

ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE PART 2

An Honest Question...

“And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” (Mt. 21:22)

Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.”

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mk. 11:23-24) Used to ask to fly. Maybe I just didn’t have enough faith.

- When it comes to God answering our prayers, what can we really expect? (Mt. 7:7-8; Jn. 14:13)

I’m not talking about hope. I think we’d all agree that we can pray and hope, but I want to know what I can expect? And even more specifically, how does faith relate to all of this. If I had prayed in faith and believed it to be so, might I have flied? Did I not believe hard enough Had I had more faith in God’s power and willingness to heal would my grandmother who died 2 years ago still be alive? What can I really expect when I pray?

And I can’t tell you how much damage getting this answer wrong has done to so many people in many cases because of preachers have taught them that God wants them to be rich and healthy and if they simply believe that, they will receive it. Name it and claim it. Creflo Dollar. “When we pray, believing that we have already received what we are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass. ... It is a key to getting results as a Christian.” This is the lie that so many people believe especially in what’s called the word-faith movement and people influenced by it. If you believe it then you receive it. It’s not true. And this ideas has been so damaging to people’s faith.

Joyce Meyer in a stunning admission: “I’m glad for what I learned about prosperity, but it got out of balance. I’m glad for what I learned about faith, but it got out of balance. And so every time somebody had a problem in their life was ‘cause they didn’t have enough faith. If you got sick you didn’t have enough faith. If you’re child died you didn’t have enough faith. Well, that’s not right...there’s nowhere in the Bible where we’re promised that we won’t have any trouble. I don’t care how much faith you’ve got, you’re not going to avoid ever having trouble in your life. Jesus said in the world there will be tribulation, but cheer up I have overcome the world.”

And yet if believing you’ve received it doesn’t mean we’ll get what we pray for what does it mean? Let’s not pretend this is just an interesting question to consider. There are people all over this room that have been praying for years...but what can you expect. I don’t know that I’ll be able to answer all of your questions, but I’m convinced that if you track with me for the next 30 minutes or so, you will walk out of here with significantly improved framework for setting your expectations when it comes how God is going to answer your prayers.

How Does God Answer Prayer?

- God *usually* answers prayer through natural means not miracles. (Mt. 9:38)

Truck, row, boat helicopter. The normal way God answers prayers is through the natural or normal means. We mentioned this last week with respect to how we ask God for things but I want to spend a few minutes talking about this as it relates to what we expect from God in answering our prayers.

If I’m sitting in my home and I say, God I’m hungry will you give me bread like you did when you fed the five-thousand? How has God designed to answer that prayer? To have food appear? By me getting up and getting something from the kitchen. That is means by which God has designed to feed me and answer my prayer for food. God I pray that you would help me get some extra money to pay the rent this month because I had to get

new brakes put on my car. Check just shows up for the exact amount. You ask your landlord for an extension, they agree but impose a small fine on you. You ask your boss if you can pick up 2 extra shifts. He says yes you work and get the money and give it to the land lord. Did God answer your prayer? Yes.

Now you may say, that's not God answering your prayer you kind of did it yourself. God answered my prayer through my effort. And if that's not satisfying then we need to ask ourselves when we ask God to do something are we asking him to work through us or work instead of us. That's just praying for miracles. God intends to answer your prayers through means and many of them involve your effort. "Pray and then start answering your prayer." (Deane Edwards) For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat." (2 Thess. 3:10). "...therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Mt. 9:38) God doesn't say, "Pray that they'd hear the Gospel."

- o ~~Lord, just make me patient.~~ Lord, give me an opportunity to learn patience this week.

So when you pray expect God to work through the normal through which He has revealed that he works. Don't just pray make me patient. Lord, give me an opportunity to learn patience this week. You ask for patience he answers with natural means he puts someone really annoying in your path. Give me friends—join a small group. Increase my faith—he might give you suffering. Help with porn addiction—might get caught. So realize God usually answers prayer though normal means and also when it comes to expectation we need to understand that...

- God often answers prayer by giving us our ultimate desire rather than our specific request. (Eph. 3:20-21)

Eph. 3:20 tells us that God is able to do exceedingly more than we could ask or imagine. And it's oftentimes the case that when we come to God with a request he gives us what more that we could have ever imagined but it's not the specific thing we ask for. It's better.

- "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses." —Henry Ford

Ford quote. Stranded man gets a Ferrari 458 Italia. Me asking to be a musician and becoming a preacher. Keller "God will only give you what you would have asked for if we knew everything he knew."

So...What Can We Expect?

3 answers: yes, no, wait.

- Expect a "Yes" if your prayer...

- o ...is based on God's promises. (Deut. 7:9)

Js. 1:6. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind." Forgiveness 1 Jn. 1:9. Mt 28 make disciples and I will be with you. "And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." (Lk 12:11-12)

- o ...is consistent with general revelation. (Mt. 4:7)

General revelation is how God has revealed himself in nature and conscience. Gravity—Drop something. Splash—ripples. Cough. Opportunity to learn patience this week. Opportunity to learn humility. Spouse. Now there's still a variety of prayers that don't fall under either of these categories that we'll address in a second.

- Expect a "No" if your prayer...

- o ...is contrary to God's Word. (Ps. 119:11)

There are so many things you don't have to pray about. God please help this lie work. God I know how I'm running my business or serving as an employee is unethical but I ask that you'd bless it because it makes a lot of money. God I'm in a sexual relationship with someone that's not my spouse and I just pray that you'd bless it.

God clearly forbids those things and so it's absurd that anyone would ask God's blessing on something that is completely inconsistent with his character and with His word....And as it relates to his Word there are some specific instances where God has told us that we shouldn't expect him to answer our prayers.

- Are you trying to understand your wife? (1 Pet. 3:7)

“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

And...if you're living in sin...

- “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” (Ps. 66:18)

If you're living in sin, don't expect God to answer.

- o ...is *inconsistent* with general revelation. (Mt. 4:7)

Now remember when we're talking about general revelation in this context, we're talking about the way God has designed his universe and the way he has consistently interacted with it. I said earlier if I drop this pen it will fall—but what if I pray in faith that it won't? Forcing God to do a miracle—putting him to the test. Mt. 4:7—Jesus quoting Deut. 6:16.

And yet I feel like we pray for these kinds of things all of the time. God I know I didn't pay attention in class or study but please help me make a good grade. God I know I'm living a lifestyle that I can't afford but would you please help me pay the bills? In my observations I've found that many of our prayers are asking suspend the way he's designed his creation to operate just for us and God may do that—but we can't expect him to—that is to if you're constantly expecting God to do miracle after miracle in response to prayers for your normal every day life, it's misguided. God has designed for you to make a worse grade, be in financial stress if you don't...

Now let me bring this point home for you. What about someone who has stage 4 cancer that is highly metastasized. What has God shown he plans to do if he brings them to the point of stage 4 cancer to bring them home. And so I'm praying for healing. I'm hoping for healing, but I'm in this sort of case I'm not expecting it. Well that's because you don't believe! It's because you don't have enough faith!! No, we're placing our faith in two different things. You're putting your faith in a result, I'm putting my faith in the character and promises of God.

So what does it mean to pray in faith, I am not saying that I have faith in a specific outcome, I'm saying that I have faith in God that he will act in a way that is consistent with his infinitely wise infinitely loving character. And so for the believer who has the stage 4 highly metastasized cancer, I'm praying in faith that God will either heal you from death or through death—and I am believing either way that he will heal you.

So when it comes to things that are contrary to God's revealed will, we are right to pray and hope for a yes but it's not a lack of faith to expect a no.

- o ...is centered on your convenience and idols (Jas. 4:3)

- Are the majority of your prayers essentially for your life to be easier and more comfortable?

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” (Jas. 4:3) What's he saying, he's saying that often times, we ask God to give us our idols—the things we're really living for—the things that truly satisfy us. Maybe it's the praise of man, that's what we want. Prov. 27:4, “Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.” God give me career success so people will respect me. God give me a beauty so people admire me. One of the idols I feel like we tempted to hope in and the pray for non-stop especially in America is comfort and convenience. And if you don't believe me, ask yourself this question: are the majority of your prayers essentially for your life to be easier and more comfortable? I feel like these kinds of prayers make up such a large % of our requests. “God help me have an easy day with little suffering, void inconvenience...” Is this us? I think if your prayers are for those things, you shouldn't expect a yes, but no. Jesus said if they hated me they will also hate you. In this world there will be tribulation but take heart I have overcome the world. Is it not instructive that when Paul prays for persecuted Christians he

NEVER prays that things would get easier? He never asks for more pleasant circumstances? Rather he asks that believers would be faithful in those circumstances. That they would fight the good fight of faith. Prayer isn't a tool for convenience is an instrument of war. War against sin, in our hearts sin in the lives of others, war for God's glory and kingdom. It's a concierge service. But so often that's how we treat it.

Piper "The number one reason why prayer malfunctions in the hands of a believers is that they try to turn a wartime walkie-talkie into a domestic intercom... Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission. It is as though the field commander (Jesus) called in the troops, gave them a crucial mission ("Go and bear fruit"), handed each of them a personal transmitter coded to the frequency of the general's headquarters, and said, "Comrades, the general has a mission for you. He aims to see it accomplished. And to that end he has authorized me to give each of you personal access to him through these transmitters. If you stay true to his mission and seek his victory first, he will always be as close as your transmitter, to give tactical advice and to send in air cover when you or your comrades need it." But what have millions of Christians done? They have stopped believing that we are in a war. No urgency, no watching, no vigilance, no strategic planning. Just easy peacetime and prosperity. And what did they do with the walkie-talkie? They tried to rig it up as an intercom in their cushy houses and cabins and boats and cars - not to call in fire power for conflict with a mortal enemy, but to ask the maid to bring another pillow to the den." Oh friends let us not use prayer as a way to try and get a smooth easy life. And so when it comes to prayer and expectation I think you can expect God to answer your prayer with a yes if it's based on his promises and general revelation, I think you can expect a no if your prayer contradicts God's word, is inconsistent with general revelation, or fundamentally for comfort and ease. Which brings us to the last kind of answer...Wait.

One Hope...

- The God of all the earth will do right. (Gen. 18:25)

Prayer for salvation. Prayer for our marriage. Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" Yes, No, Wait. We know God hears us because one day He didn't hear Jesus. (Mt. 7:46)