

Teach Us to Pray - Class 6 Teaching Notes

Purpose: To help any disciple have a meaningful and consistent prayer life by (1) learning from Scripture, (2) hearing from seasoned disciples, and (3) addressing common obstacles to prayer.

Review: last week: prayer panel – list of resources in the back (?) / week before: Why pray? God is sovereign

Review: Why Pray? God is sovereign.

- Real question: Is prayer effective?
- Scripture demonstrates and teaches that prayer is effective.
- We looked at two truths that we must hold together: God is sovereign, humans are responsible – these truths aren't contradicted by the other.
- We saw that the "why pray?" question was one of many like it that question the validity of human agency. God has ordained prayer as an effective and secondary means of His will. God's sovereignty can actually catalyze prayer instead of undermine it!
- There is great mystery involved and we quickly hit the ceiling of our understanding.

Follow-up on two weeks ago:

1. Resource – Bruce Ware's chapter
2. Great additional question on the topic: How does our existence, confined to time, and God's existence, outside of time intersect with prayer?
3. This is a good reminder to remember that God is not bound to time but is able to work within history/time. You can probably see why seeing the past, present and future simultaneously affords God a different ability to "respond" to our prayers.

This morning we are approaching the same question, "is prayer effective?", but from a different vantage point. We're not looking at God's character and the supposed obstacles there but we're looking at this question from the vantage point of the person praying.

Q: Why would our experience in prayer be a potential obstacle in doubting that prayer is effective?

What We Feel: Sometimes we don't feel like God answers!

- Common experience
- Psalm examples: 10:1, 13:1-2, 22:1-2, 38:21-22, 42:3, 44:23-26; How long-13x/ 40:1-3
- "if we felt certain of visible results within sixty seconds of every prayer, there would be holes in the knees of every pair of Christian-owned pants in the world!" (Donald Whitney, p. 69, *Spiritual Discipline of the Christian Life*)

This morning's obstacle is this: Why pray? It doesn't work!

I'd like for you to have discussion with a few others around you around two things:

- What is being assumed behind this objection to prayer?
- Imagine that a friend approaches you and says, "God doesn't seem to be answering my prayers these days, why not?" What would a helpful response be? What questions might you ask?

Let's answer these questions with compassion, knowing that we have all been in the position of being disappointed in not receiving answers to prayer.

Answers from the class

Question #1 - What is being assumed behind this objection to prayer?

Assumptions

- *Working means getting the answer you want (yes), not simply getting an answer*
- *Working is defined by the one praying and not by the one who might have something better in mind.*
- *"God has not given us His promises and the privilege of prayer in order that we might use them to pound a demanding fist upon the table before God and compel Him to do what we ask." (O Hallesby, 49)*
- *Beware of praying for an outcome alone! O Hallesby – 60.*

What Scripture might be cited to support that prayer should "work"?

Scripture of response in prayers:

- *Jn. 14:13-14, 15:7-8, 16; 16:23*
- *Mk. 11:24*

Rephrasing: Why am I not yet seeing or experiencing God's good answer to my prayer?

- "not yet" – assumes that God will or has answered each prayer in time
- "seeing or experiencing" – opens us up to the possibility that prayer and times of waiting can be formative and spiritually beneficial;
- "God's good answer" – this trusts that God's answer will be best
 - "...do we really want God to listen to our advice regarding what might be best to do? Honestly, I believe that I could not act more foolishly than to come to God in prayer suggesting to him that he see things my way and insisting that he do as I want. No, 'your will be done' means that Another's will precedes mine, and thankfully, this will has been formed out of an omniscient (all-knowing) and omnisapient (all-wise) mind and heart so that we can be assured it cannot be improved." (Ware, 141 – Prayer and the Sovereignty of God (ch); *For the Fame of God's Name*)

Question #2 - What is being assumed behind this objection to prayer?

Scenario: Imagine that a friend approaches you and says, “God doesn’t seem to be answering my prayers these days, why not?” What would a helpful response be? What questions might you ask?

Answers

An appropriate answer to this question is: I don’t know.

- I have many people ask me this question before.
- We are not guaranteed an explanation for why God does or doesn’t do things.
- Most of the time this is the right answer to this question.
- There are some exceptions to this in Scripture that I think it would be helpful to stay mindful of. These exceptions can be posed in the form of question.
- “God Himself in Christ enables us to humble ourselves beneath the inscrutability of God, to endure it, and to rely upon and rest in the God whose way we cannot fully understand.” (O Hallesby, p. 25)

“I don’t know what God’s answer is to your prayer. But what I do know is...”

Who God is

- God is personal – He hears!
- God is omniscient – Mt. 6:8
 - Keller: “God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything he knew.” (Prayer, 228)
- God is omniscient – Ps. 69:13: But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness.
- God is generous – Lk. 11:9-13; James 1:5; 1 Ptr. 3:12

What God has promised

- To hear and respond
- To be present and near
- To do good for His people
- To glorify Himself

What God has done and will do

- Proven love in Christ
- Covenant faithfulness
- Demonstrated power over evil and wisdom in steering history
- God has changed people and taught them through waiting in prayer (Paul-thorn)
- Returning soon / Justice and judgment / New creation and redemption

8 Questions to ask when you are not receiving an answer:

1. Do I know God truly through Jesus Christ?

A mediator between God and man is needed. God never promises to hear the prayers of people who are not His children. There are examples of Him responding to people who don't know Him, but that is His prerogative and not promised.

- 1 Tim. 2:5
- Heb. 10:19-20
- Paul Miller quote, p. 119

2. Have I spent time persisting in prayer about this?

- James 4:2 – You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.
- Luke 18:1 - And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

3. Are my motives pure in prayer?

- James 4:3, 6 – You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?... “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”
- Paul Miller Visual, p. 116 – A Praying Life

4. Do I trust God in what I'm praying about?

- “Helplessness united with faith produces prayer. Without faith our helplessness would be only a vain cry of distress in the night.” (O. Hallesby, p. 28)
- Mt. 21:20-22 - When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” [21] And Jesus answered them, “Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. [22] And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” (ESV)
- James 1:5-8 - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [6] 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. [7] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; [8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (ESV)

5. Am I praying for something that is not the expressed will of God?

- Example: man who claimed God led him to get divorced (for unbiblical reasons)
- Mk. 14:36 – prayer in Gethsemane

6. Am I ignoring or denying unconfessed sin in my life that grieves God?

- OT: 1 Kings 9:1-9, Is. 1:12-17, Jer. 7:16-20
- Ps. 66:16-19 - Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me! (ESV)
- Prov. 28:9
- John 15:7 - If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (ESV)
- Heb. 5:7-8 - In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. [8] Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

Q: Why is this one tricky?

7. Is there relational strain with others that may be hindering my relationship with God?

- Mt. 5:23-24, 6:12-15
- 1 Ptr. 3:7, 4:7

8. How has God been changing me through this process of waiting? (2 Cor. 1:8-11, 12:1-10)

Final Thought: Keller, pps. 236-238

Sharing: Gary Gaebel

Lifework Questions