

[Click this to go back to the free articles and media page.](#)

## God Loves Beggars

When I first started to read the Bible as a new believer, I was fascinated by all of the miracles and answers to prayer. Believing that God is not limited in power, I asked Him to do miraculous things. I am thankful that He did indeed answer on occasion in miraculous ways. But I wondered why so many of my prayers were not answered. I wondered if there was something wrong with me. It seemed like I did not possess the degree of faith necessary to believe that God would answer certain prayers. For example, I recall praying that God would heal a blind woman if I would only pray in faith. But she did not receive her sight. I recall praying for cancer patients who did not receive healing. I wondered why I was not experiencing the same degree of miraculous answers to prayer that I was reading about in my Bible. I discovered that I was not alone. All of my Christian friends had the same experience.

I shared my concerns with a pastor. He told me to read the following passage:

*“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).*

He said that in order to receive answers to prayer, we must ask according to His will. He said that unless it is God’s will to heal someone, they won’t be healed when we pray for them. He suggested that when I pray for such things, I should add the phrase, “if it be according to your will.” I often heard people tack on this phrase to their prayers for sick people. But something about it did not seem quite right. I did not read about people in the Bible praying this way.

A few years later, I read about a man who lived in England during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His life abounded with miraculous answers to prayer. Reading testimonies about the answers to prayer produced a desire to see God’s power unleashed through my prayers also. But upon closer analysis, I learned that suffering seemed to be connected to George Mueller’s prayer life. He took God very seriously and learned through his tribulations to WAIT upon the Lord for every need. I deduced that George Mueller was much further along in his faith and to experience that type of life, I would also have to learn through trials to wait upon the Lord after the pattern of **George Mueller**.<sup>1</sup>

For years, it seemed like my progress was very slow. Near the turn of the 20th century, God arranged for a variety of trials that would serve as a faith training camp. Though I did indeed learn much and observed many awesome answers to prayer, I still believe George Mueller was much further along in his faith than I am today.

There is one principle that I have learned through these experiences that is critical to an effective prayer life. It has something to do with the expression, “WAIT upon the Lord.” Though I read about it from the beginning of my walk with the Lord, I failed to fully embrace it for many years. I suspect that there are perhaps millions of Christians that either don’t fully embrace this principle or just need to be reminded about it. Jesus taught about it on numerous occasions. Here is one of them:

*“He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you?’” I say to you, though*

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<sup>1</sup> George Mueller kept a journal of all his prayers and continued to pray them until God answered. Then, he noted in his journal the date the prayer was answered and record notable details of the answer.

[Click this to go back to the free articles and media page.](#)

*he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs” (Luke 11:5-8)*

Earlier in this article, I mentioned I John 5:14-15. The parable immediately above contains important truth that can help shape our understanding of how to apply I John 5:14-15. If we are not careful, we can falsely conclude that our request is not according to God’s will simply because God does not answer it quickly. The parable above seems to suggest that we should not assume that God will not answer. Rather, as Jesus taught using another similar parable, “*Men always ought to pray and not lose heart*” (Luke 18:1). We should be slow to conclude that our request is “not according to God’s will.” How can we know it is not God’s will unless God expressly shows it? Unless and until God clearly communicates that our request is not according to His will, we should continue asking God until He answers our prayer or clearly tells us it is not **His will**.<sup>2</sup>

I John 5:15 tells us that we can be certain that God will answer requests in accordance with His will. But immediately after the parable in Luke chapter 11 (above), Jesus said that we can be certain that God will answer our prayers even if we are ignorant of God’s will in the matter.

*“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. “For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. “If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? “Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:9-13)*

On the surface, Jesus’ promise in verse 9 (above) is far reaching. “Ask, and it will be given to you.” There is no mention of “if it be according to God’s will.” On the surface, it seems like an unconditional promise. But upon closer investigation, there is a condition built into the verb choices. The verbs “ask,” “seek” and “knock” are all present tense **imperative verbs**<sup>3</sup> which include a requirement of continuation. So, verse 9 (above) was understood as “ask (and continue to ask), and it will be given to you; seek (and continue to seek) and you will find; knock (and continue to knock), and it will be opened to you. This principle of continuance implied by Greek grammar is tied directly to the parable in the beginning of Luke chapter 11. That parable concludes with, “*I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs” (Luke 11:5-8). In order to receive answers to most prayers, we must act upon Jesus’ teaching. We must pray and continue to pray with persistence and not stop until God answers our prayer. If we stop praying, we should not expect to receive the answer to our prayer.*

One of the most relevant types of prayers that demand persistence are prayers that God would deliver loved ones out of the kingdom of darkness. I will mention two instances in the Bible to encourage you in your praying for such people. Both of these instances involve demon-possessed

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<sup>2</sup> Our warrant for continued praying is found in I Peter 5:6-7: *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.* Are we burdened with a care? Then we should indeed cast it and continue to cast it upon Him.

<sup>3</sup> If Jesus was not commanding that we ask and **continue to ask**, Luke could have used the aorist form of the verb for “ask” (ἄιτησόν). This aorist form does not demand continuation. This aorist tense form is found in Mark 6:22. There, Herod tells Herodias' daughter, “Ask me whatever you want, and I will give *it* to you.” (It does not express continuance here since it would be a one-time request.)

[Click this to go back to the free articles and media page.](#)

people that seemed hopelessly lost and held fast by Satan's chains. I cannot prove the connection of prayer to these cases, but I personally believe that the persistent prayers of loved ones was instrumental in the outcome. I believe this because in both cases, the people that were demon-possessed lived outside the bounds of Jesus' ministry. In both cases, the demon-possessed were not Jews. In both cases, Jesus made a rare, unusual trip outside the bounds of Judea and Galilee that culminated in deliverance of non-Jewish people bound in darkness.

In Mathew 15:21-28, Jesus took a brief journey to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A woman of Caanan begged Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Because she was not of the lost sheep of Israel, Jesus refused. But the woman persisted until Jesus healed her. I don't at all think that it was merely her persistent begging on this occasion that made this possible. Rather, I believe this woman of strong faith had been praying for years for her daughter. I fully believe that the main reason Jesus travelled to the region of Tyre and Sidon is to answer the prayers the woman had been praying for many years. I believe Jesus was driven to make this trip because of her persistent prayers of many years. Jesus simply had to go.

In Mark 5:1-20, Jesus again left the boundaries of His normal ministry to the lost sheep of the house of Israel to travel across the Sea of Galilee to the country of the Gadarenes. There, a man hopelessly possessed by thousands of demons came out to meet Jesus when He came to shore. He was a dangerous, filthy, homeless man who lived in tombs. He did not beg Jesus to deliver him. None of this man's loved ones were present to ask Jesus to deliver Him. At one time in his life, this man was just a child, probably cared for by his mother. At this point in his life, his mother could no longer provide for him. He was so fierce that nobody could tame him. Somebody tried to do something for him by binding him with chains. Perhaps his father and some friends did this so the man would not hurt himself. While chained ever so briefly, someone most likely brought food for him. All of this suggests that somebody still cared about him even though he could no longer safely stay at home.

I understand if someone says that I am merely speculating about much of this because the Bible does not include this information. But from what I know about God's mercy and how He responds to the prayers of His beloved children, I believe this demon-possessed man had a heartbroken mother and perhaps father who never gave up praying for him. I believe this because of the circumstances surrounding this rare trip out of the area of Jesus' normal ministry in Galilee and Judea.

Why did Jesus suddenly make these very brief trips. I believe it was because the prayers of brokenhearted loved ones compelled Him to go. I believe that just as it is said of Him in Judges 10:16, His soul could endure their misery no longer. There were thousands of demon-possessed people that Jesus did not heal living in the world while He was on earth. Why did He choose to heal these people? Why did he heal the many other people we read about in the gospels? I suggest that behind the scenes, there were brokenhearted loved ones praying for them for a very long time. The Holy Spirit drove Jesus to them out of mercy to hear them because God hears the prayers of His people. So, let us pray at all times and not lose heart. He hears. He cares. He desires to show Himself a strong, loving, merciful Father of those who "call upon the Lord" (and continue calling on the Lord).

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*Tom Bear*