



Into the Light

All things are possible with God!
November-December 2024

How Should God Answer Our Prayers?

By Bob Van Domelen

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Just the other day I was thinking about how years ago we were in considerable anticipation because the calendar would go from 1999 to 2000, and in the minds of many, great catastrophes were probable. They didn't happen. Business was pretty much like the day before—just a different number to put on the check or at the start of a letter.

For many readers of *Into the Light*, it might still be the same prison cell; they are still attending treatment programs (or hoping to); and they are still praying to God to change them and free them from the kind of thinking that wanders into their minds despite all desire to be rid of those thoughts.

Some *have* experienced the kind of change I am pointing to, yet they have no opportunity to test the new resolve in the real world—the world without bars or razor-wire fences.

Regardless of whether in prison or not, my prayers are no different and perhaps neither are yours. Those prayers might sound this way: "Heavenly Father, when I consider life without You, I despair. Yet I feel so much like Paul when he begged you to remove the thorn in his flesh. You answered that Your grace was sufficient, and Paul accepted that decision. I have begged you to be freed of the thorn within my flesh, a thorn that Satan has used to taunt me and discourage me. Be with me, Lord, in my every desire so that what I desire will always be pleasing to You."

So, what *should* God's response be to my prayer or to your prayer? Should God agree that if He stepped in and eliminated the temptations we face each day that we would be better able to give Him praise and worship? After all, isn't it in God's best interests that we not sin?

Then there's the argument that goes like this: "I have not only sinned, but I have sinned against 'one of these little ones who believes in me' and have no hope but to wear that millstone around my neck and be drowned in the sea (Matthew 18:6). My prayers fall on deaf ears for my sin is too great to be forgiven."

Prayer is more than a mere recitation of words. It's more than a momentary reaching out of something in us that seeks to connect with God. Prayer is a conscious

willingness to allow ourselves to be in communion with our Creator, a surrender on our part of any control in the conversation our heart has with God.

Prayer is also a decision to trust God without demanding the resolution we seek in circumstances that lead us into that kind of communion. When I am honest about the way I pray, there is an acknowledgement that I am hoping that God agrees with the solution I am asking for in my prayers. And beyond that, if God doesn't answer my prayer, it's because I think I have not begged hard enough or have chosen the wrong words.

Up to now, this article is pretty much generic, pretty much a one-size-fits-all series of comments on prayer. But this newsletter has a rather serious focus because the focus is on child molestation and how we as offenders can change so that there will never be another victim. Given that I made reference to Matthew 18:6, let's come back to the original question. How *should* God answer our prayers?

I think the verse from 2 Chronicles presents us with a realistic approach to the question and to the way we should pray. Certainly, the people of God during the time of the rebuilding and dedication of the temple by Solomon were not exactly sinless. And I would not be surprised to learn that there may have been a child molester or two among them, so let's briefly review what the author of the Old Testament wrote.

Who are called by my name

One cannot get down to the business of repenting without recognizing that we are all called by God. He knows us, knew us before we were even born (Jeremiah 1:5), and knew of our sinful nature. That isn't saying He approved of the sins of His children but that He knew of those sins. Regardless of the nature of our offenses, we are still called as His.

Coming into this world, God called me Robert. He called me Bob. He called me His child. Held in my mother's arms, no one then called me a child molester even though God knew I would commit such a heinous crime. Years later while I sat in a prison cell, God called me Robert. He called me Bob. And He still called me His child.

Entering into prayer, I need to remember my weaknesses, to ask forgiveness, to seek God's grace, and to repent or turn from my sinful ways. Entering into prayer, I need to open with "Heavenly Father, this is Bob."

It's the name by which He knows me.

Will humble themselves

There is a mistaken notion that a pride-filled individual is a haughty, arrogant person—one who elevates him- or herself above others. But a person who is hidden, shy, or filled with misgivings about any ability to measure up to standards easily met by others might be just as pride filled as that arrogant person.

Brother Lawrence (*The Practice of the Presence of God*) learned during his lifetime of seeking to love and serve God that there was nothing he could do by himself that would achieve that end. The answer that came to him was that he must lose himself to God to find himself.

As a child, I was taught that I was made in the image and likeness of God. Somewhere along the way, I started to fashion God in *my* image and likeness. I didn't think I was God—just that it seemed to me that God would agree with what I wanted in life. At the very least, God would see the sincerity of my heart and do what He could to answer my prayers.

Little by little, day by day, my life became increasingly *me*-centered. And one day as I stood before a judge for sentencing, I saw the damage my pride had brought to my victims, my family, and to more people than I could imagine. I could no longer see what I did as meeting the needs of my victim, for my actions were meant only to serve my selfish needs. And maybe that day more than any other, I stood in humility over my sinfulness, an honest humility that demanded I let go of my old, arrogant and prideful self.

And pray and seek my face

Sometimes it *is* the formula prayers I learned as a child that bring me great comfort and give me a sense of communicating with God. But it is difficult to be specific in a formula prayer. How does one beseech God, for example, with "Lord, take away any possible source of temptation that could even remotely increase the possibility of my ever molesting another child" while at the same time reciting the Lord's Prayer?

The kind of prayer I seek demands that every action in every day becomes a prayer of connection with God, from the smallest, most insignificant deed I perform to the spiritual life and death decisions needed during times of temptation. This kind of communication comes only by practice—day by day, minute by minute—because without practice, how will I ever learn to recognize God's presence?

God desires that we seek Him. We have been given His Word—the Old and New Testaments—so that we might better learn of His faithfulness as well as His expectations. Had I been Elijah, I'm pretty sure I would have guessed God would have been in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire (1 Kings 19:11ff). But I certainly would not have thought He would make an appearance in a gentle whisper.

Likewise, it should really come as no surprise to me when God answers my prayers in His way and not mine. As I see it, my task is to present my needs, hopes, and even my sins at His feet in complete surrender. When I actively seek Him in *all* things, I will trust Him in *all* things.

And turn from their wicked ways

This is the tough part for many of us because it means

that we must draw a line in the sand over which we will not cross. For some people, it is God's responsibility to change them. Their job is to allow that to happen—and usually with the least amount of personal participation. But in the end, we pray for grace to make right choices more often than not.

There has yet to be a morning when I got out of bed feeling that there would be no more temptations. Every now and then I get a letter from someone who writes, "God has completely taken away all thoughts and desires for children." Praise God! But does that mean that I am still a pervert if I have an inappropriate image of some child? Have I managed to erase the line I drew on the ground only to draw a fresh one? A more liberal one?

Most important, however, have I practiced the presence of God to where I know I am not alone during this temptation? And if I can recognize His presence, can I not call upon whatever grace He offers me to make the right choice?

How should God answer our prayers? I think the only answer that makes sense to me is this: God should answer my prayers by continually drawing me closer to Him in all things. The words will be His, but the response will be mine.

All things are possible with God!

Our Prayer Corner



Prayer is an incredible gift we can give one another, for there is no better thing than to lift our lives, hopes, and dreams to the altar of the Lord.

Let us pray . . .

- First and foremost, for our victims and for all victims, that each day for them is a new day, a day without fear, and a day of healing.
- For those who have forgotten their name in the Lord, that in the quiet that sometimes exists, they will hear God calling them by name.
- For those who are afraid of prayer or have come to feel it doesn't work, that they try again for the connection they might once have had in talking to God, in praying.
- For those who struggle to turn from the ways of their past, that they find their focus on the promises found in God's Word.
- For the church, that they are reminded that churches are for those in need of healing to offer it to those who are in need.
- For family, that they find the strength to encourage and support their loved ones, to stand beside them rather than desert them.
- For chaplains, that they find ways to be Christ's ministers, examples of love and mercy while offering the kind of accountability needed.
- For Bob, that as he gets older and experiences

issues all seniors face, he will rely on God's love in all things, that he will continue to seek ways to serve.

- For this ministry, that Broken Yoke Ministries continues to be blessed with the financial support needed to meet basic expenses like this newsletter as well as being a resource for those in need of that information.
- (As Always) For those who are still abusing, that they will come to understand the devastation they bring on their victims and that they seek help for themselves.

Broken Yoke Ministries is a not for profit 501 (c)(3) corporation and operates solely on the contributions of people such as you. All donations to this ministry are tax deductible and will be recognized. If you cannot support us financially, pray for us. Unused stamps are also very welcomed and a good way for those in confinement to be in partnership with this ministry. The bottom line is that we need YOU to help make these newsletters possible. So pray about becoming a partner with this ministry.

To change from what we were to what we hope to be requires us to recognize the 'what' in us that needs to be changed.

Bits & Pieces

The following are taken from letters I have received. Some are meant to offer hope and encouragement to you while others call out for us to be in prayer.

I have had no option but to 'stay the course' mainly because I have been looked at as an example here. To say, 'Screw it' and go rogue did go through my mind, especially with venom spitters all around, but I counted the costs and have seen [that decision] as a lose-lose. Charles Spurgeon has said that 'a Christian counts sorrow lighter in the scale than sin.' He can bear that his troubles should continue, but he cannot support the burden of his transgressions.

I still am working on getting myself adjusted to the world around me and it can get frustrating. But I always remember and am always convicted that I am not to let the Devil take that precious peace away that Jesus gave me. So, life is good always.

Here I am, an inmate who will be a registrant. I can't repeat the past and let that situation keep me down. I must focus on God and His love as well as the love other Christians have for me. I must remember that I am a creation of God, and God does not make anything that is

bad or useless.

Well, great news! After being discharged six years ago, I can now say that I am a proud homeowner of my own house trailer. Only have to pay lot rent which is high but not as high as an apartment. Share this in your next newsletter to encourage others that when they get released, they can succeed. It takes time and effort, which is not easy, but it can be done.

I have concluded that I have been expecting not to learn anything new in group, and I have been searching for facts to back that explanation up. I need to attend my treatment groups with a new mindset: that I can learn something new and need to search for what new things I can learn.

To say that the Lord has been generous, kind, merciful, and faithful is such an understatement. I can't begin to describe in any way the amazing love He has shown me.

Sometimes I let things get to me, and I begin to think of me as garbage and worthless. I also forget those in and out of prison that have my back. I forget the people God has placed in my life. Then I get a newsletter or an encouraging word from a friend in the pod and get reminded that I am a child of God. I matter to God because He loves me – even when I am depressed and disassociate myself.



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Bits & Pieces is based on letters I get. If you want to share, please consider contributing.



Can I Tell
You
Something?

By
Bob Van Domelen

What a blessing it has been to get letters from individuals who have read this book, felt encouraged by it, and then have passed the book around the pod for others to read. One man wrote asking for a new copy as his old one looked like it 'had gone through a ringer.' I was happy

to do so.

I really don't have a problem making a racket in support of *Can I Tell You Something* because if it takes a little noise to encourage sales, I am happy to do that. Better still, join the team and promote the book as a one-of-a-kind, because that's what it is.

5 Bible Verses When you fear the future

1

"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" (Jeremiah 29:11)

2

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." (Proverbs 19:21)

3

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

4

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you." (Psalm 32:7)

5

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.'" (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Thoughts from the Outside

By Bill

It's very easy to just see the negative, the things you can't do anymore, how people feel about you, and the like, but I think it's more constructive to focus on the positives, what you have gained; little things can mean so much. I think of the first time I was able to make a meal for myself and what a blessing that was.

Things like being able to use the washroom by yourself, showering by yourself, not having to stand for count anymore, or having an intercom going off all the time when you're trying to sleep. Having air conditioning when it's warm, heat when it's cold. Sleeping in a bed that's actually comfortable, being able to wear regular clothes. Driving myself to work, listening to music that I enjoy, things like that, the small blessings that mean so much.

Even though life is not without its problems, I think staying focused on the positives is more helpful than looking at whatever problems there may be. I'm reminded of a quote I read by Phillips Brooks (American clergyman and author) that goes "There are those who want to get away from all their past, who if they could would feign

(pretend) to begin all over again. Their life seems to be one long failure. But you must learn, you must let God teach you, that the only way to get rid of your past is to get a future out of it."

Of course, that is easier said than done, but I believe it is worth striving for as if the only option we leave for ourselves is failure, we will no doubt get there. I think though many people might expect even hope for our failure, I choose to succeed. I can't go back to prison as that would be my undoing. Thirteen and a half years was enough, and even though I have a lot of time to do on paper, it is better than the alternative.

A Little Humor . . .

Just a short story this time



A man died and went to Heaven. St Peter says to him "Before you meet with God, I should tell you that we've looked over your life, and to be honest you really didn't do anything particularly good or bad. We're not really sure what to do with you. Can you tell us anything you did that can help us decide?"

The newly arrived soul thought for a moment and replied, "Yeah, once I was driving along and came upon a little old lady who was being harassed by a group of thugs. So, I pulled over and went up to the leader of the thugs. He was a big, muscular guy with a ring pierced through his lip. Well, I tore the ring out of his lip and told him he and his gang had better stop bothering this lady or they would have to deal with me!"

"Wow that's impressive, "When did this happen?"
"About three minutes ago," came the reply.



Lord, I don't know what lay before me today, but I commit it all to You. Please give me strength and courage to get through the joys, challenges and happenings of the day. I thank You for my life and for all that I have; I commit this day to You. No matter what happens, I know You have me in the palm of Your hand.