

Problems With Prayer

“You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives...”

– James 4:2-3

Understanding "Delayed" Answers

– Does Prayer Really Influence God? –

One of the most difficult philosophical questions about prayer:

- **Tread with caution:** it is always difficult, even dangerous, wading when we begin to ask God, “Why?”
- **The commands and examples are not difficult:** choose righteousness, pray always, trust God!
- **BUT**, sometimes the question lingers: **how can prayer really affect the will of an omniscient God?**
- **If His course is set, how can it be swayed by us?**
 - Ecc 7:13-14; Jonah 3:9; etc.

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Different types of givers:

- The giver who is **easily influenced by others**, perhaps only giving because it is forced upon him
 - The giver who is **very generous, but waits** to be asked and judges whether the cause is worthy
 - The giver who is **very generous and takes initiative** to find ways to give
- **Which one of these givers is most like God?**
- **#3! Think of Salvation! Ephesians 2:1-10!**

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Where does man's will fit into God's plans for giving?

1. **God knows and has always known all things –**
Is 46:9-10; Acts 15:18
2. **God knows and longs to give all things that you truly need –** Matt 6:8; Ps 34:8-9, 68:19; etc.
3. **God commands us to ask and pray –** Ps 50:15;
Ps 107:28-32; Jer 33:3; Matt 7:7; I John 5:14-15

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CONCLUSION: Before time began, God decided to grant your needs when you humbly trust Him and ask in prayer!

- When you refuse to pray, you are effectively closing the door to God's desire to help.
- When your will and God's will meet in prayer, His eternal plan for you is expressed in His answer.
- **Examples** – Jer 26:1-5; Jonah 3:5-10; Ex 32:11-14
- **God's purpose does not change, but your prayers play a part in His action!**

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Analogy: Think about God's actions and your own will in regards to salvation.

- He has always known who would choose to be saved and who would refuse to be saved (e.g. Rom 8:29)
- He has always yearned to save everyone (e.g. I Tim 2:4; II Pet 3:9)
- He only saves anyone when they choose to turn to Him (e.g. Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38, 17:30)
- **That action, of turning to God in submissive obedience (i.e. baptism), is described as an embodied prayer (I Pet 3:21)!**

Understanding "Delayed" Answers

– Does Prayer Really Influence God? –

- **God always knew when it would happen, and planned to wait for you to make His will your own!**

“Listen again: *"Call unto Me, and I will answer thee and shew thee great things and difficult which thou knowest not."* If a man call he has already turned his face towards God. His will has acted, and acted doubly; away from the opposite, and *towards* God, a simple step but a tremendous one. The calling is the point of sympathetic contact with God where their purposes become the same. The caller is beset by difficulties and longs for freedom. The God who speaks to him saw the difficulties long ago and eagerly longed to remove them. Now they have come to agreement. And through this willing will God eagerly works out His purpose.”

– S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks On Prayer*

Understanding "Delayed" Answers

– Does Prayer Really Influence God? –

Further points that must be understood:

- God will not give you everything you ask if your prayer is not according to His purpose (e.g. II Sam 12;13ff; Matt 26:36ff)
- Even when your humble prayer is in accordance with His will, sometimes the answer is delayed (see *Lesson 2: Persistence In Prayer*)
- *God's power is not limited:* He still may act in your favor even without your prayer, but only if He so chooses!

Dealing With A Frustrated Prayer-Life

“The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their cry...
The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them;
He delivers them from all their troubles.”

– Ps 34:15,17

- What an awesome privilege and assurance!
- Prayer should be naturally and enthusiastically embraced!
- So why don't we pray as we ought, bringing guilt?
- Why do we pray and not receive what we desire?
- Why is God's answer often delayed?

Missing Out On Quality Prayer Time

- The *examples* – Luke 5:16; Acts 6:4, 10:2; Rom 1:9
 - The *exhortations* – Col 4:2; I Thes 5:17; Phil 4:6
 - The ***excuses***:
 - “*I’m too busy!*” ...Try listing the things *you find time for!*
 - “*Prayer is uncomfortable.*” ...Yet you do it when you feel the need!
 - “*I don’t know how to pray!*” ...The Scriptures are full of what you need to learn!
- **The REALITY:** “I don’t feel the need, I don’t have the right attitude, and I won’t make the effort!”

Missing Out On Quality Prayer Time

- “*You do not ask*” - this is an old problem (Jam 4:2)
- **The *SOLUTION*:**
 - A sense of dependence on God – when you feel a need for God, no one has to persuade you to pray!
 - Job 21:14 vs. Ps 73; Acts 17:25; Jam 1:17
 - A realization of who God is – when we stop to truly contemplate our position before God, prayer (and confession) follows!
 - Job 21:15 vs. Ps 63; 143:5-6; Isa 6:5; Luke 5:8

Missing Out On Quality Prayer Time

- Learn to ***honestly assess*** how many ways you need God's love, power and faithfulness!
 - Does your life and lack of prayer effectively tell God that you don't need Him day to day?
- Learn to ***make time*** to pray continually!
 - Turn off your phones, TVs and log off the computer occasionally!
 - Use moments of waiting, wasting to talk to God!
- Learn to ***think carefully*** on who God is, what He has done, and who you are before Him!
 - Meditate and ponder: *who are you without Him?*

Praying But **Not Receiving**

- “*You ask and do not receive*” – another old problem (Jam 4:3)
- **Ps 39:12** – Why did the Bible writers sometimes feel like God was not listening?
- What hinders our prayers from being heard and answered?

Praying But **Not Receiving**

1. Sin Hinders Prayer

- **Is 1:15** – Why wasn't God listening?
 - vs. 4, 16-17 – Sin had cut off their lifeline to Him!
- **Is 59:1-2** – “Your sins have separated you from God...,” cf. Prov 28:9;
 - May evil never become so familiar that it is no longer offensive to us on every level!
- **Is 64:6-7** – If we refuse to listen to Him, why should we expect Him to listen to us?

Praying But **Not Receiving**

2. Selfish Motives Hinder Prayer

- NOT just praying for self: this is an important part of prayer (e.g. Phil 4:6-7)
- *Problem:* praying only with a view toward self and not toward others and God's will!
- **Jam 4:3** – "...because you ask [wickedly], that you may spend it on your pleasures" (NASU)
- How often do we pray, even for good things, only to benefit *self*?

Praying But **Not Receiving**

3. Lack of Faith Hinders Prayer

- **Jam 1:5-8** – “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting...”
 - Rote, traditional, heartless prayers (Matt 15:7)
 - Prayers offered only as a last resort (Jon 1:6)
 - Prayers offered with an arrogant spirit (Luke 18:11)
- “*Faith*” does not require a complete understanding of everything God might do!
- “*Faith*” is an obedient trust that God *will* do!

Praying But **Not Receiving**

The SOLUTION:

- 1. *Strive to live in holiness*** – Is 64:8-9; I Pet 3:10-12
 - Starting with ***confession!*** See I John 1:9-10.
- 2. *Magnify God's will in prayer*** – Matt 26:36ff; I John 5:14-15
 - Prayers full of self leave no room for God and His wisdom! See Jam 4:4-10.
- 3. *Grow in faith through the Scriptures*** – Rom 10:17
 - Looking at the evidence, what reason is there to doubt God's faithfulness?

