

there be fruit from you!” And the fig tree withered at once. ²⁰When the disciples saw it they were amazed, saying, “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” ²¹Jesus 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.*” MATTHEW 21:18–22

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. ZBC).

Give thanks when asking

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

God’s Response to Requests

God answers those who obey and please him

[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.* 1 JOHN 3:21–22

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 grants anything we ask that is in accordance with his will

[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.* 1 JOHN 5:14–15

24. Connecting with God

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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.

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 wholeheartedly

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

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

If you seek God wholeheartedly, you will find him

[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.* DEUTERONOMY 4:29

Seeking God should be accompanied by obedience to him

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

Seeking God brings great blessings

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

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

Making Requests

Ask for things in Jesus Christ’s “name”

[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.* JOHN 16:23, 26A ISV

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 and persistently

I cried out with all my heart, “Answer me, O LORD!” PSALMS 119:145A

Jesus told his disciples a story about how they should keep on praying and never give up: ... LUKE 18:1 CEV

Do not doubt but believe that what you ask will be granted

Now early in the morning, as he [Jesus] returned to the city, he was hungry. ¹⁹After 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

Praying before God

Pray before God, in his presence

[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, ... 1 KINGS 8:28 ESV

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

Pray to God as a caring father

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

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!* MATTHEW 7:9–11

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, rather than in a general sense.

Pray in the Holy Spirit

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

Be reverent when praying

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

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

Focus on God

Keep thinking about God

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

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

Keep thinking about what God has done

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

Meet with God and Live before Him

Come before God, meeting with him

[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. DEUTERONOMY 31:11

Like the Israelites came before God, believers can both corporately and individually come before God, in awareness of his presence, to meet with him. Individual Christians typically do this daily – reading the Bible, praying and even meditating.

Live before God . . .

Paul said, “Brothers, *I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.*” ACTS 23:1B ESV

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.

. . . “Walk” with God

He [Noah] walked with God. GENESIS 6:9

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.

Know God

Know God and Jesus Christ

[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]. 1 JOHN 2:14A NCV™

[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. JEREMIAH 9:24

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

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*. 1 JOHN 2:3–4

Knowing God is linked with loving and caring for others

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] 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*. 1 JOHN 4:7–8

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.”* JEREMIAH 22:16

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 is vital for understanding

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

II. Praying to God

See also: *II. Praying in Hard Times*, p. 342

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.”

The Power of Prayer

Prayer is very powerful

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*. JAMES 5:16B–18

If we ask God for things, he will give them (or do them)

[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*. MATTHEW 7:7–8

[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*. MATTHEW 18:19–20

The tremendous promises of answered prayer in this subsection are obviously not an automatic guarantee that every request will be granted. Amongst other things, such prayer must be consistent with God and Jesus Christ’s purpose and will – 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.