

What Happens When We Pray?

Seven Benefits of Prayer

By Alvin Vandergriend



Something happens when we pray that would not have happened if we hadn't prayed.

That statement summarizes a lot of what the Bible says about prayer. It is also a reminder of how much our prayers affect God's way of ruling in our lives and in the world.

Though I resonate with this maxim, I also realize it is true only if we add further qualifications. For example, it only applies to true believers. Billions of people in the world will not find something happening when they pray because they have no access to the Father's throne.

It's also only true if "pray" means true prayer, addressed to the true God, in true faith, and from a pure heart. Those who expect results from thoughtless, perfunctory, or rote prayer will be disappointed.

And it's only true if "happens" does not mean that we expect all of our difficulties will be quickly resolved by a "fix-it" God who jumps at all our requests. What happens when we pray

will always be for our good, and it will come in God's own time and way. It will come from a heavenly Father who, in His love wants what is best, in His wisdom knows what is best, and in His power does what is best.

Even with those qualifications, it boggles the mind to think of the difference true prayer makes in God's work in our world.

Here's What Happens

Let's take a closer look at seven things that happen when we pray.

1. When we pray, we enjoy God.

No joy on earth can compare with the joy of knowing God and meeting Him in a love relationship. David had a taste of it when he said to the Lord: ". . . you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Ps. 16:11). The Westminster Shorter Catechism rightly asserts that the chief end of man is to "glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

Prayer is a pathway to joy. It's impossible to talk with God or listen to Him and not, in the end, experience joy. In Old Testament times, prayer and joy came together in His "house of prayer." God said of foreigners who bind themselves to Him, ". . . these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer" (Isa. 56:6–7). We can experience the same joy in prayer today. We don't have to go to a "house of prayer" to meet Him. We can meet the Father anytime, anywhere, about anything through Jesus Christ, the Father's Son. That is joy, pure joy! The more we pray, truly pray, the more we will enjoy God.

2. When we pray, we win over sin.

Sin is our worst enemy. C.H. Spurgeon called sin “the world’s worst tyrant.” Sin is a terrible, misery-producing, down-dragging force. It’s an enemy that wants to destroy us and drag us down to hell.

Freedom from the guilt of sin becomes ours when we trust Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. We can also gain freedom from the power of sin—its power to harm and hinder us in the midst of our daily lives. Jesus wanted His weak, sleep-prone disciples to gain victory over sin as they waited with Him in Gethsemane. He said, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). If we are not watching and praying to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, we shouldn’t be surprised if we fall into temptation. I pray a simple win-over-sin prayer at the beginning of each day. It helps me gain important victories.

3. When we pray, God gives us “good gifts.”

Jesus emphasized His Father’s willingness to give good gifts to His children by comparing Him to earthly parents who know how to give good gifts to their children. He added, “. . . how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matt. 7:11).

The “good gifts” Jesus spoke of are spiritual blessings like grace, wisdom, joy, peace, power, and holiness. God wants to give His children these gifts. He doesn’t promise to give us everything we ask for. But when we ask for “anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14–15). “He hears us” means He agrees to grant what we have asked for.

When our youngest son was old enough to read, he came into my study and said, “Dad, can I have a Bible?”

I asked, "Why do you want a Bible, Son?"

He answered, "Because if I have my own Bible, I can mark and remember the verses we are learning in Sunday school."

He had his Bible within 24 hours!

Why did I get him a Bible so quickly? Because he asked for something that I wanted him to have. God wants us to have His "good gifts" and eagerly gives them to those who ask. Be a confident asker! Trust God to be a generous giver.

4. When we pray for others, God releases His grace and power into their lives.

After commanding Christians to "pray for each other," James goes on to say: "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). Prayer makes a powerful difference in the lives of those we pray for.

Prayer itself has no power. When you pray for another person, no vibes, force, or grace flow from you to them. All the power in prayer is God's power. He acts in powerful ways in response to our prayers. R.A. Torrey, enthralled by the enormity of this power, states in *The Power of Prayer*, "Prayer is the key that unlocks all the storehouses of God's infinite grace and power. All that God is, and . . . has, is at the disposal of prayer. Prayer can do anything God can do, and as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent."

Prayer can move mountains. It can change hearts and shape families. It can transform neighborhoods and even nations. It's the ultimate source of power because it is the power of Almighty God. This power is available to the most humble Christian. James reminds us that Elijah was "a human being, even as we are." He prayed that it would not rain, and it didn't rain because God heard his prayer (James 5:17–18). Your prayers can make a difference in people's lives!

5. When we pray, God enables us to do great works.

When Jesus told His disciples He was leaving them, they were shaken. He allayed their fears by promising them a supernatural power to continue His work. He said, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:12–13).

In other words, they would do their ongoing work of building the Church in partnership with Jesus. As they worked on earth, He would work from His heavenly throne. Prayer would be the connecting link.

Jesus didn't limit this promise to the disciples who would do works like He had done. He promises the same thing to "whoever believes in me." That includes you and me, doesn't it? What a powerful combination—the Almighty Son of God working from His throne on high in tandem with millions of Spirit-filled, Christ-indwelt believers here on earth, building His Kingdom. We ask, He acts, and the work gets done—great works to the glory of God the Father.

6. When we pray, society becomes more livable.

God promised in the Old Testament to deliver "peace and prosperity" in response to prayer. As the Jewish exiles headed toward captivity in Babylon, God said, "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer. 29:7). Sometimes it feels as if there is nothing we can do to change our world. But God reminds us that we can make a difference in our cities and nation if we

devote ourselves to prayer.

If we honor God and others with our prayers, we should also be able to “live peaceful and quiet lives.” Paul urged believers to make “petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving . . . for all people—for kings and all those in authority that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

That’s God’s ideal—an ideal He wants us to attain through prayer. God shapes society through the prayers of His people. By God’s design, our intercessory prayers release grace, foster peace, restrain evil, protect innocent people, avert disasters, enforce justice, and increase harvests. Helmut Thielicki writes, “The globe itself lives and is upheld by Atlas arms through the prayers of those whose love has not grown cold. The world lives by these uplifted hands, and by nothing else” (Our Heavenly Father, p. 109).

7. When we pray, the devil trembles.

Jesus taught us to pray “deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:13). Prayer is the primary way we receive the Father’s help in overcoming the devil. Jesus also tied devil-defeating activity to prayer when His frustrated disciples couldn’t cast out a demon. He said, “This kind can come out only by prayer” (Mark 9:29). And knowing that the devil would come against His disciples after His departure, Jesus twice prayed that they would be protected from the evil one (John 17:11, 15).

Luke summarized Jesus’ life and ministry by saying, “. . . he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil” (Acts 10:38). John stressed that the Son of God appeared “to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8). Paul challenged believers to be alert to the devil’s schemes and to “always to keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” (Eph. 6:18).

Prayer is our supreme weapon against evil. By prayer, we can thwart Satan's attacks, foil his schemes, and lessen his effectiveness. By prayer we assault the devil's strongholds, build the Kingdom of God, and send workers into the harvest field. Prayer—real prayer—is Satan's undoing.

One of my favorite quotes on spiritual warfare comes from The Kneeling Christian: "There is nothing the devil dreads so much as prayer. His great concern is to keep us from praying. Someone has wisely said, 'Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray'" (p. 17).

But I have to ask, "Does the devil really tremble when I pray?" The answer is, "Yes, not because of me, but because my prayers move the hand of God." It's what God does in response to our prayers that makes the devil tremble.

The Greater Work

What an amazing and gracious gift, this gift of prayer. With this one gift God makes it possible for us to find joy, win over sin, gain spiritual riches, unlock storehouses of grace for others, do great works, transform society, and defeat the devil. Because of prayer, God places the gifts and powers of heaven at our disposal.

What an awesome privilege for followers of Christ. What a huge responsibility!

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