

# I Have Some Questions...

Everything You Were Too Afraid to Ask God



## Week 3 – ...about Prayer

### Check - In

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... it's May! What are you looking forward to most about the coming summer "break"? Got vacation plans or weekends at the lake scheduled? Or will it all look exactly the same, just hotter and sweatier?

### Opening Prayer

God of Relationship, thank you for wanting to connect with us, give us the discipline to connect to you through prayer.

### Introduction

Welcome to week 3 of our series, "I have some questions..." where we are getting honest about the doubt we have about God, about faith, about the world we live in and committing to struggle through the answers that come with it. It's not been easy. We've covered some difficult topics and questions that get at the heart of our

struggles with faith and a God who we believe to be truly good and loving. But we've also hopefully come to an understanding that God doesn't mind it. We started, week 1, with a story that helped us see that God understands our "unbelief." God gets that we don't always see the bigger picture, that we want answers, and I would argue, even encourages us to bring our questions to him. And so that's what we've done... we've talked about why bad things happen, and the importance of free will and how we were created. We've talked about trying to understand the mind of God through questions of fairness and purpose. And today, we'll look at a third category of your questions... namely, is God listening? But first...

**Review Question: Last week, we talked about understanding what God is thinking, specifically when it comes to the notion of fairness. We talked about how God's idea of fairness isn't our idea of fairness, how God doesn't cause bad things to happen to you, and how God can help you make something good out of it, if you let Him. How do you feel about those answers? Do they make some things easier to understand? Do they still fall short? Discuss.**

## Scripture

Today's question makes something of a progression from our last two. We may understand now why bad things happen. We might even grasp what God's thinking when they do. But does that mean we're just supposed to sit here and take it when we suffer? I mean, we believe in a God who is not just all-powerful and all knowing, but who

is also supposed to be all-loving. So, who do we talk to when the bad things happen? Does God listen? What's the point of prayer? For that, let's look at a description of prayer from Paul's letter to a church in a town called Philippi.

### **Read Philippians, chapter 4, verses 6 and 7**

Unlike some of the churches Paul writes to, the Philippians weren't really doing anything wrong, (he only very briefly mentions a disagreement between two members.) Instead, Paul's letter to the Philippians is a letter of hope and encouragement, and this section speaks to the power and purpose of prayer.

**Question 1: Consider this passage. What does it say to you about prayer? Is it comforting and confirming? Does it challenge you or convict you?**

## **Reflection**

Now, if you're reading this, you probably have at least a little experience with prayer, (if nothing else, we've all invoked the name of God on the golf course or while driving through the city.) But it still begs a question that you all had some concerns about... namely, what's the point of prayer? And this comes out in various expressions, like, why pray? Does God hear my prayers? Does prayer even work? And it really bakes down to a primary question that we need to start with that will help iron out all the question these stem from, and that is, "what is prayer?"

Let's start with a slightly different question, "what *isn't* prayer?" Because, most folks seem to have the wrong idea about prayer. See, somewhere along the line, we decided that God was a magic genie in heaven who was supposed to grant our wishes, and prayer is the lamp that makes it happen. And so, when we ask the questions that deal with the misunderstandings we have of prayer, they are built on this very assumption... that prayer is asking God to grant our wishes. And if that's all we view prayer as, we've completely missed the boat and have diminished the beauty and richness and depth of what prayer really is.

**Question 2: What do you find yourself praying about most? Is there a specific area of your life that seems to dominate your conversations with God? Why do you think you keep coming back to this particular topic?**

Okay, that's what prayer *isn't*. Let's talk about what prayer *is*. Because, when we get a grasp on what prayer actually is, these other questions answer themselves. So, what is prayer? Let's look at it this way... think of your closest companion. If all that person ever did was ask you for stuff, what kind of relationship would that be? The obvious answer is, not much of one, right? You would never get to know the other person. You'd never develop any sense of depth to the relationship. You'd never see their value. They would simply come across as needy. It certainly doesn't feel sincere, because they're showing no interest in who you are. Let's connect the dots... if *we're*

the bad friend in the relationship, if all we ever do is ask God for stuff, what kind of relationship is that? We'd never get to know God. There's no depth or substance to the relationship.

See, in any relationship, communication is *the key* to its health. A healthy relationship has healthy communication. It means learning about the other person and the other person learning about us, showing interest and being inquisitive, stopping to listen when the other person speaks. God just wants to have that kind of relationship with you... a healthy relationship with healthy communication. And so, prayer should simply be our conversation with God, with the same purpose as communicating with any person... to build a deeper, healthy relationship with Him. You can ask for things, it's okay. But don't make it the only thing. Just talk as you would with a friend. Spend the time. And do a lot of listening. When we look at prayer that way, the prayer absolutely *does* work and God *does* listen. Because you're simply deepening the relationship through conversation.

**Question 3: Analyze your prayer life. Do you find yourself just asking God for stuff? Or do you have more of a balance in your practice of prayer? Maybe go back to the 6 types of prayer from last series and consider which you do the most and which you do the least.**

"Okay, but, I still would like to know what God wants for my life? I want to do God's will... how do I know what that is?" one of you asked. Great question! Even if the purpose of prayer is supposed to be conversation to deepen the relationship, you would still ask a trusted

friend for advice, right? So, how do we know what God is saying to us? Let's spend some time answering that question. There are three typical responses, and the first is this: when was the last time you stopped and were quiet enough or calm enough for long enough to listen? Many of us ask God something, then never take the time to listen for the answer. God doesn't like to shout, so if you really want an answer... get quiet, turn off the noise, and listen.

Now, we don't always get a burning bush like Moses or an angel like Mary, so how does God speak to us and how do we know it? Well, there are many ways God communicates, but here is a quick summary. First, God likes to speak through other people. Occasionally, it's obvious. You pray for something and someone out of the blue gives you the unmistakable answer. Sometimes, it's not that obvious, so look for what Pastor Mike calls the "Rule of 3." If three unrelated, disparate people say the same thing to you, and couldn't have colluded to do so, you might want to listen. You can also make this one intentional. Go talk to someone who has the gift of discernment. They can help you sort out what God might be trying to tell you.

And finally, another way God speaks to us is through the Bible. We call the Bible "The Word of God." We speak to others through words. If we want to hear God's words, maybe we should consult THE Word. (See how that ties into a neat little bow?) When was the last time you opened the Bible looking for a conversation with God? Instead of reading it for *study*, try reading it asking yourself what God is trying to tell you through it.

**Question 4: Part 1) Think about these methods of discernment. Do you utilize them? Which do you feel you need to take better advantage of? Who is a mentor to whom you could turn in order to help your discernment process? Part 2) Is there something you're trying to discern?**

## **Closing**

There was one more question that gets at the heart of our questions about prayer. Someone asked, "how do we wait for God to answer our prayers, or realize when it's a "no"?" This question is more difficult. "How do I *know* when it's a "no"? Well, first, go back to the things we just said about discernment... talk to others, look for God's words to you, and listen. But there's one more thing that will help. And for that, let's go back to our Scripture for today. Paul says, "tell God what you need, and then you'll get everything you want." Right? No, it doesn't say that. It doesn't say God will just grant our wishes and we'll get what we want. Instead, it says, when we tell God what we need, when we pray for something or ask about God's will in our lives, it's not about getting an answer. Instead, Paul says the point of prayer is this: "Then you will experience God's peace." (v. 6) When we deepen that relationship, when we tell God what we think we need, and give those things over to Him... we will experience His peace. And God promises to guard our hearts and minds, and that's a beautiful thing. So, how do we know when it's a "no"? We might not... but Paul says that's not the point, anyway. God has promised to protect us, so, sure, tell God what you think you need. But then live the life you have

in front of you, and trust God with the outcome. So, “What’s the point of prayer?” The point of prayer is to deepen that relationship through communication, and to unburden ourselves from the things we’re struggling with, and to ultimately receive God’s peace.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations and close in prayer.**