Prayer

Hearing God depends on two kinds of condition: those that open the relationship, so that we are heard, and those that quiet us, so that we can hear. This document sets out five steps:

1. **Conditions for being heard** — the moral and relational state of the heart.
2. **Conditions for hearing** — the attentional practices that make room for God's response.
3. **What we pray for** — the kind of request that fits God's will.
4. **How God responds** — the modes His voice takes, everyday and supernatural.
5. **Validation** — how to test whether a message is from God.

Step 1: Conditions for being heard

These conditions concern the state of the heart. Their absence separates us from God; their presence opens the relationship.

1. **Belief.** This is the “sheep-goat” effect: when people don't believe in God, they block communication with Him.
2. **Repentance.** Wrongdoing separates us from God, from other people and from creation. Love connects us.
3. **Humility and willingness to obey.** Choosing to do God's will; surrender.
4. **Commitment.** Seeking God with all your heart.

Repentance is primary because sin separates. Repentance leads to communion, which is itself a mark of knowing God. Love matters here because love creates openness.

Step 2: Conditions for hearing

These conditions don't separate us from God, but their absence crowds out His response. They concern hearing rather than being heard.

1. **Stillness and solitude.** Minimising distractions.
2. **Fasting.** Removing preoccupations over an extended period.

The sequence

1. **Belief** comes first.
2. **Repentance, humility and commitment.** People then commit to follow God.
3. **Prayer.** Expressing an intention.
4. **Stillness and fasting.** Removing the things that distract.

5. **Waiting.** Waiting on God's response.

Step 3: What we pray for

1. **It should align with God's will.**
2. **It should be genuine** — a request from the heart, not just words.

Step 4: How God responds

Most days God answers through ordinary means built into the created order. Supernatural responses are rarer and tied to special circumstances.

Everyday guidance

Mode	What it asks	What it tests for
Scripture	What is written?	Consistency
Contemplation	What emerges as I meditate on the Word?	Understanding
Wisdom	What does reality teach me?	Effectiveness
Community	What can others teach me?	Consensus
Ethics	What is right, morally and legally?	Goodness
Feeling	What does my gut say, positive or negative?	Value
Mission	What compelling need am I drawn to meet?	Purpose

Scripture. Scripture gives guidance on many things, such as the Mosaic Law and Christ's commandments.

Contemplation. Meditating on the Word lets its meaning sink in and apply to our situation.

Wisdom. Wisdom and common sense, applied to the constraints of reality.

Community. Others can see what we miss and confirm or correct what we sense.

Ethics. Moral norms and natural law guide what is right.

Feeling. Feeling is one of the most common forms of guidance. We only feel about things we value; emotions signal that something we value is at stake. Since God created us with purpose, we value what fulfils that purpose. So feelings are God-given indicators of when a God-given purpose is threatened or fulfilled. But feelings are also the mode most open to distortion: “the heart is deceitful” (Jeremiah 17:9). They are God-given but affected by sin, so they need testing (see Step 5).

Mission. We may feel a compelling mission, often from a sense that major change is needed. A perceived threat or deficiency can lead to a lifelong desire to put it right; social and political reform are examples. Mission is therefore an acting out of God's natural law.

Supernatural guidance

Occasionally God speaks through:

- Prophecy (words of knowledge)
- Dreams
- Visions
- Voices
- Angels
- Circumstantial signs
- Lottery (casting lots)

These seem to occur around special events rather than daily. A unique, time-critical event creates a specific need that everyday guidance doesn't cover.

Waiting

The answer may not be immediate, so we must wait on God. God is not an automaton who must respond to every request like a machine. He has free will and chooses whether and when to respond. This applies mainly to intervention responses, rather than the natural responses built into the created order.

Step 5: Validation

We can test whether a message is from God using eleven tests in four groups. No single test is enough; they work best together.

Content: what the message says

1. **Christ.** Does it confess Jesus Christ as Lord? This is the most explicit test in the New Testament (1 John 4:2–3; 1 Corinthians 12:3).
2. **Consistency.** Is it consistent with Scripture?
3. **Accuracy.** Is it factually correct?
4. **Goodness.** Is it ethical?

Source: who brings it

5. **Declared interests.** Does the person gain money, power or status from the message? Do they accept correction? Humility and teachability are signs of good faith; self-interest is a warning sign.

Effects: what it produces

6. **Fruit.** “By their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:16). Does acting on it produce love, joy, peace, patience and the rest of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23)?

7. **Edification.** Genuine prophecy builds up, encourages and comforts (1 Corinthians 14:3). A message that only produces fear, confusion or division is suspect, even if each part is technically true.
8. **Inner peace.** The Ignatian discernment of spirits asks whether a message brings lasting peace and freedom, or agitation and compulsion. This is the most subjective test, so use it alongside the others.

Confirmation: whether it holds up

9. **Consensus.** Does the community of believers agree?
10. **Independent confirmation.** Does the same message come from independent sources?
11. **Reliability.** Is the message the same over time?

Summary

Prayer is answered in very natural ways most days. Natural law gives rise to godly missions. Unique events that need a special response may occasionally be answered through supernatural means. Such interventions are rare, and occur when special and unique circumstances call for them.