

session 8 study guide

does God always answer prayer?

starter

PRAYER SURVEY: Circle the number that best represents your position for each of the issues below. There are no correct answers in this survey. The idea is just to see where you stand on the various questions that come up regarding prayer.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that God answers prayer.							I believe there is a God, but I question whether He is interested in what I do.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I don't always know how God answers prayers, but I always have faith He will.							When I fail to see an obvious answer, I wonder if God answers at all.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I often praise and thank God as well as ask Him for things.							I treat God a lot like Santa Claus. Give me this; give me that.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
When God says no, I feel it is for my own good.							It's hard for me to accept an answer of "no."		

session 8: does God always answer prayer?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
When God answers a prayer, my faith is strengthened.							I think that answered prayer is just a coincidence.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
When God says, "Wait awhile," I accept His timing without reservation.							I prayed once and God never answered, so I don't pray much anymore.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I find myself praying throughout the day.							Days go by and I never pray.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
When I don't feel like praying is when I pray the hardest.							When I don't feel like praying, I don't pray at all.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I feel as comfortable praying in public as I do alone.							I don't feel comfortable praying in public.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I feel that my prayer life is really growing.							I have almost buried my prayer life.		

message

When you ask a parent or other adult in authority for something, do they always say yes? If so, you are in a tiny minority! Adults who care about you sometimes answer no to your requests. They give you an answer, even if it's not always the answer you want.

When we ask God for something in prayer, He always answers. Sometimes His answer is *go*. He gives the go-ahead and grants our request. Sometimes His answer is *no*. We ask, but He sees a bigger picture and refuses our request. Perhaps what we've asked for is not what is best for us. Other times, God's answer is *grow*. The answer will eventually be yes, but we've got some growing and trusting to do first; the time isn't yet right. He always answers prayer, even if it's not always the answer we want.

1. Read the Scriptures below and decide what God's answer was for each prayer—go, no or grow—and then write why you think that was His answer. Don't forget to practice inductive Bible study to figure out what's really going on (see the previous session for inductive study guidelines).

But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be" (Genesis 15:2-5).

Go, no or grow? _____

Why?

Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done (Luke 22:42).

Go, no or grow? _____

Why?

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him (Acts 3:1-20).

Go, no or grow? _____

Why?

2. When has God answered one of your requests with *go*, *no* or *grow*? Describe each situation below.

Go:

No:

Grow:

dig

A 17-year-old girl died after a “faith healer” prayed for her healing and her parents pulled the plug. Against the wishes of the medical staff in the hospital, the parents of 17-year-old Debra Barker stopped her hospital respirator because they believed she was healed. Debra Barker had been in a coma for three days after a tragic accident in which she was thrown from her car. Evidence showed the passengers of the car had been drinking.

Pastor Stephen Johnson of Community Church said that Debra’s parents asked Reverend Jesse Thomas, a faith healer who had just preached at the church, to come to the hospital to pray for their daughter. Reverend Thomas, Pastor Johnson and Debra’s parents entered the hospital room at approximately 1:00 in the afternoon. After Reverend Thomas prayed for Debra, he said she was healed as he felt warmth flow through his hands onto her forehead. Debra’s parents, “in faith,” pulled the plug to the respirator without the permission of the hospital staff. Debra died 12 minutes later.

1. What do you think about Reverend Thomas?

2. What do you think about Debra's parents?

3. What is the role of faith when it comes to prayer?

4. Why didn't God heal Debra?

5. What lesson or idea can you take away from this story?

6. How does it relate to your prayer life?

apply

1. Read James 4:2. Imagine a wealthy family with a 10-year-old son. Come up with a scenario that might happen in that family to demonstrate this verse.

2. Now read James 4:3. Continue your scenario—what happens next?

3. Read Matthew 6:5-7. What is the reward for those who are “prayer show-offs”?

4. Why do you think God is more likely to answer *no* when we show off?

5. Why do you think God is more likely to answer *go* or *grow* when we are humble?

6. Is it possible to pray in a group without showing off? What are some ways you can avoid falling into the “hypocrite trap”?

7. What makes an answer of *go* or *grow* so difficult to handle?

8. Why is *no* so often a very good answer to prayer?

9. Where have you seen God's love and care in your life when He gave you an answer you weren't looking for?

reflect

The Serenity Prayer was written by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr for use in one of his sermons back in 1934. The prayer was first circulated by the Federal Council of Churches and later by the U.S. armed forces. Eventually, it was adopted by 12-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, around the world. Members say it together at every meeting. It goes like this:

*God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
the courage to accept the things I can;
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

1. How does the Serenity Prayer relate to God's three possible answers (*go, no or grow*)?

2. How might praying the Serenity Prayer impact your spiritual life?

3. For what do you need serenity? For what do you need courage?

4. Write a short prayer for those situations now. If you like, share your requests with a friend or your group so that you can pray for each other.

meditation



But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your
Father, who is unseen. Then your Father,
who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

MATTHEW 6:6