

Hotline to God

Ekkehardt Mueller

In our days cell phones have become so common that many think they would not be able to do without them. They feel deprived, vulnerable, and lonely without this device that allows them to connect to others. Prayer is also such a hotline, a hotline to God. Through prayer God can be reached always and wherever we are.

I. What Prayer Is

Prayer has been defined differently, but many of these definitions are complementary. Prayer is talking with God, a pouring out of one's heart to God. It has been called the breathing of the soul.

Elements of prayer are adoration and praise, thanksgiving, petitions, intercession, meditation, and silence (see 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Rev. 5:13-14; James 1:5; Zech. 2:13).

II. Invitation to Prayer

- Jesus is an example in praying - Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28, 29; 11:1; 22:41, 44
- Jesus' prayers - Matt. 26:39, 42, 44; Luke 23:34, 46; John 11:41-42; 12:28; 17:1-26
- Jesus provides a model prayer - Matt. 6:9-13 (the Lord's Prayer)
- Jesus calls on us to pray - Matt. 5:44; 7:7-11; 9:38; 24:20; 26:41; Luke 18:1; 21:36

III. God's Responses

1. *God Ignores the Prayer*

At times humans feel that God ignores their prayer, while in reality this is not true. God has different ways of answering prayer (1 Sam. 28:6), acting according to his schedule and for the good of his children. Only a few cases are reported in which God did not react to prayer. This happened when persons made decisions against God, but then realized in their distress that they needed God--1 Sam. 28:6; Ps. 18:41.

2. *God Does Not Grant the Request*

Deut. 3:26 - God refused to let Moses enter the promised land. The reason was that Moses had acted on his own authority and against God's will (Num. 20:1-13). Moses' request was not granted as he expected. Yet, it was granted in a better way--Moses was taken to heaven (Jude 1:9; Matt. 17:1-3).

3. *God Grants the Request*

Many cases in Scripture show that God actually listened to prayers and answered them accordingly.

- (1) Jesus promises to answer prayers - Matt. 18:19; 21:22; John 14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23
- (2) Prayers for the sick are being answered in God's ways - James 5:13-16
- (3) Elijah's prayers were answered - James 5:17-18
- (4) Daniel's prayers were answered - Dan. 2:16-23; 9; 10:12-14

IV. Recommendations for Effective Prayer

God is free to answer prayers as He wills. Yet following the guidelines listed below may reveal our sincerity and may also have an impact on our prayers:

- (1) Calling upon the Lord - Luke 11:9-13; Ps. 50:15
- (2) Separation from sin - Ps. 66:18
- (3) Faith - Matt. 21:22
- (4) Praying in the name of Jesus (agreeing with Him) - John 14:13-14
- (5) Abiding in Jesus - John 15:7
This includes
obedience—v. 10
- (6) Praying with others - Matt. 18:19

V. Prayer and Assurance

In certain areas of our lives we do not directly know God's will for us. We may bring our petitions to Him anyway, but we add to our prayer "Your will be done" (Matt. 26:42). Such prayers include requests for health, financial means, jobs, and others.

However, in other areas of our lives God's will is crystal clear. God's will is defined in Scripture. A unique promise is found in 1 John 5:14-15. It indicates that prayers in accordance with God's will are already answered while we are still praying. When asking ourselves what is in agreement with the will of God, we detect two major areas: (1) All of God's commandments reflect His will. (2) All of His promises reflect His will.

If in prayer we claim one of God's promises or ask Him for strength to keep His commandments, we can have the assurance that God has answered this prayer.

Samples of divine promises

- Freedom from worries - 1 Pet. 5:7
- Liberation - John 8:36
- The gift of the Holy Spirit - Luke 11:13
- Wisdom - James 1:5
- Eternal life - John 3:36
- All that is needed - Matt. 6:33
- Abundant life - John 10:10
- Forgiveness of sins - 1 John 1:9

Samples of divine commands

- Ten Commandments - Ex. 20:2-17
- Love for enemies - Matt. 5:44
- Joy - Phil. 4:4
- Gratitude - Eph. 5:20
- Occupation with the word of Christ - Col. 3:16
- Proclamation of the Gospel - Mark 16:15
- Fellowship with believers - Heb. 10, 25

If I have any need that is covered by God's commands or promises--wisdom, love, joy, etc.--I may turn to God:

- (1) I ask Him for what I need.
- (2) I tell God that He has made the wonderful promise in 1 John 5:14-15 to grant requests that are in accordance with His will. I point to the divine promise or command, not to remind God but to strengthen my faith.
- (3) I thank Him right away for answering my prayer. I do not rely on my feelings, but trust in Him (Rom. 1:17; Heb. 11:6). By the way, I may also pray for faith (Mark 11:22; 9:24).

Even today and on a daily basis we may experience God. However, with regard to prayers for others we do not have the same assurance that we have when we pray for ourselves, even if these prayers for others correspond with God's will. The reason is that God does not ignore or override our free will. If, however, we decide to agree with God's will, God will do great things for us. He hears our prayers and does what is best for us.

4/07