

Faith Works to Make Prayer Effective

I. As we introduce the lesson, but also as we introduce the entire weekend, let us talk about faith for a moment

A. What is faith?

1. Heb 11:1 – “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”
 - a. This is definitely a good answer
 - b. It is one of the standard answers we give or hear when the “what is faith” question is asked
2. Heb 11:6 also comes to mind – believe that God is and that He rewards those who seek Him
3. A question that we do not ask as often, however, is “**What is faith about?**”
4. Mark 4:35-41 – Jesus stills the sea – a story that probably we have heard many times
 - a. At this point the Apostles have been with Jesus for several months
 - (1) They have seen Him teach
 - (2) They have seen Him heal people
 - b. However, the one of calming the storm seems to be a completely different class of miracles than what the Apostles have seen – and maybe gotten used to - so far...
 - (1) From what I understand, so far
 - (a) Jesus has turned water into wine
 - (b) Jesus has healed several people
 - (2) But calming a storm... up to this point we are not told Jesus has done anything like it – which means the Apostles had not seen anything like it before
 - (a) It seems as if **Jesus’ miracles are growing bigger and bigger**
 - (b) First, turning water into wine – a miracle on an object
 - (c) Then, healing people – miracles on people
 - (d) But now Jesus performs miracles on the forces of nature
 - c. Jesus calms the storm
 - (1) 8:37 – By the standards we use here, this is at least a strong storm, if not a severe storm
 - (2) 8:38 – Jesus is asleep in the back of the boat
 - (a) I did not fully understand how Jesus could be fully asleep at this moment
 - (b) Until Sunday April 30th, when during my afternoon nap I slept through a storm and even a tornado siren going off
 - (3) 8:39 – Jesus gets up and rebukes the storm, and “it became perfectly calm”
 - (4) 8:40 – Jesus’ question: “Do you still have **no faith?**” or in Lk 8:25 “**where is your faith?**”
 - (5) 8:41 – The Apostles are puzzled: “Who then is this...?”

- (a) There is an interesting contrast:
 - (b) On one side Jesus asking the Apostles about their faith
 - (c) On the other side the Apostles asking one another who Jesus really is
 - (d) You see, **faith is very closely related to knowing who God is**
5. What is faith about?
- a. Faith is about knowing Who God is
 - b. Faith is about understanding Who it is that we call Father!
 - (1) We cannot have faith in the Word of God if we do not have faith in God
 - (2) We cannot have faith in God if we do not know God, and we know God through His Word
 - (a) It is not that complicated... it something you do daily
 - (b) You cannot know to trust my word, if you do not know me
 - (c) You cannot know me, if you do not talk with me
 - (d) The way to know me is by talking with me (my word)
 - (3) Let us try with a different illustration - Airplane Example:
 - (a) AA Boeing 777-300ER, as of this lesson in 4 weeks, Lord willing, we will be flying on one of these
 - (b) I really like airplanes like these, I think they are neat machines, and I get excited to fly on one – one of the neat things about airplanes like these is that you leave home and a few hours later you land on the other side of the world
 - (c) When I fly on an airplane like this **I trust** that it will take me where I am headed... similar to when you ride the elevator, you press 3rd floor and you will get to the 3rd floor... you board a flight to London, you expect to get to London
 - (d) Ultimately, however, my trust that we will get to London does not directly reside in the airplane itself – in the aluminum sheets the plane is made of, nor in the rubber of the tires or the blades of the engine...
 - (e) Ultimately my trust resides in the Boeing engineers that designed and built this plane, in the crew that operates this plane, in the technicians that planned the route for the day, in those who put the fuel in, etc...
 - (f) Ultimately the only reason I trust this airplane will take me where I am headed is that **I have faith that those who designed it picked the right materials, those who built it did it to specification and those who operate the airplane do so in the proper manner** – I trust that they all know what they are doing
 - (g) In the same way, ultimately my faith in the Word of God is only there because of my faith in God who is behind that Word
 - (h) Ultimately, just like with the Apostles and Jesus calming the storm, I have to know God to have faith in Him

- (4) James 2:21-23 – Look at Abraham
 - (a) 2:23 – “Abraham believed God...”
 - (b) James does not say that Abraham knew about God
 - (c) He does not say that Abraham believed about God
 - (d) James says, “Abraham believed God”!
 - (e) It was between Abraham and God, directly
 - (f) **Abraham believed the Person behind the commandments!**
- 6. Ultimately, our faith is in God
 - a. A great way to know God is through His Word – That is the way God speaks to us, allowing us to get to know Him
 - b. **Faith is about knowing God so you can trust in Him**
 - (1) Let us understand that, before being doctrinal
 - (2) **Faith is relational!!!**
 - c. We do not obey God’s Word just because...
 - (1) **...we obey God’s Word because of the Holy God that is behind it!**
 - (a) We see that throughout the Law of Moses
 - (b) “I am the Lord” repeated over and over as the Law is given
 - (2) God spoke it! God wants to have a relationship with His creatures!
 - d. Getting to know God allows us to develop a relationship with Him
 - (1) He speaks to us, through His Word, and we listen
 - (2) And we can speak to Him, through our prayers, and He listens
 - e. **Let me just open a brief parenthesis** to say something important
 - (1) **You do not develop faith by coming up with all sorts of questions and doubts about God** and His work **and never seek an answer from Him**
 - (2) Look at His Word to see what He has to say
 - (3) If you had a question about something I have said or something I have done, I hope you would come to me and ask me... not ask your friend or someone who does not even know me
 - (4) If you have questions about God, see what He has to say – to me that seems the fair thing to do
 - (5) Also, **look at the entire picture**, do not just get stuck on one single particular
 - (6) Closed parenthesis
- B. (So faith and prayer are connected)
 - 1. Knowing God is necessary to talk with Him and especially listen to Him
 - 2. So, prayer is one of the most obvious connections to faith
 - 3. Do we want our prayer to be effective? Let us grow in faith, by knowing who God is

II. Prayer

- A. Just as we asked “What is faith about?” we should ask “what is prayer about?”
- B. What prayer is NOT completely about:

1. When we think about prayer we think about three aspects
 - a. Thanksgiving, praise to God...
 - b. But what we think the most about when we talk about prayer is asking God for something
 2. We are told that we need to ask God for things
 - a. Ex. James 1:5 – You need wisdom? Ask God!
 - b. But let us make sure we do not create in our minds a misconception of who God is in relation to our prayers
 - (1) God is not the Genie of Aladdin’s lamp
 - (a) God is not there to just give us anything we ask for at any time we may ask for it
 - (b) We already pray to God much less than we should – how much less would we pray to Him if He just gave us anything we ask for the first time around?
 - (2) God is not Santa Claus
 - (a) Just the fact that you “have been good” does not automatically entitle you to receive something
 - (b) Many times this is not a concept that we swallow easily
 - (c) When we are good, we are good because we are supposed to be good, not because being good qualifies us to get something in return
 - (3) God is not a vending machine
 - (a) When you need a snack or a drink you go to the vending machine, you put in some money, and you get your snack or drink
 - (b) Let’s make sure we never think that there is anything we can do for God where He would have to give us something in return
 - (c) There is no good work or good deed that we can do for God that obligates God to give us something in return
 - c. Let us not look at God in either of these three ways
 - (1) Too often we pray wanting God to do what we ask Him to do
 - (2) **We almost tell God what we need Him to accomplish** in our lives
 - (a) We remember He is all powerful because we need Him to do stuff for us
 - (b) But we forget that because He is all powerful, He is so much greater than we are – Let us treat God as God!
 3. Do we want our prayer to be effective? Let us grow in faith, know who God is, and treat God as He deserves to be treated
- C. So, “What is prayer about?”
1. Prayer is more than just asking for stuff, even more than just thankfulness and praise
 2. James 4:2-10 – **Prayer is about perspective**
 - a. 4:2-3 – What is our reason for praying to God? Are we asking for selfish pleasure?

- b. 4:4 – if we put ourselves first, we cannot please God
 - c. 4:5-6 – Realize who God is – know Him and what He desires from us
 - d. 4:7 – Submit to God
 - e. 4:8 – Draw near to God, cleanse your hands, purify your hearts
 - f. 4:9-10 – Humble yourself! Knowing God reminds us who we are
 - g. Do we want to make our prayers are effective? Let us remember who we are before God
 - (1) It does not happen without faith
 - (2) It does not happen without knowing who God is
 - h. Dan 9:4-19 – Beautiful prayer spoken by Daniel – I wish we had time to read it!
 - (1) Just a couple of quick observations:
 - (a) 9:4-7 – Contrast between who God is and who the people are
 - (b) 9:15 – Again, contrast between what God has done and what the people have done
 - (2) In the prayer we see that Daniel, very righteous man, knows who he is:
 - (a) 4:8 – Open shame belongs to us!
 - (b) 4:15 – We have sinned! (though nothing negative is said about Daniel that we know of)
 - (3) But in the prayer we also see that Daniel knows who God is!
 - (a) 4:7 – Righteousness belongs to you, O Lord
 - (b) 4:15 – O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand...
 - (c) God does not need Daniel to remind Him of all His great deeds
 - (d) What Daniel is saying is: “**God, I know who you are!** I realize who we are, I have faith in what You can do, and we need Your help!”
 - i. Prayer is about perspective
3. **Prayer is about relationship**
- a. Jesus would often step away to pray...
 - (1) Mark 1:35 - ...after healing: “In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there”
 - (2) Luke 5:16 – ...after people keep coming to Him for healing: “But Jesus Himself would **often** slip away to the wilderness and pray”
 - (3) Luke 6:12 – ...before Jesus called the disciples: “It was at this time that He went off to a mountain to pray, and He **spent the whole night in prayer to God**”
 - b. When we think about our puny little prayers you wonder what Jesus would pray to God so much about...
 - (1) Sure, before choosing the disciples He may have asked for guidance, maybe
 - (2) But He spent **all night** in prayer!

(3) **How often and how much Jesus prays is a sign of the perfect relationship between He and His Father**

- c. Matt 7:7-11 - God is a Good Father Who gives us what is good
 - (1) 7:7 – Ask and it will be given, seek and you will find...
 - (2) 7:11 – However, God is a Father that **gives to His children what is good**
 - (a) I hope none of you, every time you go to one of your parents and you ask them for something, they just give it to you right away, no questions asked
 - (b) Dad, I need \$20. – Here, have them.
 - (c) Some of you are in college right now, some will go in the near future
 - (d) Please call home regularly to talk with your parents
 - (e) Do not be that child that does not call home for a few weeks and then finally calls home just because you need something
 - (f) Your parents deserve a better relationship than that
 - (g) Even more so, **God deserves a better relationship than us just asking Him for stuff** all the time – **Prayer is about relationship!**
 - d. God is also a Good Father that sustains us when we face difficulties
 - (1) Sometimes God may not grant our requests, but He will still be there
 - (2) 2 Cor 12:7-10 – Paul and the thorn in the flesh
 - (a) 12:8 – Three times has Paul asked God to be left alone
 - (b) 12:9 – God said “My grace is sufficient” – I will not remove this, but I have given you something already
 - (3) Luke 22:39-46 – Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, praying before he is taken to be crucified
 - (4) 22:41-42 – He prayed “if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours”
 - (5) 22:43 – An angel appeared to Him, strengthening Him
 - (a) God hears Jesus’ request: “remove this cup from Me”
 - (b) God hears Jesus’ obedience: “yet not My will, but Yours”
 - (c) God does not remove Jesus from the situation, but He sends an angel to support Jesus
 - (d) At times we may have to face difficulties – God is not going to make our life easy all the time, but He will support us when we need it!
4. **Prayer is about conforming our will to God’s will**
- a. We have just read the words of Jesus
 - b. Luke 22:42 – “Not my will, but Yours”
 - (1) As we said earlier, prayer is not imposing our will on God – basically telling God to do certain things for us
 - (2) Prayer is the opposite, it is allowing God to guide our will so that the two, as much as possible, match
 - c. Conforming our will to God’s will takes a lot of faith

- (1) When we receive what we ask for, it still takes some strong faith to ask knowing that God will give
- (2) However, it takes exponentially stronger faith to be asking for something just to hear God say “not right now, but I will help you”
- d. Let us **remember to have faith in God because He is still our Heavenly Father, no matter how He responds to our prayers**
 - (1) Sometimes we approach God in prayer just like the 4 year old child that wants more ice cream
 - (2) The 4 year old child is convinced that ice cream is good for you and that you should eat as much of it as you want
 - (3) However, thankfully, the Parent of that 4 year old child knows better, and knows that broccoli are better for you than ice cream
 - (4) That 4 year old child will not understand why something that looks like broccoli and tastes like broccoli is better for you than ice cream
 - (5) Sometimes we will not understand, but let us have faith in an all-wise and all-loving God
 - (a) It is not easy
 - (b) But God is there to help

III. Faith to make prayer effective

- A. James 1:5-8 - **Pray in faith**, knowing that God will give you what is good
 - 1. 1:5 – You need wisdom? Ask God
 - 2. 1:6 – However, **you must ask in faith!**
 - a. Know that God can give you what you ask
 - b. Trust God, do not trust yourself
 - c. Do not expect God to give you anything if you ask Him and think that you can get what you need on your own
 - 3. Matt 7:11 – God will give what is good to His children
 - 4. James 5:16b – “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much”
 - a. A righteous person is one who knows God
 - b. A righteous man is one who has faith in God
 - (1) God is happy to listen to the prayers to those who are righteous
 - (2) If a child disobeys the parent all day and at the end of the day comes to the parent asking for something, how willing will that parent be to give them what they ask?
 - (3) Why should God freely give to those that do not care about Him?
 - c. And still, what is accomplished is not because of the righteousness of who prays, but of the God who listens
- B. Luke 18:2-7 – **Pray with perseverance**, having faith that God can provide for our request

1. 18:3 – The widow is perseverant – she knows the judge can give her what she needs
2. 18:7 – If even a wicked judge listened to the widow, how much more will your Heavenly Father listen to you?
3. Why are we to keep asking, then?
 - a. Again, God is not a Aladdin’s Genie or a vending machine, giving us what we need right away
 - b. Perseverance helps us understand how much we care about what we are asking
 - (1) Is it something we want for ourselves?
 - (2) Or is it something we will use for God’s glory?
 - c. Even more, perseverance forces us to learn that we depend on God
 - (1) Perseverance done wrong = we pray once or twice and then we think God does not care
 - (2) Perseverance done right = we pray with the faith that only God can provide

C. Matt 7:7-11 - **Do your part**, having faith that God will do His part

1. 7:7 – In the sermon on the mount Jesus tells us to ask, to see, to knock
2. 7:8 – If you ask you receive, if you seek you find, if you knock it will be opened
 - a. Implied is that **we have to do our part**
 - b. If we do not ask, we do not receive, if we do not seek we do not find
 - c. If I have that plane ticket we were talking about at the beginning of the lesson, I can get to where I am going... but only if I go to the airport the day I am supposed to fly – I need to do my part!
3. Doing our part does not mean taking over what God will do – it simply means doing our part
 - a. Having the plane ticket does not mean I have to fly the plane myself (I hope not...)
 - (1) I do not think I would be able to fly the plane myself
 - (2) However, I do not have to, since that is not what I am responsible for
 - b. A good prayer is the one asking God to help us increase our faith
 - c. As we were saying earlier, however, stronger faith implies stronger knowledge of God – we have to spend more time knowing God
 - d. James 1:2-4 – Also, we may need to buckle up because we may encounter trials
 - (1) And a trial forces us to make a choice
 - (2) Are we are going to get nearer to God, or get farther from Him

D. Luke 22:42 – **Not my will, but Yours** – It is more about God than it is about me

1. 2 Cor 12:7-10 – We have seen it with Paul and his request
 - a. Paul has asked God three times that this thorn be removed
 - b. But God, basically, said “no”
2. Luke 22:42 – We have seen it with Jesus in the garden as He was about to die
 - a. Please, let this cup pass from me
 - b. However, not My will, but Yours

- (1) How easy do you think it would have been for Jesus to pray that prayer
 - (2) Sure, He was the Son of God...
 - (a) But His sweat became like drops of blood (Luke 22:44)
 - (b) He began to be distressed and troubled (Mark 14:33, Matt 26:37)
 - (c) His soul was deeply grieved to the point of death (Mark 14:34, Matt 26:38)
 - (3) Heb 5:8 – “Although He was a Son, **He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.**”
 - (4) Phil 2:6a, 7a, 8b – “although He existed in the form of God, [He] emptied Himself, **becoming obedient to the point of death**, even death on a cross”
3. Not my will, but Yours
- a. Ultimately, the most effective prayer in faith is not the one where God will do what we ask
 - b. It is the one where God’s will is going to be accomplished
 - c. There is no more effective prayer than the one done with the faith that God will ultimately carry out His will.

Faith Works to Make Prayer Effective

IV. Faith

A. What is faith?

- 1. Heb 11:1 – “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”
- 2. See also Heb 11:6

B. A question that we do not ask as often is: What is faith _____?

- 1. Mark 4:35-41 – What do I learn about faith from the time Jesus calmed the storm?

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- 2. We cannot have faith in _____ if we do not have faith _____
- 3. How does our faith in God come about and increase?

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4. See James 2:23 – Look at Abraham

Abraham's faith was based on _____

5. Our obedience to God's Word is based on _____ that is behind It!
6. Our _____ with God becomes deeper and stronger as we get to know Him

Unanswered _____ or doubts do not help me develop faith in God

- C. Faith and prayer are _____ connected to each other

V. Prayer

- A. What is prayer for?

1. Thanksgiving, Praise, Requests to God
2. What is a passage in the Epistle of James that teaches us to ask God for something we may need? What example does James use?

James _____

Asking God for _____

3. What are some misconceptions of how we can use prayer as a tool to make requests to God?

God is not the _____

God is not _____

God is not a _____

4. For prayer to be effective we need to

_____ who God is, which will help us _____ in faith. Also, we need to _____ God as He deserves to be _____ .

B. What is prayer about?

1. James 4:2-10 – Prayer is about _____

Realizing who we _____ before God is a necessary step in making our prayers effective

_____’s prayer in the Old Testament is an example of effective prayer.

This prayer is found in the following book and chapter: _____

2. Prayer is about _____

Jesus would often step away to pray...

(1) Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; Luke 6:12

The frequency and amount of Jesus’ prayers shows us the kind of

_____ Jesus had with His Father

God, as a Good Father, gives us what is _____, but He also

_____ us when we face difficulties.

3. Prayer is about _____ our will to God’s will

Who is the best Biblical example of the idea expressed in number 3 above?

Sometimes when we pray we _____ our request on God as if He

had no choice but fulfill our petition.

VI. Faith to make prayer effective – Four quick lessons:

A. James 1:5-8 - Pray in _____, knowing that God will give you what is good

Do not expect God to give you anything if you ask Him and think that you can get what you need on _____ .

See Matt 7:11 and James 5:16b.

A righteous man is the one who has _____ in God and obeys Him

B. Luke 18:2-7 – Pray with _____, having faith that God can provide for our request

When we pray in this manner we understand _____ we care for what we asking, but we especially learn our _____ upon God.

C. Matt 7:7-11 - Do your _____, having faith that God will do His part _____ and you shall receive, _____ and you shall find...

However, we need to let God do _____ .

(1) ther from Him

D. Luke 22:42 – Not my will, but Yours – It is _____ about God than it is about me

See 2 Cor 12:7-10 and Luke 22:42.

Ultimately, the most effective prayer in faith is not the one where _____
_____ is going to be accomplished.