

Can you ask God for anything? (15:8)

THE TEXT (NASB)

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD; but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

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INTRODUCTION



God loves to hear some people pray, yet He listens to some, while others He ignores. Why?

God only gives and never gets, since He Himself needs nothing. So if God delights in hearing our prayers and giving us things, how do we ensure that He listens to us?

How can we ask God for things, in a way that we're most likely to get them?



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COMMENTARY

There's an enormous contrast between the first and second clauses of this proverb. In the first section, something is being sacrificed to God, while in the second, something is being asked of Him. The message of the first part is doubly important, since it's repeated in Proverbs 21:27. Look there to learn more about money and sacrifice. Here we can focus on the second part: "the prayer of the upright is His delight."

Prayer can be our expression of adoration, thanksgiving, confession, supplication, or intercession for others. In what sense is the word prayer used in this text?

Translation Clarification

This Hebrew word for "prayer" here, תפלה (tefilah, pronounced "te-fil-lah"), is used seventy times in the Bible, almost always referring to particular requests spoken to God. It appears first in 2 Samuel 7:27 when King David (the father of Solomon) acknowledges that he found the courage to ask something of God (a prayer of supplication) only because of God's own promises to him. In other words, David was able to ask favours of God, only because he remembered God's promises of blessings for him. Consider the following alternate translations:

- The LORD is disgusted by gifts from the wicked, but it makes him happy when his people pray. (Contemporary English Version)
- The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is his delight. (Christian Standard Bible)
- The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but he delights in the prayer of the upright. (New Living Bible)

The last few words in the text show (consistently) how God loves to hear prayers from His people.

The Almighty Likes to Give



Prayer acknowledges our dependence on God. It celebrates that He is



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the Source of everything, even our very being, right here and now. We can ask Him for anything, since He already supplies everything. But who on Earth could stand all this continual pleading? Mere mortals, always competing for finite resources, are annoyed and angered by constant begging. God is different.

This proverb says that God enjoys the prayer of the upright, delights in their prayer. So what distinguishes their prayer, so that God hears and answers them? Who are the upright? The Hebrew root word for “upright” here (y-sh-r) literally means “to go straight,” directly on the way. In a moral context, it means to be free from deception and obedient to the law.

Why does God enjoy giving good things to the upright? Some suggestions:

- He is confident that they'll use their gifts well;
- Being upright Himself, He enjoys conversing with the upright;
- They need to become always more dependent on Him, to grow His kingdom in his will;
- Delighting in life, He delights in others' delight.

What Makes Our Prayers Ineffective?

Praying to the wrong God.



The Creator God is the only true God. As the Creator of everything, He has supreme knowledge and authority over everything (Isaiah 45:5-7).

Prayers directed to other gods—who, if they exist at all, are not gods, but lesser creatures of limited influence—such prayers are effective only with the acceptance of the true God. However ardent and prolonged, prayer directed at false gods is at best a pitiful waste of time and effort, and at worst an insult to the Creator. Read an excellent account of zealous, but misguided, prayers in 1 Kings 18:20-29.

Praying with a false heart, “the sacrifice of the wicked,” can include:

- Deliberate rejection of God's word (Zechariah 7:11-13).
- Refusal to heed God's counsel (Proverbs 1:24-28).
- Ignoring God's words and worshiping others as God (Jeremiah 11:10-11).



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- Religious hypocrisy (Isaiah 1:12-15).
- Justifying personal evils (Psalm 66:18).
- Mistreating other people (Micah 3:1-4).
- Insincere submission to God (Proverbs 15:29).

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND



Jesus told us to pray for our particular needs, starting with our basic nourishment. He said we should ask God for our food on a daily basis, saying, “Give us this day our daily bread,” Matthew 6:11. But He offers much more.

Jesus said that, if two conditions are met, we can ask for whatever we want and He will supply: “If [first] you abide in Me and [second] My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you,” John 15:7. The first condition, “abiding in Jesus,” comes by seeking a close, personal, constant, conversation with Him. The second condition, “His words abiding in us,” comes from deep meditation on Jesus’ open teachings. When we abide in Jesus, and His words abide in us, we experience a deep relationship with Him, and our wishes are guided by His Spirit. Then, instead of selfish desires, we ask for what pleases God—and what brings us true joy. God wants us to delight in what he gives.

Jesus says, “Until now you have asked for nothing in my name; ask and you will receive that your joy may be made full,” John 16:24. As the perfect parent, God enjoys making His children happy.

APPLICATION



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- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Make your prayers more effective by being straight in your dealings. Study Psalm 18:19-24 to discover why God heard the prayers of His servant David, while ignoring the prayers of David's enemies (Psalm 18:41).
- Pray often. Don't ever let yourself think that your prayers, your *genuine* prayers, are boring or insignificant to God.
- Don't think of God as a genie out of a bottle, a servant to grant you any wish. Recognize that God is infinitely wiser, kinder, and more powerful than you are. Make requests of Him that satisfy both your highest dreams and His perfect ways. To increase God's attention to your prayers, increase *your* attention to His word. Study Isaiah 1:10-15, 66:1-2, Proverbs 28:9, Zechariah 7:13, Psalms 18:27,41 and Proverbs 1:22-33.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



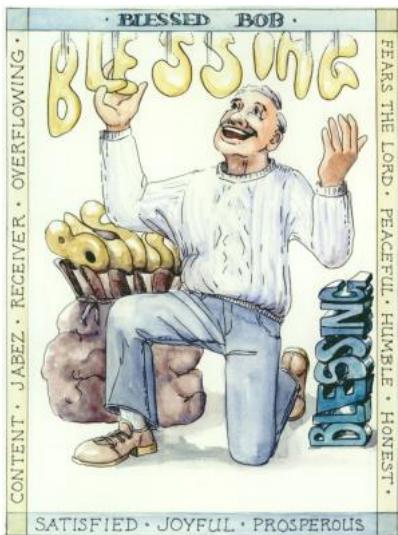
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KEY WORDS

immorality, advertising, humility, LORD, more assets (quantity), prayer, pride, sacrifice, righteous, wicked

ILLUSTRATION

[Who is Blessed Bob?](#)



Blessed Bob is very fortunate. He recognizes that good things come from God! God is shunned by many, but not by Bob. Bob loves God. He wants to receive all the good things that God has for him. He's not too proud to ask God for help. In fact, Bob prays often. Some think that he prays without ceasing. But he is not without fault. Blessed Bob makes many mistakes, and when he does, he admits his errors. He corrects them and presses on.

Bob gets so many blessings he feels overwhelmed. His cup overflows. But he doesn't hoard his blessings. Like Generous Genevieve, Blessed Bob likes to give to others. He is truly prosperous, even though there are many who are financially richer than he is.

We see examples of Blessed Bob in the Bible in the lives of Job and Joseph. Job went through some very good times (Job 29:2-25) and some very bad times (Job 2:7-8). Joseph had similar financial cycles (Genesis 39:2,21). Both men kept their focus on God, not on their financial condition (Job 1:21, Genesis 50:19-21).

More recently we have examples of those who have lived with the same life focus. R. G LeTourneau was the inventor of the largest earth moving machines in the 1930's and 1940's. He credited God for his tremendous success. He gave away much of his wealth while he was



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still living saying that, "When I shovel money out to God's interests, God shovels money back to me, but God's shovel is bigger than mine." He was called the mover of men and mountains because of his great work and influence. On his gravestone, R. G. LeTourneau left all visitors with these words, SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU MATTHEW 6:33.

Blessed Bob is full of joy. He is satisfied with life!

