

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

paul mallison

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Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

24. Connecting with God

Composed by Paul Mallison

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.
- Answers need not be limited to only what is mentioned in the material.
- The group should feel free to diverge from the study if related issues arise.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. Being Close to God

Being or growing close to God involves consciously seeking God and focusing on him. Additionally, we can actually meet with God and also should live throughout each day in awareness of his presence. In growing close to God, we come to know him – the importance of which is emphatically stated by the Bible.

a) Seek God

“Seeking” typically entails intense effort, which is very much applicable to seeking God and fellowship with him. Seeking God also requires prayer, worship and obedience – along with persistently focusing on God, as per the following section, *Focus on God*.

Seek God – with all your heart . . .

1CHR 22:19A Now *seek the LORD your God wholeheartedly and with your entire being!*

Ps 119:10 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *With all my heart I seek you. Do not allow me to stray from your commands!*

. . . If you seek God wholeheartedly, you will find him

DEUT 4:29 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *But if you seek the LORD your God from there [in exile], you will find him, if, indeed, you seek him with all your heart and soul.*

Seeking God should be accompanied by obedience to him

2CHR 14:4 *He [Asa] ordered Judah to seek the LORD God of their ancestors and to observe his law and commands.*

Seek God and his help through prayer and fasting

DAN 9:3 [DANIEL:] *Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.* ESV

Blessings of seeking God

Ps 34:10 *Even young lions sometimes lack food and are hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*

LAM 3:25 *The LORD is good to those who trust in him, to the one who seeks him.*

Not seeking God has detrimental results

2CHR 12:14 And *he* [Rehoboam] *did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the LORD.* ESV

ZEPH 1:6 [GOD:] *I will remove* those who have turned away from following the LORD and *those who no longer seek the LORD* or ask him for help. GW

Note: Desire God and things of God

Ps 73:25 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] Whom have I in heaven but you? And *there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.* ESV

MATT 5:6 Blessed are those who *hunger and thirst for righteousness,* for they will be satisfied.

1COR 14:1 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Pursue love, and *earnestly desire the spiritual gifts,* especially that you may prophesy. ESV

What does “seeking God” wholeheartedly involve doing?

The Bible promises that if we seek God wholeheartedly, we will find him. In what sense do we “find” him?

What do you do or could you do in order to seek God wholeheartedly?

b) Focus on God

(➔ *In fact, persistently meditate on God's word and commands . . . , in 36. Standing Firm*)

Keep thinking about God

Ps 63:6 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *I remember you while I'm lying in bed; I think about you through the night.* NCV™

Ps 26:3 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *For I am ever aware of your faithfulness, and your loyalty continually motivates me.*

Keep thinking about what God has done

Ps 143:5 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *I recall the old days; I meditate on all you have done; I reflect on your accomplishments.*

Think about Jesus Christ – and his example

HEB 12:2–3 *We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete. He endured the shame of being nailed to a cross, because he knew that later on he would be glad he did. Now he is seated at the right side of God's throne! ³So keep your mind on Jesus, who put up with many insults from sinners. Then you won't get discouraged and give up.* CEV

Look forward to what is to come in the afterlife . . .

2COR 4:17–18 [PAUL:] *And this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble.* ¹⁸*For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts for ever.* GNT

In v. 18a, “things that are unseen” has primarily in view the “tremendous and eternal glory” (v. 17) to come - which “lasts for ever” (v. 18b).

. . . and do not dwell on the past

PHIL 3:13B–14 [PAUL:] *Forgetting the things that are behind* and reaching out for the things that are ahead, ¹⁴with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Further godly things to focus on

ROM 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but *those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.* ESV

PHIL 4:8 [PAUL:] Finally, brothers and sisters, *whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things.*

What do you think about during times of inactivity (e.g. travelling on the train)? What could you do to remind yourself to focus on God in such times - as well as at other times?

List at least one thing each about God and about what he has done, to focus on in the next few days.

How much do think about the afterlife? What situations have you faced (or do you face) where you would have found it (or would find it) encouraging to do so?

c) Meet with God and Live before Him

We are to come before God, in awareness of his presence, to meet with him. Christians typically set aside some time everyday to do this, focussing fully on God. Generally this involves reading the Bible, prayer and even meditation.

Additionally, we are to constantly live before God in the sense of living in awareness of his presence, companionship, help and discernment of our lives. As such we should think, speak and act accordingly.

Prepare yourself to come before God, as shown in the OT practice of consecration

Ex 19:22 *Even the priests who approach the LORD must consecrate themselves. Otherwise, the LORD will break out against them.*” ISV

To “consecrate” oneself means to set oneself apart for God or to dedicate oneself as sacred to him (cf. *Accordingly, consecrate yourself to serve God . . .*, in 28. *Serving God*). It is also spoken of in the OT in regard to cleansing oneself before approaching God or entering his temple. In both cases it signifies ridding oneself of all that is sinful. As such, a parallel can be drawn between the OT practice of consecration and the need for believers to rid themselves of sinful practices in order to approach God.

Draw near to God . . .

HEB 10:19–22 Therefore, brothers and sisters, *since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus,* ²⁰*by the fresh and living way that he inaugurated for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,* ²¹*and since we have a great priest over the house of God,* ²²*let us draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that faith brings,* because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.

. . . Come before God, meeting with him

DEUT 31:11 [MOSES, TO LEADERS OF ISRAEL:] . . . when *all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God* in the place he chooses, you must read this law before them within their hearing.

Just as the Israelites at times together came before God, believers can both individually and corporately come before God, to meet with him. Believers are in fact freer to do this, because of Jesus Christ and what he has accomplished (cf. Heb 10:19–22 ↑).

Continue to live before God, in his presence . . .

ACTS 23:1 And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, *I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.*”

ESV

ISA 23:18B Her [Tyre’s] merchandise will belong to those who *live in the presence of the LORD* so that they will have plenty of food and expensive clothing. GW

. . . “Walk” with God

GEN 6:9 This is the account of Noah. Noah was a godly man; he was blameless among his contemporaries. *He walked with God.*

To “walk” with God involves living before him. It suggests a personal and interactive relationship, inclusive of such things as prayer and trust in God.

As such, act before God – in awareness of his presence and scrutiny

2CHR 31:20 This is what King Hezekiah did in Judah. *He did what was good and right and obedient before the LORD his God.* NCV™

2COR 4:2 [PAUL:] Instead, we have renounced secret and shameful ways. We do not use trickery or pervert God’s word. *By clear statements of the truth we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience before God.* ISV

Paul in effect claims to “tell the truth before God” (NLT), “in the sight of God” (NASB, NKJV, NRSV) – acting in accordance with what upright people would think to be right. Paul suggests that he spoke not only in awareness of God’s presence, but also of his scrutiny.

What does one need to do in order to meet with God?

Do you need to make better provision in your daily routine for meeting with God? If so, what could you do?

What are some practical steps we can take to keep God consistently in view, relating to him or in readiness to do so – i.e. to “practice the presence of God”?

d) Know God

Know God and Jesus Christ

1JN 2:14A [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] I write to you, children, because *you know the Father*. I write to you, parents, because *you know the One who existed from the beginning* [Christ]. NCV™

JER 9:24 [GOD:] If people want to boast, they should boast about this: They should boast that they *understand and know me*. They should boast that they *know and understand that I, the LORD, act out of faithfulness, fairness, and justice in the earth* and that I desire people to do these things,” says the LORD.

We are to understand and know God – which includes appreciating that he acts in “faithfulness, fairness, and justice”.

Knowing God is linked to obeying his commands . . .

1JN 2:3–4 Now by *this we know that we have come to know God: if we keep his commandments*. ⁴*The one who says “I have come to know God” and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in such a person.*

. . . Knowing God is likewise linked with loving and caring for others

1JN 4:7–8 Dear friends, *let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been fathered by God and knows God*. ⁸*The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

JER 22:16 *He* [King Josiah] *upheld the cause of the poor and needy*. So things went well for Judah.’ *The LORD says, ‘That is a good example of what it means to know me.’*

Knowing God is manifested in caring for the poor and needy, amongst other things. Note that like 1 John 4:7–8 above, this verse may be implying that one who knows God reflects his character and deeds.

Knowing God aids godly living . . .

2PET 1:3 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, . . .* ESV

Note that the Greek for “knowledge” indicates a complete or additional knowledge, here implying a very close, personal relationship with God (cf. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

. . . Knowing God and Jesus Christ is likewise vital for spiritual growth

PROV 9:10 Wisdom begins with respect for the LORD, and *understanding begins with knowing the Holy One.* NCV™

2PET 3:18 *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* To him be the honor both now and on that eternal day.

Believers grow spiritually through Christ’s grace and knowledge of him. As noted earlier (cf. 1:3 ↑), the latter probably encompasses personal knowledge of him or knowing him personally.

Further blessings of knowing God

2PET 1:2 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *May grace and peace be yours in full measure through your knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.* GNT

JOHN 17:3 [JESUS, TO GOD:] *Now this is eternal life – that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent.*

Eternal life involves knowing God and Jesus Christ in an ongoing, progressive, intimate relationship. While this verse is not explicitly saying that eternal life is a blessing resulting from knowing God and Jesus Christ, it certainly at least associates knowing them with eternal life.

Note: Not knowing God leads to sin and evil

1THES 4:5 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Don’t use your body for sexual sin like the people who do not know God.* NCV™

3JN 1:11 [JOHN:] My dear friend, do not follow what is bad; follow what is good. The one who does good belongs to God. But *the one who does evil has never known God.* NCV™

How is knowing God similar to knowing another person – and how is it different?

Why do you think that knowing God is linked to obeying his commands (cf. 1Jn 2:3–4)?

To what degree or in what sense do you know God? What things could you do to know God better?

II. Praying to God

(➔ II. *Praying in Hard Times*, in 39. *Hard Times*; *Pray for Each Other (I): General*, in 26. *Being One Body*; and *Pray for Each Other (II): What to Ask*, in 26. *Being One Body*)

Prayer is one of the greatest privileges and one of the greatest responsibilities of being a Christian. It is also one of the main sources of vitality for our lives as Christians, and is critical to our effectiveness in our endeavors for God's kingdom. At the end of our lives, quite possibly many of us will see prayer as the main thing that we should have done more often. As the saying goes: "Life is short; pray hard."

a) The Importance of Prayer

Prayer is portrayed as an offering to God

REV 8:3–4 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A SCENE IN HEAVEN:] Another angel holding a golden censer came and was stationed at the altar. A large amount of incense was given to him *to offer up, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar that is before the throne.*⁴ *The smoke coming from the incense, along with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand.*

Prayer is very powerful . . .

JAMES 5:16B–18 *The prayer of a righteous person has great effectiveness.*¹⁷ *Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and there was no rain on the land for three years and six months!*¹⁸ *Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land sprouted with a harvest.*

. . . For if we ask God for things, he will give or do them

MATT 7:7–8 [JESUS:] *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.*⁸ *For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

MATT 18:19–20 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *Again, I tell you the truth, if two of you on earth agree about whatever you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you.*²⁰ *For where two or three are assembled in my name, I am there among them.*

The tremendous promises of answered prayer in this subsection are obviously not an automatic guarantee that every request will be granted (cf. *Epilogue: God’s Response to Requests*, p. 29). Amongst other things (cf. *Making Requests*, p. 25), such prayer must be consistent with God and Jesus Christ’s purpose and will (cf. 1Jn 5:14–15) – which Jesus may have in view here with his reference to those asking being “assembled in my name” (v. 20). Nevertheless, such wonderful promises should greatly encourage us to pray fervently and persistently – which is in

view with the use of “ask”, “seek” and “knock” in Matthew 7:7–8 above.

We help others by praying for them

2COR 1:10–11 [PAUL, REFERRING TO GOD’S DELIVERANCE:] From such terrible dangers of death he saved us, and will save us; and we have placed our hope in him that *he will save us again, ¹¹as you help us by means of your prayers for us. So it will be that the many prayers for us will be answered, and God will bless us;* and many will raise their voices to him in thanksgiving for us. GNT

Furthermore, we are called on to pray

COL 4:2 *Be devoted to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.*

In what sense is prayer an offering to God?

What evidence is there for the power of prayer? (Include any evidence you have encountered personally.)

Make a comment or give an insight on Jesus' remarkable statements in Matthew 7:7–8 (in *For if we ask God for things, he will give (or do) them*).

b) Praying before God

Pray before God, in his presence

1KI 8:28 [SOLOMON, TO GOD:] Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, ... ESV

NEH 1:4B [NEHEMIAH:] I fasted and *prayed in the presence of the God of Heaven*. ISV

To pray “before” God (cf. 1Ki 8:28 ↑) effectively means to pray in his presence (cf. Neh 1:4b ↑), being mindful of his presence.

Approach God with confidence

HEB 4:15–16 For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathizing with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Therefore *let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help*.

In view of Jesus Christ’s role as our high priest (v. 15) we are to approach God with confidence – both in regard to him receiving us and to him hearing our prayers (v. 16).

Be reverent . . .

EPH 3:14 [PAUL:] *I kneel in prayer to the Father*. CEV

Kneeling in prayer – “fall to my knees and pray” (NLT) – is indicative of reverence for God, and submission to him.

. . . and humble yourself before God

2CHR 33:12–13 In his pain *Manasseh asked the LORD his God for mercy and truly humbled himself before the God of his ancestors*. ¹³*When he prayed to the LORD*, the LORD responded to him and answered favorably his cry for mercy. The LORD brought him back to Jerusalem to his kingdom. Then Manasseh realized that the LORD is the true God.

Pray to God as a caring father

MATT 6:9 Therefore, *this is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.* isv

MATT 7:9–11 [JESUS:] Is there anyone among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*

Having a holy and loving Father in heaven should inspire us to make requests of him, doing so in awareness of him being such a Father. Note that the term “evil” (v. 11) is used here in a relative sense – in comparison to God and his standards.

Pray in the Holy Spirit

JUDE 1:20 But dear friends, use your most holy faith to build yourselves up, *praying in the Holy Spirit.* NCV™

Having the Holy Spirit, believers are to pray “in the Holy Spirit”. As such we are to consciously rely on the Holy Spirit’s help, to empower and guide us in our prayers.

In what way/s should Jesus Christ's role as high priest affect our prayers to God? (Do not limit your answer to what is mentioned in this study.)

How do we humble ourselves before God?

Explain in your own words what is involved in praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20)?

c) Physical Aspects of Prayer

Pray aloud . . .

ACTS 4:24 When they [the believers] heard this, *they all raised their voices to God and said, “Master, you made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them., . . .* ISV

. . . or pray in your heart

1SAM 1:13A *She [Hannah] was praying in her heart so her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.* NCV™

Pray anywhere

ACTS 10:9 About noon the next day, while they were on their way and approaching the city, *Peter went up on the roof to pray.*

ACTS 21:5B *We knelt on the beach and prayed.* CEV

Pray anytime . . .

PS 55:17 [DAVID:] *Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, And He shall hear my voice.* NKJV

. . . In fact, pray constantly

1THES 5:16–18 Always rejoice, ¹⁷*constantly pray,* ¹⁸*in everything give thanks. For this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Spend long periods alone in prayer – like Jesus did

LUKE 6:12 Now it was during this time that *Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he spent all night in prayer to God.*

Keep alert to pray

EPH 6:18B *Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads. For this reason keep alert and never give up; pray always for all God’s people.* GNT

Postures used in prayer

ACTS 20:36 And when he [Paul] had said these things, *he knelt down and prayed with them all.* ESV

2SAM 7:18A Then King David went into the Tent of the Lord's presence, *sat down and prayed ...* GNT

MARK 11:25 *Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you your sins.*

Note: Do not pray for show and do not babble on

MATT 6:5-8 [JESUS:] *When you pray, don't be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners. They do this just to look good. I can assure you that they already have their reward. ⁶When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door. Pray to your Father in private. He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you. ⁷When you pray, don't talk on and on as people do who don't know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. ⁸Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.* CEV

What is meant by “constantly pray” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)? How can we do this?

What could you do to enable yourself to spend long periods in prayer – to both make time to and actually pray for an extended time?

What posture/s do you find the most functional for praying?

d) Making Requests

Note that the teaching on prayer in general in the previous two sections is also very pertinent to making requests to God in prayer.

Ask for things in Jesus Christ's "name"

JOHN 16:23, 26A [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] On that day, you will not ask me for anything. Truly, I tell all of you with certainty, *whatever you ask the Father for in my name, he will give it to you.* ... ²⁶*On that day, you will ask in my name.* 15v

In Jewish thought, a person's name represented or embodied their whole person – including their nature, authority and purpose/s. As such, to ask in Jesus Christ's "name" is to do so in accordance with all that his name signifies. It is prayer that is compatible with Jesus Christ himself and his purposes – and made on his authority.

When praying, people often use the phrase "in Jesus Christ's name" (or "in Jesus' name") to signify that they are asking for something in Jesus Christ's "name". The usage of the phrase does not by itself mean that the prayer is necessarily in accordance with Jesus Christ's "name". Along with being conscious of and acknowledging Jesus Christ's authority and role in our making of requests to God, the content of the prayer is also at issue. Thus asking for things in Jesus Christ's "name" concerns both how we ask and what we ask. Bear in mind that the deeper one's relationship with Jesus Christ becomes, the better-equipped one becomes to make requests of God in Jesus Christ's "name".

Note that in the above verses, "On that day" (vv. 23, 26a) refers to the time following Jesus' ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost – inclusive of the present age.

Ask earnestly . . .

Ps 119:145 *I cried out with all my heart, "Answer me, O LORD! I will observe your statutes."*

LUKE 22:44 *And in his anguish he [Jesus] prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

... Even fast when making requests of God

EZRA 8:21, 23 [EZRA:] *I called for a fast there by the Ahava Canal, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and seek from him a safe journey for us, our children, and all our property. ...*²³ *So we fasted and prayed to our God about this, and he answered us.*

Ask persistently

LUKE 18:1 Jesus told his disciples a parable about their need to *pray all the time and never give up.* ^{1SV}

1TIM 5:5 But the widow who is truly in need, and completely on her own, has set her hope on God and *continues in her pleas and prayers night and day.*

Believe and do not doubt that what you ask will be granted

JAMES 1:6–8 *But when you ask God, you must believe and not doubt. Anyone who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown up and down by the wind.*^{7–8} *Such doubters are thinking two different things at the same time, and they cannot decide about anything they do. They should not think they will receive anything from the Lord.* ^{NCV™}

MATT 21:18–22 Now early in the morning, as he [Jesus] returned to the city, he was hungry.¹⁹ After noticing a fig tree by the road he went to it, but found nothing on it except leaves. He said to it, “Never again will there be fruit from you!” And the fig tree withered at once.²⁰ When the disciples saw it they were amazed, saying, “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?”²¹ Jesus answered them, “I tell you the truth, *if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen.*²² *And whatever you ask in prayer, if you believe, you will receive.*”

Belief is vital in petitioning God, particularly in regard to things that seem impossible, as Jesus figuratively points out (v. 21). But belief is not merely making yourself “believe” what you do not really believe. Instead, it involves an understanding of God’s will and genuinely trusting in God to fulfill his will (cf. Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary).

Give thanks when asking

PHIL 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, *through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God.*

Note: “The Lord’s Prayer” – the prayer Jesus gave as an example

MATT 6:9–13 [JESUS:] So *pray this way: Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored,* ¹⁰*may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* ¹¹*Give us today our daily bread,* ¹²*and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors.* ¹³*And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*

In v. 10, “your will be done” is speaking of people acting in accordance with God’s will and/or the fulfillment of God’s plans for the world. Note that the conclusion of “The Lord’s Prayer” as it is often prayed in church – “for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen” – is contained at the end of this passage in some manuscripts.

What is the significance of asking for things in Jesus' name?

How or why does fasting help in praying?

If you believe, will you receive whatever you ask for in prayer?
Explain your answer.

e) Epilogue: God's Response to Requests

Again, much of the teaching in the previous sections is very pertinent to the theme of this section – because for prayer to be answered, it should be presented appropriately.

God answers those who obey and please him . . .

1JN 3:21–22 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] Dear friends, *if our conscience does not condemn us, we have confidence in the presence of God, ²²and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing to him.*

The clause “if our conscience does not condemn us” (v. 21) refers to having a clear conscience before God, from obeying and pleasing him (v. 22b).

. . . God does not listen to those who do evil rather than good

JOB 35:12–13 *Then they [the wicked] cry out – but he does not answer – because of the arrogance of the wicked. ¹³Surely it is an empty cry – God does not hear it; the Almighty does not take notice of it.*

Ps 66:18 [A PSALMIST:] *If I had harbored sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*

God grants anything we ask that is in accordance with his will . . .

1JN 5:14–15 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] And this is the confidence that we have before him: that *whenever we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us in regard to whatever we ask, then we know that we have the requests that we have asked from him.*

. . . Further verses regarding prayer and God's will

LUKE 22:41–42 He [Jesus] went away from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and *prayed, ⁴²“Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Yet not my will but yours be done.”*

Jesus requested that his impending suffering be avoided – if this was in God's will. The request was not in accordance with God's

will and so was not granted – in line with Jesus' qualification that it only be granted if it was God's will.

ROM 1:9B–10 [PAUL, TO THE ROMAN BELIEVERS:] I mention you ¹⁰always in my prayers, *asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.* ESV

Paul appears to pray that his request be in accordance with God's will or, similarly, be achieved through God's will.

Sometimes God may not appear to answer, or does not answer immediately

PS 22:1–2 [DAVID:] *My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? I groan in prayer, but help seems far away. ²My God, I cry out during the day, but you do not answer, and during the night my prayers do not let up.*

HAB 1:2 [HABAKKUK:] *How long, LORD, must I cry for help? But you do not listen! I call out to you, "Violence!" But you do not intervene!*

Sometimes God and Jesus Christ refuse requests

DEUT 3:23–26 Moreover, at that time I [Moses] pleaded with the LORD, ²⁴*"O, Lord GOD, you have begun to show me your greatness and strength. (What god in heaven or earth can rival your works and mighty deeds?) ²⁵Let me please cross over to see the good land on the other side of the Jordan River – this good hill country and the Lebanon!" ²⁶But the LORD was angry at me because of you and would not listen to me. Instead, he said to me, "Enough of that! Do not speak to me anymore about this matter.*

2COR 12:7B–9 [PAUL:] Therefore, so that I would not become arrogant, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me – so that I would not become arrogant. ⁸*I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me. ⁹But he said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me.

Examples and affirmation of God answering prayer

ACTS 12:5–7, 11 So Peter was kept in prison, but *those in the church were earnestly praying to God for him.* ⁶On that very night before Herod was going to bring him out for trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison. ⁷*Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the prison cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up, saying, “Get up quickly!” And the chains fell off Peter’s wrists. . . .* ¹¹*When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from everything the Jewish people were expecting to happen.”*

ACTS 28:8 His [Publius’] father was in bed, sick with fever and stomach trouble, and Paul went to visit him. *Paul healed the man by praying and placing his hands on him.* CEV

PS 65:5 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *You answer our prayers by performing awesome acts of deliverance, O God, our savior.* All the ends of the earth trust in you, as well as those living across the wide seas.

Have you ever felt God did not answer a request? What do you make of this?

How can we make requests to God that are “according to his will” (1Jn 5:14–15)?

What are some reasons why God does not grant requests? (Do not limit your answer to what is mentioned in this study.)

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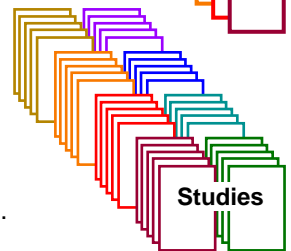
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Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org
Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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