**How God Answers Prayer**

**Introduction:**

Do all the events that take place in our lives do so by pure chance? Is everything that happens during our stay on earth predetermined or foreordained by God? Did God just wind up this world like a clock and then cease to be active in its affairs? Or do we have a loving, all-powerful God who is still active in the lives of His children and responsive to their pleas? The Bible says “No” to the first three questions and “Yes” to the last.

The word commonly used to describe the means by which God responds to our prayers is “Providence.” Providence comes from the Latin word which means foresight, to foresee. Divine Providence would then refer to the foresight of God by which He determines the needs of His creation and provides for them in order to accomplish the purpose for which they were created. While in times past, God used miraculous acts to accomplish His will, He does not do so anymore. The age of miracles ceased at the close of the apostolic period. But He is still very active and involved in the lives of men by working through natural laws within the confines of natural law. {Normal processes] Miraculous – Providential seen in the life of Elijah. (I Kings 18:36-38, 41-45) “And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and 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 God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again.’ Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. 41-45 Then Elijah said to Ahab, ‘Go up, eat and drink; for there is the sound of abundance of rain.’ So Ahab went up to eat and drink, And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, ‘Go up now, look toward the sea.’ So he went up and looked, and said, ‘There is nothing.’ And seven times he said, ‘Go again.’ Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, ‘There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!’ So he said, ‘Go up, say to Ahab, Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.’ Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel.” NKJV

**Body:**

1. **He answers according to His infinite wisdom**. (I Samuel 16:7) “. . . For the Lord does not see as man sees. . .” NKJV We don’t have perfect knowledge and thus sometimes ask for things not for our ultimate good. Our request might harm us or the Lord’s cause if granted.
2. **He may answer our prayers in a way we never imagined**. We may ask to be more steadfast in our faith and God answers that request by allowing us to suffer through very difficult times. (James 1:2-3) “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” NKJV
3. **He may answer with a “No” or substitute something else**. (II Corinthians 12:7-10) “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” NKJV God answered “No” because it made Paul stronger.
4. **He may answer using a different time table than we do**. (II Peter 3:8) “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” NKJV Many of us are very impatient and want an immediate response. God knows best!

**NOTE**: All of the above assumes that we are actually praying. God cannot answer our prayers if we are not praying! Why is a constant, regular prayer life so vital to the child of God? What are we missing without it?

Now focus our attention on the book of James. (James 5:16) “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” NKJV Prayer changes things! We cannot be indifferent about prayer. God is telling us that when we pray, the outcome can be different than it would have been had we not prayed. The statement means nothing if it does not mean that.

The same book tells us that if we don’t believe this, we will not receive the benefits of prayer.

(James 1:-6-8) “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” NKJV Man, with conflicting feelings, may go back and forth.

Consider this thought: If God automatically gives us all the blessings we need without us asking for them, what is the use of prayer? It would lose its effectiveness. If the righteous were automatically blessed and the unrighteous cursed, what does Matthew 5:45 mean? “. . . and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” NKJV Example of automobile trip: If left to chance [natural set of random possibilities], the child of God is no safer than anyone else. We can’t be sure if an event is God’s providence. Without prayer to God, the Lord’s will for specific blessing may not even be put into effect in the lives of His children. Listen to these words. (James 4:2) “. . . Yet you do not have because you do not ask.” NKJV This passage teaches that God did not want them to miss out on these blessings; It is His will that they have them. Here are a few remarks from Guy N. Woods: “From this section we learn that there are not only unanswered prayers, there are also unasked prayers! There are some things it is entirely proper for us to have; God wants us to have them; and He freely bestows them upon those who ask. Some seek to secure to themselves the things they want and perhaps need by methods which avoid God; and thus often fail to have such – not because they are forbidden to them, but because they simply do not go to the right source for them.”

God’s specific will for them, according to His providence, could not even be put to work in their lives without prayer.

Quote from Dub McClish: “When we contemplate the fact that by our prayers, God may actually be moved in a given direction or to set in motion a series of events, it is an astounding thought.”

Read I John 5:14-15. “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” NKJV When we pray to Him as we should, His will goes to work. We must ask in harmony with what the Bible teaches about prayer. Once having gone to the Father in prayer, the peace of God will keep us from worrying or being anxious.

(Philippians 4:6-7) “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.” NKJV

Knowing and understanding these truths should give us a greater zeal in praying for the sick, family, spreading the Word, the church, government. Our Father will indeed give to those who ask. (Matthew 7:7-11) “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your Father, who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” NKJV

**Invitation:**

Do you want to have the privilege of prayer? You must be in God’s family first. Maybe you are in the family, but need prayers of the congregation.

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