

## **Rethinking Prayer**

(appropriate for Mid Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily, November 2020

Other youth bible studies by Michael Daily available at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

Recommended Books: John S. Mahon, *Lord, Teach Us to Pray: How to Have a Daily Quiet Time Alone with God*, WestBow Press, March 2015, ISBN-13: 978-1490869131

Donald S. Whitley, *Praying the Bible*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2015, ISBN-13: 978-1433547843

I once heard a man say, while praying, that we know which prayers are God's will by the ones He answers.

So, we pray for whatever is on our minds and hearts and then we watch to see which ones God answers and which ones He doesn't, and that way we can tell which ones were His will by the ones that get answered.

We just kind of throw everything against the wall and see what sticks. Is that what the Bible teaches prayer is?

### **James 1:6-7**

**But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,**

What we see in the Bible is quite different. According to **James 1:6-7** effective prayer requires faith, without any doubting, that God will answer the prayer.

So, what does that mean? If somehow we work ourselves up into a frenzy of manufactured "faith", shouting out the name of Jesus, and "claiming the victory" while jumping up and down, sweating and crying profusely, then our prayers will be answered? Is that what this verse means? No.

There is only one way we can know with 100% confidence and 0% doubting that God will answer a prayer.

### **I John 5:14-15**

**This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.**

The only way we can know with 100% confidence and 0% doubting that God will answer our prayer is if we know ahead of time that answering that prayer is His will. So, the only way we can "ask in faith without any doubting" is to know 100% for sure that what we are asking for really is God's will. If we are not sure, then we are doubting and James 1:6-7 tells us we should not expect to receive anything from God.

So, the "seeing what sticks" approach to prayer actually results in less answered prayer! How does that affect people's faith in God and His Word? It reduces it because prayer appears to have no effect – sometimes things happen and sometimes they don't – whether you pray or not!

**The next question is, "How do we know with 100% certainty what things are God's Will?"**

### **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.**

### **(Isaiah 55:8-11)**

**"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. <sup>9</sup> "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. <sup>10</sup> "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; <sup>11</sup> So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.**

### **(Isaiah 40:8)**

**The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.**

God's will is clearly revealed in His Word, the Bible. As a result, if we pray for the things God tells us are His will in the Bible, we can have 100% confidence that those prayers will be answered. Then we keep our eyes open and watch to see how He does it. For example, during my daily bible readings I will pray for the truths I am reading over in the bible, either for myself or for other people. When I do this I've noticed that my prayers are different. I pray prayers I otherwise would have never prayed.

When we pray in this way what will the result be? We will see prayers answered, faith being increased, and we will see God's will being done on earth - as it is in heaven.

And soon we come to realize that prayer is not us trying to get God to run to and fro doing our will. Prayer is about God getting us to run to and fro doing His will!

*"True prayer is not asking God for what we want but for what He wants."*

– J. Oswald Sanders, **Prayer Power Unlimited**, Discovery House Publishers, 1997, page 52.

Effective prayer is praying for the things that God has revealed in the Bible that He wants, with the result being more answered prayer as well as seeing people's faith in God and His Word increase.

### **An Example from Matthew 6:31-33**

If we read Matthew 6:31-34, and use it to shape how we pray, we come up with an interesting approach. In this passage Jesus is talking about all the things in life that the Gentiles eagerly seek (food, covering, worries, cares of this life). But then Jesus says that for Christians all of these things will be given to them if they seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness.

### **Matthew 6:31-34**

**Do not worry then, saying, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear for clothing?' 32 For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you.**

So we have a choice. One option is we can choose to pray by giving God a long list of all the things we want Him to do for us. Since we don't really know which ones (if any) are His will, we don't have full confidence in our prayers asking God for them.

An alternative would be to reshape our prayers based on what God tells us is His will in Matthew 6:31-33. We could pray with more focus on seeking His kingdom and righteousness knowing that a side effect is that God will give us the other things! If we do that what might our prayers sound more like, instead of a "long list of stuff we want"?

### **Example Prayer**

***"Help me to seek first your kingdom and righteousness"*** (Matthew 6:33)

***"Bring teachers into my life to help me learn how to seek first your kingdom and righteousness"***  
(II Timothy 2:2)

***"Give me wisdom to understand how to seek first your kingdom and righteousness"*** (James 1:5)

***"Work in the hearts of those in authority over me to not hinder me in seeking your kingdom and righteousness"*** (Proverbs 21:1)

***"Give me the discipline & self-control to seek first your kingdom and righteousness"*** (Galatians 5:22-23)

Notice that if we take this approach to praying our prayers start to lean more toward asking God to accomplish His will. This ties back in to the quote from J. Oswald Sanders.

*“True prayer is not asking God for what we want but for what He wants.”*

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### **Effective prayer requires the discipline to pray according to what God’s Word says**

#### **Psalm 50:17**

**“For you hate discipline, And you cast My words behind you.**

#### **I Peter 4:7**

**The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer.**

We don’t just pray whatever comes into our minds and hearts.

#### **Jeremiah 17:9**

**“The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?**

#### **Mark 8:33**

**But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”**

So, prayer is a discipline. We pray for the things God has revealed in His Word.

### **However, there are some additional requirements for effective prayer:**

#### **Obeying His commands**

#### **I John 3:22**

**and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.**

#### **(Psalm 66:18)**

**If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear;**

#### **(Matthew 5:23-24)**

**Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.**

#### **Pray without ceasing**

### **I Thessalonians 5:16-17 - Rejoice always; <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing;**

Notice verse 17 says to pray without ceasing. In reality, most of us are actually pretty good at praying without ceasing. You know why? Because complaints are prayers! And God hears them!

#### **Numbers 11:1-2**

**Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the LORD; and when the LORD heard *it*, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed *some* of the outskirts of the camp. <sup>2</sup> The people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD and the fire died out.**

Complaints are prayers of ingratitude. Instead God wants us to give thanks for all things.

**1 Thessalonians 5:18 - in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**

**Ephesians 5:20**

**always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;**

**(Philippians 2:14)**

**Do all things without grumbling or disputing;**

Asking with wrong motives

**James 4:3-4**

**You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. <sup>4</sup>You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**

**The prayers of the lukewarm tend to center on their own comforts rather than the will of God.**

Most of the time the motivation of their prayers is for God to restore their comfort that has been disrupted:

"Lord, I'm having money troubles. Please fix them and restore my comfort"

"Lord, I'm having trouble in my marriage. Please fix it and restore my comfort"

"Lord, please help me find a nice house for a low price so I can be comfortable"

"Lord, please give us a big house so we can do ministry" (but then the ministry never materializes)

Rarely will you hear the lukewarm pray:

"Lord, give me more opportunities to share the Gospel."

"Lord, give me more opportunities to serve others."

"Lord, give me relationships with mature Christians whose example will challenge me and who I can imitate."

"Lord, reveal to me where I am falling short in my obedience to You."

"Lord, keep me in the center of Your Will and use whatever means are necessary."

"Lord, provide opportunities to use my spiritual gifts to help the church and strengthen the faith of others."

"Lord, maximize my life for Your glory and to have an eternally valuable impact in the lives of others."

**Conclusion**

Instead of asking for the things the unbelievers worry about, pray for the things God wants that He has stated in the Bible. Put Him and His Kingdom first in your life and in your prayers and, guess what? He will also give you the other things!

### **Optional End of Lesson Activity**

Cut out the verses below and give one to each small group. Have each group write a one or two sentence prayer using what God has revealed His will is in the verse and turn it in to you. Once all the prayers are in, read them all out loud asking the group to listen to how the prayers sounds compared to their normal prayers. If the prayers sound different from our normal prayers, its probably time for us to change how we pray!

### **Ephesians 6:19-20**

and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

### **Colossians 4:3**

praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned

### **Colossians 1:9-12**

For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

### **Psalms 139:23-24**

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; <sup>24</sup> And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

### **I Peter 3:15**

but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

**James 1:22** - But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

### **Romans 12:2**

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

**Matthew 5:44** - But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

**II Thessalonians 3:13** - But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.

### **Hebrews 12:15**

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

### **Matthew 28:19-20**

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

### **Ephesians 4:29**

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

**John 15:8** - My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

**QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD**

*JEREMIAH 15:16*

**THEME: *Rethinking Prayer***

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *James 1:6-7, I John 5:14-15***

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *John 15:7, Isaiah 40:8***

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**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *I John 3:22, Psalm 66:18***

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*JEREMIAH 15:16*

**THEME:** *Rethinking Prayer*

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION:** *Philippians 2:14-15*

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**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION:** *James 4:3-4*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

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**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION:** *Matthew 6:32-33*

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