

Using Christ's Name

How Prayer Works:

John 14:12-14, 16:23-24

September 9, 2007

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I have learned a lot as we've spent time this summer considering how prayer works. As I pray, I'm more confident, focused and motivated. I hope that is true for many of you. Let me summarize our learning. First and foremost, prayer is all about relationship. There are people who get their prayers answered and there are people who see no answers. It isn't because God has favorites. Jesus declared:

Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8, NLT)

God has an open door policy to every human being. He wants you to ask and bring your issues and desires to him. He wants you to seek, not be idle, but pursue a vision with him. He wants you to knock and begin a dialogue, a dialogue in which a relationship is formed.

I have three adult children. We are related by name. We are related by blood, and we are related through their choice of fellowship, where we talk and do things together. On occasion, I can watch them make a mistake. They are in charge, and so they have the right to make a mistake without my interference. When, however, they pursue an issue with me, when they ask, when they seek, and when they knock, they grow a relationship with me where they know me better and benefit from whatever wisdom and resources I have. That is God's prayer promise to you. Pursue your agenda with God and you will come to know him and receive your true desire.

A second important truth about prayer is that its answers are affected by our behavior and by our association with others. I remember wrestling with a brother in the living room and knocking over and breaking my mother's rare, crystal, antique lamp. My mother loves me, but she was not predisposed to show me or my siblings great favor at that moment. She was more concerned that we understood what we did, learned and then showed appropriate behavior in the living room. There were times when we as a group of children needed to speak to our parents to regain the favor and blessing they desired to show us. All of that became apparent as we pursued things with our parents that grew a relationship. It benefits us to keep asking, seeking and knocking. When we do that, we learn then that our prayers are affected by our association with family, church, community and nation. Consequently, answers to some individual prayer requests may be delayed until there has been appropriate corporate repentance and prayer.

Toward the end of his time on earth, Jesus was especially high on what God would do in response to our prayers. In John 14, Jesus challenged his disciple Phillip to understand what he was seeing when he observed the miraculous works of Jesus. Phillip was seeing God at work. Jesus then challenged Phillip and the rest of his disciples that anyone who believed in Jesus would do these same miraculous works and even greater ones. Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. (John 14:12-13, NIV)

Do you understand why Jesus is so high on prayer? He is ascending to the Father to intervene on our behalf so that he can bring honor to his Father through answering our prayer requests. Jesus wants us to ask all kinds of requests so that God's power and love can be revealed. Jesus wants all kinds of requests to be proffered in his name so that he can bring all

kinds of honor to his heavenly father by his response to those requests. Jesus emphasizes that you are to ask all kinds of things. He declares:

You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (John 14:14, NIV)

Doesn't this sound like he wants his name used in all kinds of prayers so that knowledge of God and him will spread? Jesus wants you and me to go for it in prayer. His answers to all kinds of prayers will bring salvation to this earth because people will learn the name by which all people are saved. This is the glory of the Father.

Understand then that it is God's will and plan for you to bring all kinds of requests in Jesus' name so that the world will be restored to the glory of the Father. God wants you praying. God wants you asking. God wants you seeking. God wants you knocking. How many things have not come to be because we just didn't ask individually or corporately?

I'm a person with visions and dreams. I was going to say that I can't help myself, but I don't want to help myself. I love those visions and dreams; and God just loads them into me. The frustrating thing is that I want them to be reality, and they don't easily become reality. I can work and work, and they just don't happen. As a young pastor I asked a highly acclaimed consultant what to do. He told me to write these dreams and desires all down as a church vision, present it to the church council, and have them decide what they'll agree to own as their own and work with me for. I worked with such joy and passion on this paper. My dream for the church was so specific and energizing. The day came to present it to the council. I was so excited. Do you know what the council did with the vision? Nothing. It didn't agree. It didn't disagree. It acted as if I had never presented it. People stared uncomfortably at me for a bit and then turned to other things. Now obviously, I had more to learn about leadership, but I was crushed. I had no hope of pursuing or fulfilling a single dream. Almost as an afterthought, I took each line item

and put it on a prayer request sheet that I and a small group prayed over on Tuesdays. Five years later, an elderly woman came up to me: “I kept a paper you presented at church council a few years ago. I looked at it this morning and realized that every single thing in your vision has come to be.” Most of those things I had a hand in, but she, the prayer group and I realized that Jesus was bringing glory to our Father through his response to the requests about the dreams he had planted in our hearts.

Let me share one proviso or warning. Jesus didn’t give this warning to his disciples. Perhaps, they didn’t need it. Perhaps, they understood better, or maybe he just wanted them to start praying all kinds of things using his name and then learn these things later.

Jesus focused his life on his father’s love for the world. He never sought advancement or comfort at the expense of others. That was to the glory of his father. When we use Jesus’ name in presenting selfish or sinful requests, do we honor Christ and help him glorify our Father? Suppose I gave all my children use of my credit card in order to honor my deceased father. If my little one charged loads and loads of candy, do you think that might defeat the purpose? If the older children used it in ways so that were incompatible with my father’s values, would that defeat the purpose? I’d encourage my children to use the credit card, but there would be moments that I might wish to block their action.

When it comes to God, our prayers in Jesus’ name may be fully compatible with God’s will. We may simply need to persevere until the time is right or some issues are resolved.

Whatever the circumstance, recognize the hunger in Jesus’ words:

I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. (John 16:23-24, NIV)

Jesus hungers to honor his Father and make you smile. Will you believe and pray?