

Does God Always Answer Prayer? (Part One)
Rev. Dr. John Bartol

“Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of His highest willingness.”

R. Trench

George is offering sympathy to Clarence over the loss of his wife. George is very skeptical over matters of faith whereas Clarence has a deep faith in God and the power of prayer.

George asked, “Where was your God when your wife died ; why didn't He answer your prayers and heal her cancer?” Clarence replied, “We didn't ask God to heal her cancer. ”You didn't? “No, she struggled with it some years ago, experienced healing and her life was spared for six wonderful years. Then when it broke out again, we felt somehow that this would be final. We prayed only that she should have clarity of mind and no severe pain. And that prayer was answered.”

Do you agree with Clarence or do you sometimes wonder how, when, or if, God answers prayer? Most of us have wrestled with these questions at one time or another. Perhaps there have been times of bitter disappointment or suffering when you have prayed and prayed and nothing seemed to happen.. You even sensed that some people get through to God and others don't.

Does God always answer prayer? If so, how? First of all, let us try to agree on what we mean by genuine prayer. Perhaps when everything else fails, you use prayer as a last resort. “Lord, help Jim land a good job; help Mary find a boyfriend; help our team win; stop the terrorists; let us win the lottery; bless me and my family and make us all healthy, wealthy and wise. And if so, I promise never to swear again.”

If that is the way you pray, it is no wonder your prayers do not seem to be answered. Prayer is a two-way conversation, talking to God, listening to God and then acting obediently. Prayer is not using God as a heavenly bellhop, ready to grant our every whim or wish. The chief purpose of prayer is to find and do the will of God. Why? Because God loves us, wants the best for us, and knows what's best far better than we do. Also, there are many Scriptures confirming God's promise that our prayers do not go ignored or unanswered. “This is our assurance from God, that if we ask anything according to his will, He hears us” (1st John 5:14).

But you ask, how are they answered? May I suggest four ways in which our prayers are always answered but not necessarily in the way we may want or expect. Sometimes God says YES; sometimes the answer is NO; sometimes the answer is WAIT. But there is also a fourth answer that is perhaps most frequent of all - YES IF! Yes--if you are willing to be part of the answer.

“Prayer changes things? No! Prayer changes people and people change things.”

(To be continued).