

## What To Teach Kids About Unanswered Prayer

By Natasha Crain

My son Nathan wasn't feeling well recently so we all prayed together for him to feel better. The next night at prayer time, Kenna pointed out that we prayed for him already but he wasn't feeling better. She had a look of simultaneous confusion and disappointment on her face. In a total of about 3 seconds I had the thought that this is the beginning of a lifetime of seeking to understand why God does or does not answer certain prayers AND replied, "We'll keep praying and trust God that Nathan will feel better."

I felt a giant theological error well up in my throat. How often we casually imply or even consciously think that if we just "trust God" for a specific prayer outcome, He will answer the way we want!

*"Everything will be OK! Just trust in God!"*

Yes, everything will be OK . . . perfect actually . . . when Christ returns and God is glorified in His kingdom for eternity. In the meantime this life is a mess. We are sinful people with free choices, surrounded by other sinful people with free choices. There is illness, there is death. There are natural disasters. Christians live in this fallen world and are affected by its consequences as much as non-believers.

Yet, we are to pray. We are to ask God for our hearts' desires in the midst of all this. If every Christian's prayer for a specific (positive) outcome was answered, however, *we* would effectively be in control of the world through God. Thank God that prayer doesn't work that way! It's actually a little scary to think of millions of people (even if they are Christians) controlling God like a puppet through prayer strings. I would much rather God be in control, in His infinite wisdom and perspective.

The dynamics of prayer are really not unlike our children making requests to us . . . we encourage their requests, consider their requests, and want them to continue making requests, but may not grant them what they want depending on how it would impact themselves, us or others . . . just like God relates with us through prayer.

Jesus powerfully demonstrated this himself when he prayed in Mark 14:36: "Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." God CAN do anything but his specific answers to prayer are based on how our requests align with His will.

If we come to believe that God can or should be trusted for *specific* outcomes, our relationship with Him will be as variable as the ups and downs of life; a good outcome equals happiness with God, a negative outcome equals disappointment or anger with God. This is not what our relationship should look like, yet it is very common.

To put this in a simple framework for my kids, I've boiled it down to these 5 key concepts that I emphasize at home.

1. God wants us to continuously pray. (e.g., Philippians 4:6-7; Ephesians 6:18)

2. God hears our prayers. (Implied in the fact he wants us to pray, plus Psalm 34:15)
3. We can and should pray for our hearts' desires. (e.g., Matthew 21:22; Matthew 7:7-11; John 14:13-14)
4. God CAN answer our prayers for specific outcomes, but may not, depending on His will. (e.g., Matthew 6:10; Matthew 26:42; Mark 14:36)
5. God works all things together for good. This statement, from Romans 8:28, can easily be taken out of context. Paul is not saying that God works all things together for OUR good (at least as we would commonly perceive "good" in this life). He follows in verses 28 and 29 by explaining that the good he is referencing is God's overall plan for the world leading to His final glorification.

Here is how I apply these truths for my (young) children:

"We just prayed for (fill in the blank). Do we know God WANTS us to pray? (yes) Do we know God hears ALL of our prayers? (yes) Do we know that God CAN answer any prayer he chooses? (yes) Does God answer EVERY prayer the way we ask? (no) What is important is that we always pray because God wants us to, but we have to remember that only God can decide how he is going to answer our prayers."

In this way I hope to teach them that we should not limit or censor our prayers, but at the same time we need to respect and trust in God's infinite wisdom . . . not our own.

### About the author, Natasha Crain

I'm a [national speaker](#), [author](#), [blogger](#), and [podcaster](#) whose passion is to help Christians think more clearly about holding to a biblical worldview in the midst of an increasingly challenging secular culture.

I've written three apologetics books for parents: *Talking with Your Kids about Jesus* (Baker Books, 2020), *Talking with Your Kids about God* (Baker Books, 2017), and *Keeping Your Kids on God's Side* (Harvest House, 2016). My fourth book, *Faithfully Different: Regaining Biblical Clarity in a Secular Culture*, will be released in February 2022. My articles have been featured in outlets such as *Focus on the Family Magazine* and the *Christian Research Journal*, and I've been interviewed on radio shows across the U.S. and Canada.

I have an MBA in Marketing and Statistics from UCLA, a BA in Economics from USC, and a certificate in Christian apologetics from Biola University. I was a marketing executive and adjunct marketing professor before I transitioned to the full-time ministry of writing and speaking.