

5 QUESTIONS TO ASK

When Prayers Feel Unanswered

By Margaret Willden

Have you ever offered a prayer and waited for an answer that never seemed to come? You're not alone—but you can be sure that Heavenly Father does indeed hear your prayers. It's important to remember that answers may not come *when* or *how* you want them to and that our Father in Heaven always knows best.

Here are a few questions you might ask yourself when you're struggling to receive answers to a prayer:

1 Am I ready to act on the answer?
Praying in faith means being ready to act on the answer you receive—whether or not it's the answer that you expect. The Prophet Joseph Smith once received the following instruction: "Prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same" (D&C 132:3). If you pray about whether or not you should attend that party, will you obey no matter what (even if the answer is no)?

2 Have I done everything in my power?

Let's say that you didn't study for your science test because you were hanging out with friends instead. Will Heavenly Father help you pass your test if you simply ask for His help?

We need to do our part to receive the blessings. So in studying for a test, you could pray for the strength to do well according to your preparation.

Consider the example of the sons of Mosiah, who were successful in their missionary work when they put in the extra effort: "They had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting; therefore they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation, and when they taught, they taught with power and authority of God" (Alma 17:3).

3 Have I ignored the answer?

Heavenly Father always hears you, so it's possible that He has already answered your prayer! As it says in Doctrine and Covenants 6:14, "As often as thou hast inquired thou hast received instruction of my Spirit." You can pray for the spiritual eyes to recognize the answer, because prayers are sometimes answered in subtle or indirect ways—like through the actions of others.

Also, don't forget to take time to listen. Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained: "[Heavenly Father's] answers will seldom come while you are on your knees praying. . . . Rather, He will prompt you in quiet moments when the Spirit can most effectively touch your mind and heart" ("Using the Supernal Gift of Prayer," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2007, 9).

4 Are my desires righteous?

If you ever asked for something that wasn't in your best interest, it's pretty likely your request wasn't granted. The Savior taught that we "must always pray unto the Father in [Jesus Christ's] name" (3 Nephi 18:19), which suggests that we ask for things that are right so they can be granted. Ask yourself, "How would the Savior feel about my wants?" If your wishes are rooted in selfishness or any other form of unrighteousness, pray to have a change of heart and to know what the Savior would have you desire.

5 Is it the right time?

What we ask for must be right, but the timing must be right too. Heavenly Father has a grand plan in store for us, but our schedule is sometimes a little different from His. "My words are sure and shall not fail. . . . But all things must come to pass in their time" (D&C 64:31–32). It might mean waiting a little bit longer for that injury to heal or for a lost pet to be found, and sometimes the Lord's timing includes the next life—but you can be sure that He will hear and help you along the way.

It can be hard to be patient, especially when the answer to your prayer isn't obvious. But as you search, you can take courage in knowing that you will always find the answers you need if you seek with real intent: "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). ■

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