

Answers to Prayer

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The Father is aware of us, knows our needs, and will help us perfectly.

An important and comforting doctrine of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that our Heavenly Father has perfect love for His children. Because of that perfect love, He blesses us not only according to our desires and needs but also according to His infinite wisdom. As simply stated by the prophet Nephi, “I know that [God] loveth his children.”¹

One aspect of that perfect love is our Heavenly Father’s involvement in the details of our lives, even when we may not be aware of it or understand it. We seek the Father’s divine guidance and help through heartfelt, earnest prayer. When we honor our covenants and strive to be more like our Savior, we are entitled to a constant² stream of divine guidance through the influence and inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

The scriptures teach us, “For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him,”³ and He “knoweth all things, for all things are present before [His] eyes.”⁴

The prophet Mormon is an example of this. He did not live to see the results of his work. Yet he understood that the Lord was carefully leading him along. When he felt inspired to include the small plates of Nephi with his record, Mormon wrote: “And I do this for a wise purpose; for thus it whispereth me, according to the workings of the Spirit of the Lord which is in me. And now, I do not know all things; but the Lord knoweth all things which are to come; wherefore, he worketh in me to do according to his will.”⁵ Although Mormon did not know of the future loss of the 116 manuscript pages, the Lord did and prepared a way to overcome that obstacle long before it occurred.

The Father is aware of us, knows our needs, and will help us perfectly. Sometimes that help is given in the very moment or at least soon after we ask for divine help. Sometimes our most earnest and worthy desires are not answered in the way we hope, but we find that God has greater blessings in store. And sometimes our righteous desires are not granted in this life. I will illustrate, through three different accounts, the ways our Father in Heaven may answer our earnest petitions to Him.

Our youngest son was called to serve as a missionary in the France Paris Mission. In preparation to serve, we went with him to purchase the usual shirts, suits, ties, and socks, and an overcoat. Unfortunately, the overcoat he wanted was not immediately in stock in the size he needed. However, the store clerk indicated that the coat would become available in a few weeks and would be delivered to the missionary training center in Provo prior to our son’s departure for France. We paid for the coat and thought nothing more of it.

Our son entered the missionary training center in June, and the overcoat was delivered just days before his scheduled departure in August. He did not try on the coat but hurriedly packed it in his luggage with his clothing and other items.

As winter approached in Paris, where our son was serving, he wrote to us that he had pulled out the overcoat and tried it on but found that it was far too small. We therefore had to deposit extra funds in his bank account so that he could buy another coat in Paris, which he did. With some irritation, I wrote to him and told him to give the first coat away, inasmuch as he couldn't use it.

We later received this email from him: "It is very, very cold here. ... The wind seems to go right through us, although my new coat is great and quite heavy. ... I gave my old one to [another missionary in our apartment] who said that he had been praying for a way to get a better coat. He is a convert of several years and he has only his mom ... and the missionary who baptized him who are supporting him on his mission and so the coat was an answer to a prayer, so I felt very happy about that."⁶

Heavenly Father knew that this missionary, who was serving in France some 6,200 miles (10,000 km) away from home, would urgently need a new overcoat for a cold winter in Paris but that this missionary would not have the means to buy one. Heavenly Father also knew that our son would receive from the clothing store in Provo, Utah, an overcoat that would be far too small. He knew that these two missionaries would be serving together in Paris and that the coat would be an answer to the humble and earnest prayer of a missionary who had an immediate need.

The Savior taught:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

"Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."⁷

In other situations, when our worthy desires are not granted in the way we had hoped, it may actually be for our ultimate benefit. For example, Joseph the son of Jacob was envied and hated by his brothers to the point that they plotted Joseph's murder. Instead, they sold him as a slave into Egypt.⁸ If ever a person might have felt that his prayers were not answered in the way he had hoped, it could have been Joseph. In reality, his apparent misfortune resulted in great blessings to him and saved his family from starvation. Later, after having become a trusted leader in Egypt, with great faith and wisdom he said to his brothers:

"Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

"For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest.

"And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

"So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God."⁹

While in college, our oldest son was hired into a very desirable part-time student job that had the potential to lead to a wonderful, permanent job after graduation. He worked hard at this student job for four years, became highly qualified, and was well respected by his coworkers and supervisors. At the end of his senior year, almost as if orchestrated by heaven (at least to our son's way of thinking),

the permanent position did open up, and he was the leading candidate, with every indication and expectation that, indeed, he would get the job.

Well, he was not hired. None of us could understand it. He had prepared well, had interviewed well, was the most qualified candidate, and had prayed with great hope and expectation! He was devastated and crushed, and the entire episode left all of us scratching our heads. Why had God abandoned him in his righteous desire?

It wasn't until several years later that the answer became very clear. Had he received the dream job after graduation, he would have missed a critical, life-changing opportunity that has now proved to be for his eternal benefit and blessing. God knew the end from the beginning (as He always does), and in this case the answer to many righteous prayers was no, in favor of a far superior outcome.

And sometimes, the answer to prayer that we so righteously, desperately, and earnestly seek is not given in this life.

Sister Patricia Parkinson was born with normal eyesight, but at age seven she began to go blind. At age nine, Pat began attending the Utah Schools for the Deaf and Blind in Ogden, Utah, some 90 miles (145 km) from her home, necessitating her boarding at the school—which included all of the homesickness that a nine-year-old could possibly experience.

By age 11, she had completely lost her eyesight. Pat returned home permanently at age 15 to attend her local high school. She went on to college and graduated with an undergraduate degree in communication disorders and psychology, and after a heroic struggle against doubting university admissions officials, she entered graduate school and completed a master's degree in speech language pathology. Pat now works with 53 elementary school students and supervises four speech-language technicians in her school district. She owns her own home and her own automobile, which friends and family members drive when Pat needs transportation.

At age 10, Pat was scheduled to have yet another medical procedure to address her diminishing eyesight. Her parents had always told her exactly what was going to happen in terms of her medical care, but for some reason they didn't tell her about this particular procedure. When her parents did tell her that the procedure had been scheduled, Pat, in the words of her mother, "was a mess." Pat ran to the other room but came back later and said to her parents with some indignation, "Let me tell you what. I know it, God knows it, and you might as well know it too. I am going to be blind the rest of my life!"

Several years ago, Pat traveled to California to visit family members who were living there. While she was outside with her three-year-old nephew, he said to her, "Aunt Pat, why don't you just ask Heavenly Father to give you new eyes? Because if you ask Heavenly Father, He will give you whatever you want. You just have to ask Him."

Pat said she was taken aback by the question but responded, "Well, sometimes Heavenly Father doesn't work like that. Sometimes He needs you to learn something, and so He doesn't give you everything you want. Sometimes you have to wait. Heavenly Father and the Savior know best what is good for us and what we need. So They aren't going to grant you everything you want in the moment you want it."

I've known Pat for many years and recently told her that I admired the fact that she is always positive and happy. She responded, "Well, you have not been at home with me, have you? I have my

moments. I've had rather severe bouts of depression, and I've cried a lot." However, she added, "From the time I started losing my sight, it was strange, but I knew that Heavenly Father and the Savior were with my family and me. We handled it the best way we could, and in my opinion, we handled it the right way. I have ended up being a successful enough person, and generally I have been a happy person. I remember His hand being in everything. To those who ask me if I am angry because I am blind, I respond, 'Who would I be angry with? Heavenly Father is in this with me; I am not alone. He is with me all the time.'"

In this case, Pat's desire to regain her sight will not be granted in this life. But her motto, learned from her father, is "This too shall pass."¹⁰

President Henry B. Eyring stated, "The Father is at this moment aware of you, your feelings, and the spiritual and temporal needs of everyone around you."¹¹ This great and comforting truth can be found in the three experiences I have recounted.

Brothers and sisters, sometimes our prayers are answered quickly with the outcome we hope for. Sometimes our prayers are not answered in the way we hope for, yet with time we learn that God had greater blessings prepared for us than we initially anticipated. And sometimes our righteous petitions to God will not be granted in this life.¹² As Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, "Faith also includes trust in God's timing."¹³

We have the assurance that in His own way and in His own time, Heavenly Father will bless us and resolve all of our concerns, injustices, and disappointments.

To quote King Benjamin: "And moreover, I would desire that ye should consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. For behold, they are blessed in all things, both temporal and spiritual; and if they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it."¹⁴

I know that God hears our prayers.¹⁵ I know that as an all-knowing, loving Father, He answers our prayers perfectly, according to His infinite wisdom, and in ways that will be to our ultimate benefit and blessing. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.