



DISCOVER

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

14

**The Secret of
Answered Prayer**



PASTORS FORDYCE DETAMORE and Gus Youngberg were missionaries in Borneo in the 1930s. On one occasion, they made a trip up the Tatau River to locate a new mission site. They came to an area that looked promising, but upon exploring it a little, they discovered bodies buried in trees. This was an indication of sacred ground, so they continued their journey.

Arriving at a village, they found a typical family longhouse in a small clearing in the woods. A basket of human skulls hanging above the door was a telltale sign that these people were headhunters. Nevertheless, the locals welcomed the two pastors. Upon entering the thatched house, they met the grandmother, who was the “witch doctor” for the village. They visited with the family and shared with them the story of Jesus and His love. Before leaving, the two pastors taught the family a simple prayer.

Several months later, when Detamore and Youngberg returned to this village, the people told them a story of a little girl who had become lost in the jungle. Knowing she would be surrounded by scorpions, highly poisonous snakes that dropped from trees, and wild animals, the villagers did not expect her to survive if she had to spend the night in the jungle. Search parties hunted for the little girl, but to no avail. Then the searchers remembered the prayer they had recently learned from the two missionaries. Deciding to put it to the test, the villagers prayed the simple prayer to the God of heaven.

In the early hours of the morning, the family heard the little girl outside the house, asking to be let inside. With tears of joy, they listened as the child told them that she, too, had prayed the missionaries' prayer while lost in the jungle. When she finished praying, she said she saw a large man dressed in white and wearing a white *tobi*, or hard hat, like the missionaries wore. The man was very kind. He took her by the hand and led her through the jungle right to her own longhouse.

The entire family—witch doctor and all—accepted the love of Jesus, because they had learned that the angels of the Lord surround those who trust and love Him. God does hear us when we pray—even the simplest sincere prayer.

1 | A Conversation With God

Can we be sure God hears us when we pray?

“You will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:12, 13).

What assurance did Jesus provide to us so we can know He will hear and answer our prayers?



Wherever we are,
whatever we're doing,
we can always come
to God in 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” (Luke 11:9).

Prayer is a two-way conversation. Jesus promises:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).

In prayer, you can talk to Jesus as you would talk with a friend while having a meal together. Tell Jesus everything that is on your heart; don't try to make nice, formal speeches. Listen carefully and let God speak to you through the Bible, and follow His will for your life as it is revealed in Scripture.

Prayer can become a way of life for the Christian. The Bible says:

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

How can we “pray without ceasing”? Do we have to stay on our knees all the time or constantly repeat phrases of adoration and petition? Of course not. The Bible recommends that we be so closely in touch with Jesus that we feel free to speak to Him anytime, anywhere. We can pray in a busy crowd, in the quiet of our bedroom, or while driving to school or work. Wherever we are or whatever we’re doing, we can always come to God in prayer. To “pray without ceasing” means to always keep our hearts open to communication with God.

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you”
(James 4:8).

The closer you come to Jesus, the more you’re able to experience His presence. When you pray, don’t worry about saying the right words. Just talk honestly and openly. Talk about everything in your life, as you would to your best friend. Jesus left heaven and gave His life to become your personal Friend.

2 | How to Pray

When we engage in formal prayers in public or private, we may wish to follow the outline of the prayer Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount. He taught His disciples the Lord’s Prayer in response to their request, “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” (Matthew 6:9-13).

This doesn't mean that we must always use these exact words when we pray. The Lord's Prayer is a model that includes all the essential elements of prayer:

- ▶ We come to God as our Heavenly Father, asking that He direct our hearts with His will, just as His will prevails in all of heaven.
- ▶ We ask Him to supply our physical needs.
- ▶ We pray for forgiveness and for a forgiving attitude.
- ▶ We remember that God is the One who gives us the ability to resist sin.
- ▶ We praise Him for His love, glory, and power in our lives.

On another occasion, Jesus instructed His disciples to pray to the Father "in My name" (John 16:23)—that is, to pray in harmony with Jesus' principles. That's why Christians usually close their prayers with the words: "In Jesus' name, Amen." Amen is a Hebrew word that means "let it be so."

Sometimes Christians refer to the Lord's Prayer as a model prayer. They often memorize it and repeat it in public. Although the Lord's Prayer gives guidelines on what to pray for and how to formulate a prayer, our communication with God works best as a spontaneous outpouring of the heart.

A look at the various prayers of men and women in the Bible teaches us one basic lesson: pray about everything. God invites us to pray about critical matters: forgiveness for our sins (1 John 1:9), increased faith (Mark 9:24), the necessities of life (Matthew 6:11), and healing from suffering and disease (James 5:15).

God assures us that we can bring all our needs and cares to Him in prayer. Nothing is too small to pray about.

"Humble yourselves . . . casting all your care upon Him [God], for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6, 7).

Stephen and his friend Kyle were discussing Stephen's swollen, inflamed toe, which he had hurt at work when a large rock he was moving rolled on top of his foot and injured his toe. As college students trying to pay their tuition and monthly food bill, Stephen and Kyle tried to avoid trips to the doctor. "I'll wait a few days before I go to the doctor," Stephen told his friend. "Maybe my toe will improve. I prayed and asked God to heal it. He knows my circumstances, so maybe it will be healed."

"You prayed about your toe?" Kyle responded with a look of astonishment on his face. "Don't you think that's too insignificant to bother God about?"

"No," Stephen answered. "I don't think so. I talk to God about everything. He cares about every detail of my life. Nothing is too small or insignificant to take to God. If He knows the number of hairs on my head, I'm sure He cares about my toe!"

Our Savior is interested in every detail of our lives. God delights in our prayers. His heart warms when our hearts reach out to Him in love and faith.

3 | Private Prayer

For most of us, there are some things we hesitate sharing even with our closest friends—things we keep hidden away in a corner of our minds—but we can unburden ourselves completely in private, one-on-one prayer with God. We can tell God anything and everything. It's not that He needs information; the Almighty God knows our secret fears and hidden motives better than we do. We just need to open up our hearts to Him, understanding that He knows us intimately and loves us infinitely. Healing can begin only when Jesus can touch the wounds. We need to admit our problems and recognize our needs. Growth can come only when Jesus can reach our greatest weaknesses.

When we pray, Jesus our High Priest is near to help us in every time of need:

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15, 16).

Do you feel anxious, stressed out, or guilty? Lay it out before the Lord. Prayer brings you within the circle of Christ’s mercy and grace. He can then supply your every need.

Should you have a special place for private prayer?

“When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matthew 6:6).

Although you can pray anytime, anywhere, you need a special time set aside each day for personal prayer. Daniel, a mighty man of God, prayed three times a day—morning, noon, and night (Daniel 6:10). Growing Christians have a set time and place to spend with God in Bible study and prayer. Make your daily appointment with God at the time when you feel most alert and can concentrate best.

4 | Public Prayer

Joining with others in prayer creates a special bond and taps into God’s power in a special way. Jesus says:

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).



Joining others in prayer creates a special bond

Remember that the Lord's Prayer takes less than a minute to repeat. Public prayers should be brief. Don't turn them into speeches that make it seem like you're talking to an audience rather than God. Don't feel you have to speak in unnatural or theatrical tones; simple reverence and humility are much better ways to approach the Lord.

One of the greatest things you can do as a family is to develop a prayer life together. Show your children that they can take their needs to God directly. They'll get excited about God as they see Him responding to their prayers in the practical details of life. Make family worship a happy, relaxed time of sharing.

5 | Seven Secrets of Answered Prayer

When Moses prayed, the Red Sea parted. When Elijah prayed, fire came down from heaven. When Daniel prayed, an angel shut the mouths of ravenous lions. The Bible presents us with many exciting accounts of answered prayer, and it recommends prayer

as the way to tap into the mighty power of God. Consider Christ's great promise:

"If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:14).

Jesus "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20). God promises, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." (Jeremiah 33:3).

Yet some prayers seem to go unanswered. Why? Are there conditions attached to prayer? Here are seven principles that will help you pray more effectively.

1. Keep close to Christ.

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

We should always ask in prayer that God's will be done—not ours. When we make our relationship with God a priority and keep in touch with Him, we'll be listening and looking for answers that otherwise might go undetected.

2. Keep trusting God.

"Whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22).

Faith means that we're really trusting our Heavenly Father to supply our needs. If you're troubled by a lack of faith, remember that our Savior performed a miracle for the man who pled for greater faith: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). Just concentrate on exercising the faith you do have; don't worry about the faith you *don't* have.

3. Surrender calmly to God's will.

"This is the confidence that we have in Him [God], that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14).

Remember that God wants to teach us, as well as give us things, through prayer. Therefore, sometimes He says, "No." Sometimes He says, "Yes." And sometimes He says, "Not now," and turns us in another direction. Prayer is a means of becoming more and more in sync with God's will for your life, so you need to remain sensitive to His responses and learn from them. Keeping track of your specific prayer requests and their results can be a great help.



As you pray, also remember that the Bible reveals God's will to us (Psalm 119:105, 133) and the Holy Spirit helps us zero in on God's will: "The Spirit . . . makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27). Remember that our will would always coincide with God's will if we could see life as He does.

4. Wait patiently on God.

"I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1).

The main point here is to keep your focus on God and His solutions. Don't just send out a quick plea and then stare in horror at the problem, letting it overwhelm you. Don't ask God for support one minute and then try to drown your troubles in frenzied pleasure-seeking the next. Wait patiently on the Lord. In today's on-demand world, we desperately need that discipline.

5. Don't hold on to sin.

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear”
(Psalm 66:18).

Known sin short-circuits the power of God in our lives; it separates us from Him (Isaiah 59:1, 2). This doesn't mean you have to be perfect in order for God to answer your prayers, but it does mean that if you want to have a close relationship with God, you can't knowingly hang on to sin with one hand and reach out for divine help with the other. Sincere confession, repentance, and asking God for forgiveness will solve your sin problem.

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss,
that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3).

If you're not willing to allow God to free you from evil thoughts, words, and deeds, your prayers won't be effective. God isn't going to answer “Yes” to selfish or mean-spirited prayers. Therefore, as you pray, keep yourself open to God's plan for your life as outlined in the Bible, and you will find peace, spiritual power, and a life-changing experience.

6. Feel the need of God.

God responds to those who ask for His presence and power in their lives.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

7. Persist in prayer.

Jesus illustrated the need to persist in our petitions by telling the story of a very stubborn widow who kept coming to a judge with her request. At last the judge said in exasperation:

“Because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’ Then the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?’” (Luke 18:5-7).

Don’t give up! Discuss all your needs, hopes, and dreams with God in prayer. Ask for particular blessings. Call for help in times of need. Keep seeking and listening until you learn something from God’s response. Prayer is a process of developing an ongoing relationship with God.

6 | Angels Minister to the Needs of Those Who Pray

When we pray, God sends angels to answer our prayers.

“Are they [the angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14).

The psalmist rejoiced that through the ministry of the angel of the Lord, his prayers were answered:

“I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. . . . The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them” (Psalm 34:4, 7).

After 40 days of temptation, in answer to Jesus’ prayer, “The devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him” (Matthew 4:11). When we pray, God sends angels to answer our prayers.

Scripture suggests that each Christian has an accompanying guardian angel.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 18:10).

The Bible includes numerous promises and stories of angels ministering to those who pray (Exodus 23:20; Hebrews 13:2; Psalm 91:11, 12; Acts 12:5-11), and heavenly angels still walk the earth today in answer to prayer—just as they did in Bible times.

Sometimes they assume human form—bringing comfort, rescue, and protection at precisely the right moment. A police officer arrives just when needed, and then vanishes. Attackers suddenly see people surrounding their intended victim, but the protectors are only visible to the attackers. A driver offers a ride home on a freezing night, and then disappears, leaving one-way tire tracks in the snow that stop at the door. Soldiers appear out of nowhere to release an abducted prisoner.



These are not urban legends, but credible accounts by real individuals who have experienced amazing answers to their prayers when God sent an angel to minister to them.

Such experiences still occur today. Kurt was eating supper with a group of pastors around a blazing fire pit on a jungle island in the China Sea. The pastors were talking about a witch doctor who had recently converted to Christianity. The witch doctor had shared with them that at times he would hide outside a village, waiting to capture an unsuspecting person to offer as a human sacrifice to his gods. However, whenever he came to a Christian

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WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. What are some things we can ask God for in prayer?

(1 John 1:9) _____

(Mark 9:24) _____

(Matthew 6:11) _____

(James 5:15) _____

2. What happened in each of the following instances of answered prayer in the Bible?

(1 Samuel 1:10-20) _____

(1 Kings 17:17-24) _____

(Jonah 1:17-2:10) _____

(Acts 4:31) _____

3. If you think you do not have enough faith when you pray, what should you ask God? (Mark 9:17-24)

4. What example from His own life did Jesus give us regarding the importance of prayer? (Mark 1:35)

5. According to Jesus, whom should we specifically be praying for on a regular basis? (Matthew 5:44)

village, he always found it surrounded by sword-wielding tall men with bright shining faces, so the witch doctor would move on to another village. The villagers didn't know it, but God was answering their prayers to watch over them and guide their lives. God will do the same for you.

Prayer is one of the grandest experiences we can engage in as human beings, so begin building up your personal prayer experiences today.



“The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:5-7).

My Decision

- I will spend time in prayer each day, building and strengthening my relationship with God.
- I want to understand God's message as recorded in the Bible.

My Prayer

Father in heaven, I want to keep in constant communication with You through prayer. Please teach me how to pray more effectively. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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