
How to Pray! Part IX

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The Power of Prayer

Matthew 21:18-22; James 5:13-18

James 5:13-18 tells us in the context of prayer to *sing songs*, meaning to praise our Lord, in unity, with willing, loving hearts. It can be a literal song we sing, but it actually is more of an attitude and passionate reverence. This is an aspect of real worship and music, which is never a show; rather, it is the response of our love giving praise. We, as a congregation, are the performers, and Christ is the audience. Real, authentic worship is to be inspired by who Christ is and what He is doing in us. It is not about form, function, or type; it is about hearts showing love to Him. Prayer and worship share the same heart and attitude (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:12-17).

When James tells us about the *power of faith*, he is referring to trusting in God and then being faithful in our intercessory duty to others. It does not mean a “special power” as some have proclaimed; rather, it is a call to action, showing our Christian community and faith displayed in our care toward one another. What matters to God over anything else is how we respond and learn. It all comes down to asking, being real, being honest, being ourselves, and making sure our motives are right. We will know our prayers are being heard when we show the love and care of our Lord. If we are earnestly praying, and perhaps are frustrated that the answer we desire has not come, remember that while we are waiting, God is working immeasurably more than we could ever know (Matt. 21:22; John 14:14)!

Prayer needs perseverance! Still feel stuck because that power is not there? Then, as Jesus told us, *keep asking* (Matt. 7: 7-12)! Jesus shows us the virtue of perseverance and its application in prayer. Our motivation to persist in our service to God is the desire to draw near to Him for what He has done for us. Consider the amount of time the Apostles, and even Jesus (when He walked this earth), spent in prayer. Now, consider how much more we need to pray, and compare that to how much time we actually spend in prayer. The Christian life does not run on autopilot. It needs persistence and constant navigational resetting as well as hands-on steering. It needs passion and conviction so His truth can get through. In order to line up our lives with His plan and will, we have to be willing and able to surrender to His concerns. We do this through knowing His Word and praying, which leads to our spiritual growth and Christian formation. The benefit of surrender is we have more security in Christ, which gives us more confidence, faith, peace, and empowerment for life and ministry (Psalm 1:1-3; 119:97-104).

Remember, prayer is not a vending machine where we can pick what we want, and what we want to do. Rather, it is aligning our mindset with His. Many people have mistaken the passage in Matthew 7 to think that God is a divine bellhop who will give us what we seek and what we want if we just have enough faith. But, that is plainly not the message this passage is meant to give us. Yes, we are to seek, we are to knock, and we are to be persistent with our prayers. But, we are not to seek only our selfish

concerns. Prayer is seeking the Son-ship/Lord-ship of Christ because He is in control, not just because of a friendship with Him. Prayer is the instrument with which to seek His Will, not ours.

Jesus tells us blatantly, *ask and it will be given*. This is a very bold and direct statement, which is rare if not non-existent in other languages and cultures of the time, including Hebrew law and writings. He is telling us that we have the right and the ability (by what Christ has done on the cross) to go directly to God in prayer. There is no need for intermediaries, special priests, or rituals. There is also a promise in this passage that gives us the confidence that He hears our prayers and even answers them. But, we are not to assume that God will answer our every whim or desire. We are not the focus of the prayer, nor are we God. He, God and Lord of the universe, is sovereign, and His will is to be sought, brought into our hearts and minds, and then put into practice. We also are to have confidence and trust that His answer is best! We often seek those things that are not beneficial or right for us because our view, understanding, and thinking do not include all of the information. We only see our temporary and immediate needs, whereas God sees it all, even the outcome.

Take it to heart that our God is willing and able to give! He wants to give every good and perfect gift to us! It is up to us to ask so we can receive it! But remember, we are always to seek what is according to His will and character as the prime prize! Prayer is a relationship to build, mold, and grow us deeper in His heart. It is not just an “asking machine” even if you have the right and pure motives, and spend your time interceding for others, as we all should. Jesus is telling us to keep on asking (inquiry), seeking (finding it), and knocking (then it will be opened to you so you can find it), and it will be given to you. Asking, plus action and perseverance equal a quest for the character and growth to be a more mature Christian. It leads us to go deeper in our relationship and be of more use to God and others.

Prayers are not to be just memorized. Rather, they are to be passionately pursued! Prayer, along with the power we receive from it, calls for commitment and is something to be accomplished! God desires that we be in close relationship to Him, not merely seeking what we can get. He will give us what we need and much more! If we only seek what we think we want, we will never have a clue to what maturity and surrender mean. Our motives, obedience, and perseverance will be the keys! Be in love with Him. Seek His presence, and be persistent in your prayers. If you fear you will ask Him for the wrong thing, remember, we all do that. As you draw closer to Him, you will learn the right things to ask. Prayer is persistence and learning! Have you asked, sought, or knocked today?

1 Peter 3:15-17 tells us that we are, *made alive by the Spirit*. This is about the Who (Christ) and how we are should manifest what the Spirit does in us. The image is that God and the Spirit, separate in distinction, yet One God, gives us our witness along with our own spirit that we are in relationship and in communion with (John 10:17-18; Acts 2:32; Rom. 1:4; 8:1-11; Gal. 1:1; 4:6; Eph 1:20).

Questions to Ponder

Read Matthew 21:18-22

1. When something bad happens to you or to someone around you, what do you tend to do first? What should you do?
2. What can you do to make sure your motives are right with prayer?
3. What matters to God over anything else is how we respond and learn! How have you been with this?
4. What does it mean when Christians just make leaves?
5. When you pray do you feel that it is something to be accomplished or how Christ accomplishes His purpose in you?
6. What can you do to gain more of an attitude of passionate reverence for Christ? How would you teach that or be an example?
7. How does the praise of our Lord, in unity, with willing, loving heart affect your prayer life?
8. How does your prayer life affect your praise of our Lord?
9. How would you illustrate the power and significance of faith? What is something in your life that took extra ordinary trust?
10. Read Rom. 12:2 and Phil. 4:8: Why is it that without faith, trust, and prayer a Christian can do nothing—no growth, no fruit, no ministry, and no impact?
11. What is the significance of obedience, as applied to faith? How can this help you to move great problems out of your way (Isa. 54:10; 1 Cor. 13:2)?
12. What happens when you combine faith with arrogance?
13. How is prayer also about persistence and learning? What gets in your way to be persistence? Have you asked, sought, or knocked today?
14. What does it take for prideful people to have confidence and trust that God's answer is best? What about you?
15. Why is prayer not a vending machine where we can pick what we want, and what we want to do? Why would some Christians think it is?
16. How does prayer need perseverance in your experience? What can you do when you feel stuck because that power or passion does not seem to be there?

17. What are some of the key reasons that cause you to either move forward in Christ or move backward in pride?
18. How do some churches and Christians display only self interest with prayer? What does that mean to God and the community?
19. How have you aligned your mindset with His? Has this been a challenge? How so? What do you still need to align?
20. Ask this to your church board in love, are we, as a Church, just producing fat sheep—Christians that are fed but do not produce, where only *self* is the focus? If so, what does God think about that? What can you do about it?