

What To Expect When We Pray?

Welcome to **Week 3** of our 21 DOP! Two weeks down and one week to go! If you have made it this far, I just want to say Thank You to those of you who have participated and want to encourage you to keep pressing in! I believe because you have honored the Lord in this time you will be better off because of it. You may not fully realize how powerful this time has been, but God is moving in special ways because we have been praying. God is also doing a work in you as well and sometimes the fruit of our labor in prayer bears fruit immediately and sometimes that fruit is yet to be realized, but rest assured God is at work and your time and effort in prayer is not wasted! If you are one who has not joined with us or you are new to VC because this is your first time I want to encourage you to join in with us this last week and make a commitment to pray with us over these next 7 days. Today we begin **Day 15** and you can pick up our 21 day Prayer Guide at NEXT if you do not have one already so you can follow along with us. We also have our last Worship and PRAYER NIGHT this Thursday at 7 so mark that on your calendar for this week and let's use this as a time to celebrate what God has done over these 21 days. If you would like to start your own 21 DOP and would like to know more about what we have been doing these last couple of weeks or if you have missed any of our messages on prayer you can catch up by watching or listening to our past messages online through our Vertical App or YouTube Channel.

In Week 1 we talked about WHY WE PRAY. Last week we talked about the specifics of HOW TO PRAY and today we are going to look at WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN WE PRAY? If you have your Bible, turn with me to **Psalm 24:1-6 (NIV)** as we prepare to open our hearts to God's word this morning.

When we understand that prayer is more of an intimate worship engagement with God than a mere listing of our needs. And when we understand the importance of prayer as a necessary element for pursuing a more intimate walk with God. We can then understand that when we neglect prayer we are failing to engage in one of the most significant disciplines in our lives.

However, I want to bring to your attention another aspect of our prayer life that is just as devastating as a PRAYERLESS life and that is to have a HINDERED PRAYER life! In other words, prayers which we offer up to God but fall on deaf ears.

What is it that hinders our prayers? What is it that keeps God from responding to our prayer petitions? Well let's take a look at our main passage for this morning

Psalm 24:1-6 (NIV) **1** The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; **2** for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters. Here, the Psalmist is accentuating the majesty and authority of God over all the earth. He is highlighting for us that He truly is unlike any other. He is awesome in power. He is worthy of adoration. He is deserving of our worship! And from our meager human perspective He is in a sense unapproachable because He is so awesome and holy. And so the psalmist asks a rhetorical question. **3** Who

may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? If God is who the Psalmist says He is then who is allowed to come before Him? The “mountain” of God is a reference to the place where God dwells. Prayer is the mechanism by which we ascend into His presence. It is the posture we are to take if we want to stand before Him. But, when we consider the magnitude and the loftiness of God who is worthy to have an audience before the KING? Who is allowed to enter in before Him and make any kind of request or statement? (Imagine an immaculate palace with pure white floors and you want to come in but your shoes are covered with mud. This is in essence what it is like for us to come before a holy God where the mud of sin covers our feet) We get a glimpse of this when Moses encounters God at the burning bush in Exodus 3. When God spoke to Him through the burning bush he was commanded to take off his sandals when he came into the presence of God for it was holy ground. Unconfessed sin is like dirty sandals. We must take them off to come before Him. In verse 4 the Psalmist gives the answer as to who may enter **4 The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.** Only those who have clean hands and a pure heart may enter. One who has proper outward motives (signified by clean hands) and one who has proper inward motives (signified by a clean heart). The evidence of this is they are not lifting up their souls to false gods (counterfeits to God) nor are they perpetuating lies and deceit by encouraging others to worship or look to these counterfeits for hope. This is not a call to perfection, but a call to live life to glorify God rather than to oppose Him. These are those who seek an intimate relationship with God and because they know sin hinders that process they want sin eliminated from their lives. **5 They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior. 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob.**

If this is who is allowed to come into the King's presence then what hinders our intimacy with God and keeps us from being able to enter before Him? It is UNCONFESSSED SIN and an UNREPENTANT HEART! Sin that is in our lives that we have not agreed with God on is unconfessed sin and our unwillingness to change/turn from that sin are the actions of an unrepentant heart. Sin must be put away just to come into God's presence.

We need to realize that before God can build some things he has to remove some things. God cannot give us more of himself when we are content with holding on to more of our own selfish desires. Let's look at some specific biblical examples of where prayers are hindered.

#1 Known sin that has not been repented of or confessed

Isaiah 59:1-3 (NIV) 1 Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God, your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. 3 For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt.

Your lips have spoken falsely, and your tongue mutters wicked things.

It is hard to have a conversation with someone when you are doing things to create distance and separation from them. Likewise with God. Our sin creates barriers and separation between us. As a result, God will not hear you until you lay down your sin and draw near to Him. Think

about the model prayer we looked at last week. Jesus started with worship before he went to petition. Why? Because we need to be reminded of who He is and allow His holiness to expose our sinfulness so that He can take our sin and exchange it for His righteousness. Then we can come near without shame!! Then we are in position for Him to hear us.

#2 Selfish desires not subjected to God's will

James 4:3 (NIV) When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

God is all about His will. When our will does not align with His we are working in opposition to Him. How then can He answer when the answer would be in direct opposition to who He is and what He is about. When you pray, what is your heart's desire? Is it for God to have His way or is it for you to get yours?

#3 Unbelief

James 1:6-7 (NIV) **6** But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. **7** That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

If you don't believe Him why then do you come to Him? If you don't listen to Him and believe what He says in His word and do it, then why would He hear you and do what you ask?

#4 Strained Relationship

Matthew 5:22-24 (NIV) **22** But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. **23** "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, **24** leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

1 Peter 3:7 (NIV) Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

We should be people of peace and we should be at peace with everyone. If someone has hurt you, because you have been forgiven by God, you should forgive them! To act contrary to these principles is to act in opposition to God and once again sin has a grip on us of which we need to repent. Who may come into His presence? Those who have clean hands and a pure heart. If not, do not expect Him to hear you when you pray.

When it comes to prayer we must humbly ask God to reveal anything that is not pleasing to Him (Examine your heart, Confess It, and Forsake It). Btw, only Jesus can cleanse you of your sin. You cannot will it away, try harder, or do better. You must simply surrender to Jesus and let Him exchange your sin for His righteousness.

The BIG QUESTION now becomes, **Should we expect God to ANSWER ALL of our PRAYERS?** Well let's look at what Jesus said. .

John 15:1-8 (NIV) "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. **2** He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. **3** You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. **4** Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. **6** If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. **7** If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8** This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Notice some key observations from this passage:

First of all, the context of John 15 is all about ABIDING in CHRIST. "Whatever you ASK" must be bathed in and birthed through a relationship with Jesus!! Secondly, your fruitfulness (that which God wants to bring about in your life is all about God's glory and proof that you have a relationship with Jesus as His disciple. Any motives or desires that fall outside of these parameters will not be honored by God as a result of your prayer. You can expect God to answer but His answer will always be in conjunction with your relationship with Him and ultimately His glory and will. The Bible is filled with answered prayers. We are commanded to pray and God promises to answer but we must ABIDE IN HIM and HIS WORD. To help us understand this further let me highlight for you **4 ways God answers our prayers:**

1) Sometimes the answer is immediate!

Matthew 14:22-31 (NIV) **22** Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. **23** After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, **24** and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. **25** Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. **26** When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. **27** But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." **28** "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." **29** "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. **30** But when

he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

When we call out to God for salvation it is immediate. We don't have to wait. Sometimes our situation is so dire that God shows up immediately right at the moment of our cry. But let's not become spoiled in these moments when God does move RIGHT NOW and expect His answer to always be immediate! Sometimes it is and then.....

2) Sometimes the answer is delayed!

John 11:1-7 (NIV) 1 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." 4 When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, 7 and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

Why does God delay in answering our prayers? Sometimes God delays in order to bring greater glory to Himself and lead people to worship Him more fully which was one of His intentions in the case of Lazarus. Mary and Martha wanted immediate results. But Jesus had something even bigger and better in mind! Sometimes He is trying to teach us something about faith! If all our answers were immediate, how could we stretch and test our faith muscles? Sometimes He is trying to teach us something deeper about who He is that would enhance our faith and our witness. In the case of Lazarus Jesus wanted to show them that He IS the resurrection! So sometimes God answers us with, "Not yet!" Are you ok with that? Do you trust Him with that? Will you let Him show you something greater?

3) Sometimes the answer is "NO"!

1 Corinthians 12:6-9 (NIV) 6 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Sometimes God is doing a deeper work in us and through us that we may not be able to see or even fully understand right now. In these times we must trust Him that He knows what is best for

our situation and for His kingdom agenda. If His answer is “NO” then God certainly will grant us what we will need in that moment. His GRACE is truly sufficient for us whatever the situation!

Sometimes the answer is different than we expected!

Luke 8:40-42 (NIV) 40 Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. **41** Then a man named Jairus, a synagogue leader, came and fell at Jesus’ feet, pleading with him to come to his house **42** because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him..”

It is at this point Jesus encounters the woman with the issue of blood. Upon touching His garment she is made well. After, taking time to acknowledging her and telling her that her faith has made her well, someone from Jarius’ house meets them and informs Jarius that his daughter has died.

Luke 8:49-50 (NIV) 49 While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” he said. “Don’t bother the teacher anymore.” **50** Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.”

I am sure this was not what Jarius had in mind. He was hoping to get Jesus to his house before she died. Now because of the pitstop they were too late.

Luke 8:51-55 (NIV) 51 When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child’s father and mother. **52** Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. “Stop wailing,” Jesus said. “She is not dead but asleep.” **53** They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. **54** But he took her by the hand and said, “My child, get up!” **55** Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat.

You pray for patience and God gives you only more difficult situations so you can practice your patience. You pray to God asking Him to alleviate the stress in your current job only to find out that the way He is going to do it is through a layoff and you getting another job. Sometimes you pray for God to heal your marriage and things only get worse because God is trying to get you both to submit to some counseling where He can really begin addressing the deeper issues between you.

God is answering our prayers but because He knows what it is going to take, He brings about a different outcome than we were expecting!! Do you trust Him! Here are two promises we need need to embrace when it comes to prayer:

Matthew 6:8 ESV Do not be like them (babbling unbelievers trying to get the attention of their false gods), for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Romans 8:26 (ESV) Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

What can we expect when we pray? We can expect that God will answer His children when they call to Him! We can expect that He will always give His children what is best! He is, after all, a faithful FATHER!! But only when his children choose to ABIDE in HIM!!!

Invitation:

Are you ABIDING in the FATHER and in His WORD? If not, what is keeping you from doing so?

Is there SIN that is hindering your PRAYER LIFE?

- **Known sin (confess and repent)**
- **Selfish desires standing in the way of God's will**
- **Unbelief**
- **Strained relationships (unforgiveness and reconciliation)**

Is PRAYER a priority in your life? Do you have a relationship with Jesus?