

the love and graciousness of the Father.

My son wanted a dog. My wife and I agreed to let him get one. He looked in the newspaper for weeks but he could not find a suitable animal. During this time, months in advance, my wife had rented a cabin in preparation for a winter holiday trip. The time for our camping trip drew near and my son's heart desire was to have a dog to take on this trip. We prayed for him in this matter, since it was so important to our son; he was adamant that he must have a dog for this trip or he would not enjoy the winter holidays. Well, the day finally arrived for our departure to the woods and he had been unsuccessful at finding a suitable pet. He was very disappointed. After packing up everything, we drove to the state park where we had made reservations. When we pulled up to our cabin, sitting out in front, as if they were waiting for us, were two beagles!

The two animals were thin and sickly from going without food and being in the elements. Our son fed them and cared for them. The next morning one of the beagles disappeared but the other one stayed at the cabin. We put forth much effort to find the owner during our stay. We talked to the park ranger, made phone calls, etc. but were unable to locate an owner. We knew it was important we attempt to find the owner or we would be taking someone else's dog which had been lost. All our efforts failed so we felt free to take the little beagle home with us.

Our family had gone through a period of great stress and disappointment prior to this trip. In answer to specific prayer the Lord had provided a dog, which brought my son, and all of us, much joy. In the process of seeing how He chose to answer this prayer, we reveled in and were surprised by His goodness.

The second example relates to the ministry which I head in Laurel, MS. We are involved in much tract distribution (as well as booklets and Scripture portions). We had prayed that the Lord would use this aspect of our work as we give out the materials we've acquired or had printed ourselves. Our Christian publications are selected to fit the needs of those to whom we minister. We emphasize prayer (for the churches), conversion stories and evangelism (for reaching unbelievers), devotional material and booklets for the sick and elderly (to whom we minister daily), and Scripture portions (especially the "Gospel of John" in Spanish for the growing Hispanic population we assist).

We had been excited over giving this printed material away in Jones County and south Mississippi, and had seen positive results from our efforts. We became serious about praying over this particular aspect of our work, asking the Lord to use our labors to be a blessing to others.

We were very surprised to receive a letter from an inmate on death row in Kabwe, Zambia who had read some of the literature! His cell-mate, who had since died, shared it with him. He did not know how the man had gotten the materials. In his first letter he explained how this had been a real blessing to him and he requested more of our literature. This led to a series of written correspondence by mail. Who would have thought we in Mississippi would touch a life in Africa by our work done on a local level! It was God's answer to our prayer; something we would have never expected. It caused us great joy to be used in such a way.

In Conclusion

There is a connection between sincere Christian prayer and joy. The happiness the world offers is artificial. It is fleeting and temporary and dependent upon one's circumstances. The joy offered by God is real. It is supernatural and transcends circumstances and lasts. God is so loving toward His people that He wants only the best for them. Once His people receive salvation He causes them to experience joy. Only He can give this joy. God encourages His people by giving them answers to their prayers. God strengthens His people in their faith by sending them answers to their prayers. God thrills His people by answering their prayers, sometimes in the most unexpected ways!

Ultimately, in Jesus Christ we "rejoice with joy inexpressible".²³

Robert Smith
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REFERENCES*

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|-----------------------------|------------------------|
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| 4. James 1:6-8;4:8 | 15. Ephesians 1:17-18; |
| 5. Acts 12:5-17; | Colossians 1:9-10 |
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| 6. I Peter 3:7; James 4:1-2 | 17. Galatians 5:22 |
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| 8. Philippians 2:9-11 | 19. Romans 15:13 |
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| 11. John 16:26-27 | 22. James 1:3-8 |
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*All quotations cited in the text are from the New King James Version of the Bible.



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RECEIVING JOY THROUGH PRAYER ©

John 16:24

"Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

In this verse, as Jesus is teaching His disciples, He is impressing upon them the necessity of prayer and how they are to make their requests known to the Father. Jesus will soon be departing- following His death, burial, and resurrection, back to heaven. Since these have received Him and believed in Him, then they can and should pray to the Father in His (Jesus') name. Jesus states: "...the Father Himself loves you because you have loved Me and believed that I came forth from God." (verse 27) Jesus' followers (Christians), who are alive after His departure into heaven, are expected to pray, and pray in His name, to the Father until He returns again. Only those who truly love Jesus can pray in this way and have the Father accept their prayers.

Condition #1 "Ask"

When we hear Jesus say, "Ask", it sounds as if He must be talking to complete incompetents in order to feel it necessary to instruct in such an elementary way. It also seems the most simple matter for His followers to practice. Both ideas are wrong! This one little word- "ask", used by Jesus, carries much, much weight and is important for all to heed. Why? (1) Believers do not pray nearly enough! so His people do not ask. (2) Believers ask but often their prayers are not effective.

Christians do not ask believing²; Christians do not ask with persistence³; Christians do not ask with clean consciences⁴; Christians who do ask are not attentive⁵; Christians who ask are distracted by their own quarreling⁶; Christians ask with selfish, pleasure-seeking motives⁷.

The first condition given is that the believer must ASK. Those who love Jesus may ask with absolute confidence in an answer but sometimes it may be necessary to ask many times over. Those who love Jesus will pray after careful evaluation of their lives for unrepented sin, after laying aside strife and arguing with others, and not seeking worldly amusements or allurements for themselves in prayer. Those who love Jesus will couple prayer with watchfulness for answers and notice God's hand at work on their behalf.

Condition #2 “In My Name”

The name of Jesus is “the name which is above every name”⁸. It is in His name we find salvation⁹; everything that a believer does “in word or deed”¹⁰ is to be done in the name of Jesus. Whenever prayer is raised it is to be done in and with the authority of Jesus’ name.

A policeman, because of his being a representative of the law, can speak with authority when he yells, “Stop in the name of the law!” A soldier, by virtue of carrying a white flag, is given protection and the opportunity to say, “I come to you in the name of peace.” An explorer, having been commissioned by the king, can step ashore on newly discovered lands and declare, “I claim this land for Spain in the name of King Ferdinand!” All three call upon a higher power outside themselves to give their words validity and weight. The policeman calls upon “the law” which he is empowered to enforce; the soldier calls upon the desirability of “peace”, which he is afforded; the explorer calls upon the “king” as the one in whose place he stands. One is given the right to speak if he can invoke the right name as a true representative of that person.

If our President is unable to travel to visit the head of another country on an important occasion, he may send someone on his behalf to make the call. This person represents the President in his absence and speaks with authority “in the name” of the President. The President has given him power. The representative may say, “I bring you greetings in the name of President _____ ...” His words carry weight because he has been endowed with the right to speak for the President and can call his leader’s name.

One is given the right to speak, and be heard, if he can invoke the proper name and has been granted the authority to do so by that important person. Just because someone knows the name of an impressive personage, and can say it, does not bestow privilege. *One has privilege when he has been granted the authority by that important person.*

Thus it is with prayer. Only those who are Christians can pray “in the name of Jesus” to the Father. It does no good for one who is unconverted to pray in Jesus’ name and expect answers. An unbeliever has no authority from the Son to do so. Jesus explained that His disciples, those who believe in Him and love Him, are the only ones who can pray to the Father in His name. The Father, in turn, loves those who love His Son and will receive their prayers. Further, the followers of Christ are expected to pray to the Father in the name of Jesus and not neglect this responsibility.¹¹ Christians pray with awesome power, not because they have the right to invoke the name of a president or king; Christians may call upon the name above every name- Jesus Christ.

Promise #1 “You will receive”

The Christian who asks and asks in the name of Jesus will receive. Receive what? Should a Christian ask in the name of Jesus for Super Bowl tickets for himself and expect to get them because he loves football? Should a Christian ask for the money, in the name of Jesus, and expect to receive it to take a Caribbean cruise because he likes to travel? Should a Christian ask in the name of Jesus for free movie passes for a year to the theatre and expect to receive them? Should a Christian ask in the name of Jesus for a gift certificate to his favorite restaurant and expect to receive it? Should a Christian ask, in the name of Jesus, for a free shopping spree in the local department store so he can acquire videos and music CDs and children’s toys and games?

The answer is simple- No, of course not! “Jesus” is not a magic word to be used to have one’s every wish granted. Nor is Jesus a Christian’s personal magic genie who waits to be summoned at our call to do our bidding or satisfy our whims. Prayer is not a means for fulfilling our worldly desires and opening the door to personal amusements or luxury. Scripture speaks plainly when it says: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.” (James 4:3) To pray in such an openly selfish way and invoke the name of Jesus, would be to greatly dishonor His name.

Well then, what does the Christian, praying in the name of Jesus, receive? First, it is understood that the Christian is praying “according to His will.”¹² This means that a believer’s prayer is based upon those things he knows to be God’s will as he (1) learns from Scripture, (2) is led by the Holy Spirit, or (3) finds himself in circumstances which God causes to occur in his life [referred to as *providence*].

Is it appropriate for an obedient believer to pray for food so he will not go hungry¹³ or for a job to support himself and his family?¹⁴ Is it appropriate for a sincere believer to pray for wisdom and knowledge?¹⁵ Of course. In Scripture we learn these are things to be sought by asking the Father.

You may carefully plan what you want to pray about and then enter into prayer; as you pray, something completely different comes to your mind unexpectedly which you suddenly and earnestly begin to pray about. You are very tired, it is late, and you go to bed looking forward to a good night’s sleep; in the middle of the night you inexplicably become wide awake while someone’s name, which you cannot get out of your mind, is impressed upon you for prayer. Is this appropriate prayer? Of course. The Holy Spirit is directing our prayer lives in such cases.

You take a new job and meet someone there who you like very much or a new neighbor moves in next door with

whom you simply cannot get along. God has put someone in your path that was not there before. You have promised a dear friend who is deathly sick in the hospital you will make a visit but your car will not start; you don’t know if you should wait until later to go, ask someone else for a ride, hire a taxi, or not go at all. Your plans are suddenly changed. Your brother’s house is completely destroyed by a terrible fire; he and his family need a place to live, clothes, money, and food. They ask you to help so you have some decisions to now make, due to a sudden change in their circumstances. People come into and go out of your life; plans are changed unexpectedly; problems present themselves suddenly. All these are examples of God’s providence which call for prayer by the Christian.

Again, the question, what will you receive? You will receive what you truly need. It may be a physical need or a spiritual need or guidance in making a decision. A Christian praying aright can have confidence he will receive an answer to his prayers and his needs will be met.¹⁶

Promise #2 “Your joy may be full”

A *proof* that a person is a Christian is that he prays and receives answers to his prayers. Another proof that one is a Christian is that he has joy. He has joy that comes from the Holy Spirit¹⁷. This is a spiritual joy from God not dependent upon circumstances, whether they be perceived as good or bad (in an earthly sense). This being said, one of the ways the Lord sustains joy in the life of a believer is by allowing the Christian to see answered prayers. This is why it is important to not just pray, but to “watch and pray”.¹⁸

As human beings it is often difficult for us to rise above distressing circumstances although we know the promises of Scripture and have our hope in Christ¹⁹ and not in the world. We are weak. We do battle against the flesh.²⁰ Our Father, knowing us,²¹ knows how frail and fainthearted we can become. He strengthens us by allowing us to see answers to our prayers. Even more than that he gives us joy by answered prayers.

It is hard for us to be joyful when we have nagging unsolved problems. We can give them to Him in prayer. It is hard to be joyful when we have strife or broken relationships with others. We can give this to Him in prayer. It is hard to be joyful when we have financial troubles or sickness. We can give this to Him in prayer. It is hard to be joyful for many reasons as life becomes hard to bear. We can give it *all* to Him in prayer. If we ask aright, He will answer and we will receive what we need to establish, or re-establish, our joy to the full.

In fact, trials in this life are designed to lead us to prayer. We can even find joy in the trials themselves because they build up our prayer life. Trials give us reason to ask and receive!²²

Two answers to prayer recently, which have caused my “joy to be full” come to mind. I share these as a testimony to