

## Prayer Examined

### *Prayer*

Have you ever considered prayer?

Let's start by looking at personal prayer...

I was looking at several definitions of prayer and I came across something interesting. One source said that in personal prayer we approach God and ask that the laws of the universe be annulled on behalf of a single petitioner, usually ourselves, who has already confessed their unworthiness to ask.

Is this correct? It makes several points:

- When we ask God for something we are asking that the usual course of events be suspended and that something atypical happens.
- The nominal outcome is to be changed and that the laws of the universe be placed on hold or eliminated in the situation for a single petitioner.
- We in and of ourselves are not worthy to ask... But, we are NOW worthy because of the righteousness Christ has imputed to us.

When we pray it is a serious thing. We are engaging with our Father, the God of the universe and asking for a divine dispensation of the natural laws in favor of something miraculous.

A couple of points need to be made here:

- God knows everything
- God can do anything
- God is willing to help you, but maybe not in the way you see that help coming
- God always gives an answer to prayer. This doesn't necessarily mean he is going to do whatever you want. Sometimes His answer is "wait", sometimes the answer is "No" but, sometimes we are favored with a "Yes"
- God is divine and is sovereign. His will is paramount

This means that we don't always get what we ask for. We cannot demand things be done from our king. We ask reverently and he decides to answer or not as he severally will.

God has plans for us:

Jeremiah 29:11

*For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

Whatever happens it is for our good:

Romans 8:28

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Frequently I will hear... But pastor, what about John 14:14 where the word says:

*You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

In John Chapter 14 we find Jesus telling his disciples about going to be with the Father. He continues and explains that He and the Father are one. He and the Father are never in contradiction with each other in Goals, plans or objectives. Jesus says that he is in the Father and the Father is in him. This is significant, because Jesus has been granted all authority. He says that even greater things shall we do. He has said that he will do what we ask in his name, but what does that mean? Is it only invoking the name of Jesus?

What we see here is Jesus walking in the will of the Father and doing amazing miracles. We see that Jesus is communicating with the Father in prayer. We see that his prayers are answered. Jesus is in the will of the Father.

When we walk in the will of the Father, he will do whatever we ask to see it done. It is for his glory, for his kingdom established here.

Do you see the model here?

Jesus shows us the path of obedience to God. He then goes on to tell us of the Holy Spirit that will come and advocate for us, lead us and guide us. In John 14:23,24 Jesus lays out the necessity of obedience in our Christian walk. He says: *“Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”*

Let me lay it out:

- Jesus is Gods Son
- Jesus was granted all authority
- Jesus has said that we must be obedient to God
- Jesus demonstrated walking in the will of the Father
- Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, healed the blind, cured the leper, etc.
- Jesus said greater things shall we do
- Jesus has made us join heirs with him

God the Father has said in Hebrews 11:6:

*"...without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."*

If you want your prayers answered there are several things that you must do:

- Come before the throne reverently and ask for what you need
- Do not order or demand that God do something. Come as a supplicant
- When you pray set aside some time to pray
- Ask yourself, would this request be in line with God's will?
- Pray reminding God of what he is and what he has said he will do
- Ask boldly as a child of the king for God's favor in your need
- Ask with the expectation that God will do what is best for you
- Ask knowing that you will receive an answer. It might not be the one you expect
- Ask in FAITH believing that God can and does do miraculous things
- Don't condemn another's faith, should God decide not to act on their behalf immediately. He has his reasons.
- Be persistent
- Be passionate about your request

Persistence is needed in prayer. God knows your needs, but he wants you to choose to bring them to Him. Let's think about persistence for a minute here:

Jesus said: Ask (Keep on asking) and it shall be given unto you. He said knock (Keep on knocking) and it shall be opened unto you. He said seek (Don't give up) and ye shall find.

God wants our praise, our adoration, our persistence and our perseverance:

Jeremiah 29:13 lays it out clearly: *"You will seek me and find me when you see me with all your heart"*

God wants us to be passionate in our prayers. He wants us to express our hope, feelings, desires and dreams to him. In short he wants relationship with you. That relationship is like a loving Father to a child.

My friends it is not easy to take when we are passionate about a need and we bring it to God and he replies with: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." This is what he said to Paul after all.

Sometimes divine dispensation amounts to you having to go through a circumstance but God's grace will assure your victory over it.

God answers prayer!

Let's look at James 4:2 NASB

*You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask*

From which we get the oft' coined phrase you have not because you ask not. But as we move down to verse 3 we find the criteria for why when we ask we don't get what we are asking for...

Here now the word of the Lord:

*"You ask and do not receive, because you ask, with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."*

So motive matters in receiving what we ask for...

But what about John 16:23,24?

*"In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full."*

Seems like a blank cheque doesn't it? Except for the fact that motive, intention and heart matter. What this tells us is that Jesus want's us to live an abundant life and life full of joy. Elsewhere he tells us that we must be obedient to the Father.

So let's switch gears for just a minute and look at the benefits of being obedient to God.

Turn with me to Luke 5:1-9 NASB

*Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat. When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but [b]I will do as You say and let down the nets." When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; so they signalled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' [c]feet, saying, "Go away*

*from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!" 9 For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish, which they had taken;*

Does it make sense there are more fish on one side of the boat? Nope, what we have here is a suspension of the natural order to make way for a miraculous event. The thing to note here is that even though it may have seemed crazy, they still obeyed and as a result reaped the harvest of their faith. Simon Peter was a learned fisherman and he knew a miracle when he saw it. God wanted to bless Simon Peter. Simon Peter obeyed God. Simon Peter nearly sank his boat over the abundance of God's blessing.

Okay let me put this in a real life example for you. Remember when you were a kid and you were told to do something? Remember how you may have argued about doing it. Remember how you may have "forgotten" to do it. Maybe some of you out there were totally obedient and never strayed, but I doubt it. You may not like what I am about to say, but I think it is true...

As adults we really haven't changed all that much. Ask yourself this morning, Do I treat God, like I used to treat my parents?

When we hear from God do we hesitate, procrastinate, argue, find excuses or act as if we didn't know what we were supposed to do?

So many of us long time Christians have forgotten Jeremiah 29:11. God has plans for us. He wants to prosper us.

Here's a thought... We need to try not to get in the way of that...

Let's examine the difference between forced obedience and willing obedience?

- Forced Obedience:
  - No Choice
  - Fear of rebellion
  - Weakness of purpose
  - Selfishness
  - Self-centeredness
  - Low self-esteem
  - A sense of separation
  
- Free & Willing Obedience
  - A choice
  - Love
  - Trust
  - A sense of togetherness
  - A symmetry of purpose
  - Strength of will

- Self-Confidence
- Self-Awareness
- A sense of rightness

I think that is pretty self-explanatory. So let's press on to what God's word has to say about it

\*Don't have a source for this...

1. Obedience shows several things:

- Obedience shows that a person is wise: Matthew 7:24
- Obedience shows true love: John 14:21
- Obedience shows that God is worthy of one's obedience: Acts 5:29
- Obedience shows that Jesus Christ is indeed God in the flesh: John 7:17

2. Obedience assures several things:

- Obedience assures one of a successful life: Joshua 1:8 Obedience assures entrance into the kingdom of heaven: Matthew 7:21; Luke 8:21
- Obedience assures the mercy of God: Exodus 20:6
- Obedience assures that that person is a member of God's Family: Matthew 12:50; Mark 3:35
- Obedience assures one of being blessed: Luke 11:28; Deuteronomy 11:27
- Obedience assures that one knows the truth: John 7:17
- Obedience assures the abiding presence of God, the Father and of Jesus Christ: John 14:23
- Obedience assures deliverance from one's enemies: Exodus 23:22
- Obedience assures one that God will be his/her God and that all things will work out for his/her good: Jeremiah 7:23
- Obedience assures one of being loved by God and the Lord Jesus: John 15:10
- Obedience assures one of a good and longer life: Deuteronomy 4:40
- Obedience assures one of being a friend with the Lord Jesus: John 15:14-15

3. Obedience is better than the best sacrifice one can offer: (better than anything else)

- 1 Samuel 15:22
- Hebrews 10:5-7

What about prayer not for stuff or a need for ourselves or others, but just to spend time with God?

Let me tell you a little anecdote about Abraham Lincoln:

“Imagine what a heavy schedule of appointments President Abraham Lincoln had to keep day after day. Yet when an elderly woman with no official business in mind asked to see him, he graciously consented.

As she entered Lincoln's office, he rose to greet her and asked how he might be of service. She replied that she had not come to ask a favor. She replied that she had not come to ask a favor. She had heard that the President liked a certain kind of cookie, so she had baked some for him and brought them to his office.

With tears in his eyes, Lincoln responded, "You are the very first person who has ever come into my office asking not, expecting not, but rather bringing me a gift. I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

God loves you.

James Packer in his book *Your Father Loves you* said this:

“The aim of prayer is not to force God's hand or make him do our will against his own, but to deepen our knowledge of him and our fellowship with him through contemplating his glory, confessing our dependence and need, and consciously embracing his goals. Our asking therefore must be according to God's will and in Jesus' name.

The context of such asking is assured faith. In that day when Jesus teaches them, by the Spirit, plainly of the Father, there will be no question of enlisting Jesus' support in prayer, as if he were more merciful than the Father or could influence him in a way that they could not; in that day they will know inwardly that as believers they are the Father's beloved.

To ask in Jesus' name is not to use a verbal spell but to base our asking on Christ's saving relationship to us through the cross; this will involve making petitions which Christ can endorse and put his name to. When God answers in Jesus' name, he gives through Jesus as our mediator and to Jesus as the one who will be glorified through what is given.”

God wants to bless you abundantly. Let me give you a historical example of how I see God views our petitions:

Who has heard of Alexander the Great?

Alexander the Great had within his court a philosopher who had a keen insight, and outstanding ability. This philosopher was good at his craft but had very little money to show for it. He came before Alexander the Great and asked for some financial help. Alexander the Great told him to draw whatever he needed from the imperial treasury. But when the man requested an amount equal to \$50,000 in that day, he was categorically refused. The Treasurer could not believe that such a large sum of funds was authorized and so proceeded to have the request verified with Alexander the Great. When told about the situation and asked what to do, Alexander the great said: “Pay the money at once. The philosopher has done me a singular honor. Buy

the largeness of his request he shows that he has understood both my wealth and generosity.

When we petition God do we place our limitations on him? Do we come before the throne with a vision in line with his purposes? Do we understand who we are talking with?

Let's look at another example from history. I ask you to consider Julius Caesar of whom it was said that on one occasion when Caesar gave a person a very valuable present, the receiver replied that it was too costly a gift. But Caesar replied that it was not too great for Caesar to give. Our God is mighty and he delights to bless us abundantly.

You know If I had Christ praying for me in my office here in Salmo right now, I know I could overcome anything...

...This morning, it makes no difference because he is praying for me!

Let me give one final example... In his book Born for Battle Author R. Arthur Matthews says something really significant with regards to our intimacy in prayer:

The central significance of prayer is not in the things that happen as results, but in the deepening intimacy and unhurried communion with God at His central throne of control in order to discover a "sense of God's need in order to call on God's help to meet that need" (E. M. Bounds, The Weapon Of Prayer).

To quote Florence Allshorn, "We still struggle to put Him first in a vague and limited way. I must pray till Jesus Christ hears me and gives me what I need. I am important, the great "I." We must not miss the great truth that I am for Him primarily. It is a soul-shaking fact that I am not looking into some far-off sky where Someone is hidden to whom I cry;...but that He Himself has said "There is a place by my side." I must see from there or I will not see; I must look at things from His standpoint..."

Today we must stand ready to pray, to listen and then respond. When we pray we must pray with a sense of expectation. We must be committed to seeing God's hand move.

In short:

Talk to God

Ask in Expectation

Approach the throne boldly and passionately

Don't sell God short on his desire to make your life abundant

Prayer.

