return to this earth. As we "sigh and cry" for the abominations of this world (Ezek. 9:4), we are to extol the greatness of that coming kingdom, talking with God in detail about how wonderful the age to come will be—contrasting it with the sorrows of this present age. This is a key element of our prayer life, as it reinforces our desire and longing for God's kingdom while emphasizing the need for us to prepare personally for that kingdom.

- **Your will be done, as in heaven, so also upon the earth.** Just as God's will is always done in heaven, we must seek for His will to be accomplished here on earth. Ultimately, this will be done through the establishment of His kingdom. Meanwhile, we must seek *His will* for our lives—asking Him to help us to understand what He wants for us and our loved ones. Our focus must not be on what we want, but on what God truly wants to accomplish in our lives as well as in the Church. We pray "Your will be done" knowing that God always has our best interest at heart (I Pet. 5:6-7). Importantly, as we pray for God's will to be accomplished, we must be ready and willing to *surrender to His will* in every area of our lives—repenting of any sin that stands contrary to His will.

- **Give us our bread as needed day by day.** As our loving Father, God wants us to look to Him for our physical and spiritual needs. He promises to care for us in every way (Matt. 6:25-34); but, to keep us from taking Him for granted, we still need to ask (Matt. 7:7-11). It is not wrong or selfish to discuss our *needs* with Him—so be specific. As long as we are asking according to His

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will, we may continue to patiently bring our needs before God (Luke 18:1-8). Above all, do not neglect to ask for daily strength and guidance—our *spiritual bread*. Also, ask that God will look after the needs of others.

• **And forgive us our sins, as we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.** We must acknowledge that we still fall short and sin. Ask for God’s forgiveness, confessing your specific sins. Thank God for Jesus’ supreme sacrifice, acknowledging that it is through His shed blood that we have forgiveness and reconciliation. Ask God to strengthen you in these particular areas so you will not stumble and sin again—renewing your commitment to overcoming. Also, ask God to show you the areas of your life where you may be unknowingly sinning. Following David’s example, use Psalm 51 as a guide in going before God in repentance of your sins.

A key aspect of asking for forgiveness is that we must *forgive others* of any and all offenses against us. God will not forgive us if we hold on to grudges or harbor anger against others. Ask God to help you to be forgiving.

• **And lead us not into [trial and testing], but rescue us from the evil one.** God does not tempt us with sin; we are tempted and led astray primarily by our own selfish desires (James 1:13-14). The point here is to pray that we will not *need* to be corrected through sore trials—and to ask God for guidance and strength in spiritually fighting against our enemy, Satan the devil (I Pet. 5:8). Again, be specific about the battles you face as you struggle to overcome your own nature, the world and Satan.

• **For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.** Just as you begin by praising God for His greatness and glory, end your prayer by extolling His greatness, power and glory. With thanksgiving, be mindful again of His coming kingdom, His perfect will, and His awesome love for us. As instructed in John 14:13-14, we are to conclude our prayers by

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asking of the Father *in Jesus' name*. Indeed, it is through Christ that we are able to pray to the Father. Finally, the word “Amen” simply means “so be it.”

Additional Points on Effective Prayer

- A “formal” tone is unnecessary and can hinder your prayers. Always be mindful of honoring God, but use a “conversational” tone—which will actually foster intimacy. God wants us to come to Him as a beloved parent. We should feel safe, confident, appreciated and loved in His presence. We are not to use repetitious “religious sounding” words or a syrupy tone with God—but entreat Him much like a child would his or her human father.
- Conversation with God is a two-way street. God *talks to us* as we read His Word—so never neglect Bible study.
- Prayer should be conducted *in private* (Matt. 6:6) when there will be minimal distractions.
- Don’t “make time for prayer”—that’s not really putting God first. Rather, build your day around your relationship with God, scheduling prayer *first*. Daily prayer will become a fixed habit over time—so stick with it.
- Value the opportunity through prayer to develop a strong, lifelong relationship with your spiritual Father. You must pray daily.
- God will not hear your prayers if you are living in sin. “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is His ear heavy that it cannot hear. But **your iniquities have come between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear**” (Isa. 59:1-2).

What kind of person will get God’s attention? It really has

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nothing to do with where you “go to church” or where you fellowship; it has everything to do with your heart and mindset. God says, “But to this one I will look, to him who is of a poor and contrite spirit and who trembles at My Word” (Isa. 66:2). Also, “the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their supplications” (I Pet. 3:12).

- Never feel that God listens to some prayers while ignoring others. The apostle Peter said, “Of a truth I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons. But in every nation **the one who fears Him and works righteousness** is acceptable to Him” (Acts 10:34-35).

- **How often should you pray?** The apostle Paul wrote that we should pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17). Obviously, this does not mean we are to pray around the clock, but we are to make prayer a continual part of our daily life (this can also mean being in a continual *spirit of prayer* throughout the day). David said he prayed evening, morning and at noon (Psa. 55:17); when Daniel was going through a particularly difficult time, he prayed three times a day (Dan. 6:10). On some occasions Jesus started His day early, before daylight, to have extra time for prayer (Mark 1:35). Clearly, one should pray *more than once* each day.

- When you pray, *believe* that God hears and that He will respond. The Apostle James writes, “But let him ask in faith, not doubting at all because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven by the wind and tossed to and fro. Do not let that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-7). Also, “all the things that you ask when you are praying, believe that you will receive them, and they shall be given to you” (Mark 11:24). “And this is the confidence that we have toward Him: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (I John 5:14).

- Again, God has *conditions* for answering prayer. “And whatever we may ask, we receive from Him **because we keep His**

commandments and practice those things that are pleasing in His sight” (I John 3:22).

- Throughout the Bible, the example is to pray to God while on one’s *knees*. You may pray silently, but you should also pray *aloud* at times.
- Utilize the book of Psalms in your prayers, as many of them are actually prayers. Read them aloud to God, adding your own thoughts or comments.
- Don’t let prayer become a long list of what *you* want from God. Rather, spend considerable time **praying for the needs of others** (even your enemies). Finally also, properly focused prayer can help believers become more outgoing, selfless and concerned about others.

Also, be sure to download (or request) the sermon series ***Keys to Answered Prayer*** (www.cbcg.org/keys_answered_prayer.htm), and the sermon series ***How to Pray*** (www.cbcg.org/how_to_pray.htm).

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