

April 30, 2023

I Got Questions: Week 3

How many of you believe in the power of prayer?

The good news is, prayer is incredibly powerful.

The bad news is, prayer can also be confusing.

The reason it can be confusing is because you may have seen God answer some prayers in amazing ways, God showing up in big ways. And then other times when you pray in a similar way, with a similar type of faith, believing in the same God, He didn't do what you thought He should do and knew He could do... and that brought out questions.

In *1 Kings 18*, Elijah called down fire from heaven, and burned up over 800 false prophets that were serving the false god of Baal.

Daniel was in a lion's den when he prayed, and God took starving lions and put them on an overnight diet.

John 14:13-14 (NIV)

And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Question: When a prayer went unanswered, did you ask yourself...

- Did I do something wrong?
- Is God not listening?
- Is He mad at me?
- Does He not care?

Let me build an understanding of the Nature of God in light of the Purpose of Prayer.

I. Prayer revolves around who's in the CENTER, and that's not YOU (us)!

We are not the main character in the story... The Biblical narrative focuses solely around God.

He doesn't exist to serve us, we exist to serve and glorify Him.

II.) What the Purpose of Prayer is NOT.

God is not a puppet on OUR strings, who is at our beck and call. The Purpose of Prayer is not to get God to do our will, the purpose of prayer is to know God, so we can do His will.

Some people see Him as a "Santa Claus" God. In other words, if we are good all year and do the right things, then when we pray to God, he says, "Yes, you've been a good boy and girl, therefore, you get everything you want this Christmas."

We need to understand that God is not a button to be pushed, but a relationship to be pursued.

So what we first have to understand is that the purpose of prayer is not to get God to do our will, but for us to know Him and be conformed to His will, and to do His will!

1.) Maybe you have a broken relationship that's hindering your intimacy with God?

In Mark chapter 11, Jesus was talking to His disciples. He was giving them a lesson on faith. And He was basically saying, "Hey, if you really have faith, you can ask something as crazy as for a mountain to be moved, and if you don't doubt in your heart, I'll do what you asked me to do." In verse 24 He said, "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you've received it and it will be yours."

Then in verse 25 He says, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

How many think it sounds like Jesus is adding a little bit onto His teaching about faith? It seems to be that Jesus is implying that our relationship with other people might matter when we pray to God.

A.) How many have kids? If your kids are ever fighting and they come in screaming bloody murder, he did this and she did this, and then they say, "Can we have a friend over tonight?" What's your answer?

B.) *1 Peter 3:7*- Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect, why? So that nothing will hinder your prayers.

2.) Maybe you have the wrong motives?

The Pharisees did this all the time. They would go out in their flowing robes and stand on the street corners and pray these long elaborate prayers. Not because they really loved God, but because they loved the applause of people who said, "Oh, you're so spiritual when you pray this way."

3.) Maybe when you prayed, you didn't believe God would actually do it? There could have been some lack of Faith?

Mark 9. There was this dad who had a son who was possessed by an evil spirit. So the dad cries out, "Can anyone help my boy?" And so, he goes up to the disciples, "Can you cast this demon out?" And the disciples couldn't do it.

And Jesus looked on with His disciples, "Don't you guys have faith? If you had faith, you could drive out this demon."

So the dad goes to Jesus, "IF you can do anything, IF by chance you can take pity on us and help us..."

Jesus says, "Everything is possible for the one who believes." And I love the father's honesty... I do believe, BUT help me overcome my unbelief.

Our faith really matters to God.

Look at these 3 examples:

A.) There was a woman who was bleeding for 12 years. But she knew, if I could just touch the hem of the garment I'll be healed, and she did it. Jesus turned to her and said, "Your Faith has healed you."

B.) There was an immoral woman who knelt down and worshiped at the feet of Jesus and poured expensive perfume over Him, and Jesus looked at her and said, "Your Faith has saved you."

C.) There were two blind men who said, "Heal us, heal us." And Jesus said, "Do you believe that I can?" They said, "Yes, we do believe that You can." And Jesus said, "According to your Faith, let it be done unto you," and their sight was restored!

But at the same time, we have to remember, God is still God, period.

There are some ministries that preach what's called the Prosperity Gospel, which is a distorted gospel. Their message is if you have enough faith, then God has to do what you want. That's a dangerous distortion of what scripture says, because we interpret the Bible in light of the Bible. So we don't put our faith in FAITH, we put our faith in God.

4.) Maybe God has something different in mind?

Maybe in your case, even though you really want it and really think it's best, and all logic tells you it's best, maybe God has something different?

1 John 5:14-15 (NIV)

This is the confidence that we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything... according to our wisdom, according to what we want, according to our desires, NO, scripture says, "... if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us— whatever we ask— we know that we have what we asked of Him."

Paul's Story: He did so much for God, yet he had a thorn in the flesh that he asked God to remove! If you know his story you have to believe his motives were pure. His faith was strong, and still God didn't do it.

Here's what Paul learned: "God showed me that His grace is sufficient for me, it's enough, and His power is made perfect in my weakness, my brokenness, therefore I'll boast all the more in my weakness because His strength, His goodness, His glory is made perfect when I don't get what I want and when I don't understand."

So in closing, that raises the very important question. Why even bother praying?

Sounds like you gotta have this right and that right, pray just right, and it seems God is gonna do whatever He wants anyway?

The Purpose of Prayer is not to get God to do what we want. The purpose of prayer is relational, it's to get to know God. It's to know Him intimately, so that we can do His will.

LIFE GROUP QUESTIONS WEEK 3

- 1.) How many have struggled with the confusion of not all prayers being answered during your journey?
- 2.) How good would you say your Prayer Life is? Most people struggle in this area, so it's okay to be honest! Sometimes there's not a lot of teaching on Prayer, and so people can feel intimidated in how to talk to God, or that their prayers don't seem to match up with the way other people's prayers seem to sound. Have you ever experienced any of those situations?
- 3.) Does it help to be reminded that the Purpose of Prayer is not to get God to do our will, the purpose of prayer is to know God, so we can do His will.
- 4.) What do you think Pastor Jim meant when he said, "We need to understand that God is not a button to be pushed, but a relationship to be pursued," in regards to Prayer?
- 5.) Comment on any of these points that you didn't realize or were challenged by in regard to our Prayer Life.
 - Maybe you have a broken relationship that's hindering your intimacy with God?
 - Maybe you have the wrong motives?
 - Maybe when you prayed, you didn't believe God would actually do it? There could have been some lack of Faith?
 - Maybe God has something different in mind?