

# Where is God when we need Him?

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## Does He really hear and answer our prayers? Why does He seem silent to many who pray?

People come to us from time to time for encouragement and for prayer. Often they are hurt or angry or discouraged because they pray and God doesn't answer; He seems to have turned His back on them, appearing not to hear their prayers at all.

We all know that sometimes God delays answers to prayer because He wants to test our faith. Sometimes He is working out His perfect timing before answering a prayer. Sometimes we realize later that He had something better in mind than what we asked. Sometimes we see that we had been "asking amiss" [James 4:3], with a wrong motive or desire. Sometimes, for our good, God just says "No."

But many express frustration because *none* of their prayers are answered. Nothing in their lives seems to be going right; God's promises have not proved true for them. They do all the "right things"--faithfully attending church, praying, sometimes even fasting. They worship and praise the Lord, even in the midst of their disappointment. They know that the Lord has promised He will never forsake us, yet they feel forsaken, and based on the outward evidence, some would agree with them. We hear the cry of confusion in their hearts.

### What's wrong?

It is clear from the Scriptures that God really wants to answer our prayers. And while it is true that He may in many cases answer "no" or "wait," *we should be seeing answers to some--if not all--of our prayers*: if not daily, then regularly and often, as the reasonable pattern of our prayer lives. If this is not happening, then something must be wrong--not just in our praying but in the overall conduct of our lives. His promises of answered prayer are to those who are following Him in obedience, are they not?

If people experiencing a life full of unanswered prayers are truly saved, if they have been born of the Spirit [John 3:5,8], there is something desperately wrong in their walk with the Lord. In Bible passages too numerous to list, God promises to answer prayers.

The first thing, then, must be to look at one's heart and make sure he truly is a child of the Lord. If there has been a time in his life when, indeed, "all things were made new" [2 Corinthians 5:17], when he knew he was a son of God because he was led of the Spirit [Romans 8:14], he can know he is a child of God, for no one can snatch him out of the Lord's hand [John 10:28]. If there is uncertainty, then the issue of salvation needs to be settled with the Lord under the guidance of a pastor or mature Christian.

But if one is truly a Christian, and somehow is living with less than God's promised provision for His children, then prayerfully considering the following verses may be helpful. If we ask Him, the Lord will show us if these truths apply to us and our walk with Him, and if they do, in what way and what we must do about it:

"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities [willful disobedience] have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." [Isa. 59:1-2]

"Come and listen, all you who fear God, let me tell you what he has done for me. I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished [clung to] sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!" [Psalm 66:16-20]

"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men." [Isaiah 29:13]

### **What is our part?**

All our sins--past, present and future--are forgiven through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross, but we must still come before Him with clean hands and a pure heart. Jesus told Peter he didn't need a bath, but he needed to wash his feet [John 13:10]. We do that through the confession of our individual sins, knowing He will forgive [1 John 1:8-9].

It may be painful to allow the Lord to show us if sin is the reason for a loss of fellowship with Him, but sin is actually a very simple problem to deal with--if we are willing to confess it, receive God's forgiveness and cleansing, and to embrace His strength to get beyond it, to turn away from it through the power of His Spirit in us.

What the Lord wants is a broken and contrite heart [Psalm 51:17], a heart utterly crushed over our sins [Psalm 38:8-10,17-18], and a desire to repent [Matthew 4:17], to turn away from those sins in His strength, acknowledging we have no strength of our own. If we come with a truly humble heart, asking to be shown and willing to be obedient to whatever God says, He will show us the way back to Him. He may not answer every prayer as we desire, but we will not be forsaken or abandoned. We will know His love in the midst of whatever trial we are facing. His grace, His peace that passes all understanding, will be sufficient. We will be more certain of His faithfulness--and His response to our prayers--than of anything else in life.