

A Deeper Walk with God

A Definitive Guide to What You Can and Cannot Pray For

Edited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to Luke Chapter 11. So, yet another prayer that didn't go my way. So, my wife decided to replace her 17-year-old car. What was I thinking? She was always going to get the Honda. She was never going to get that mid-engine Corvette that I've been showing her pictures of. We're going to talk about prayer today because the series is **A Deeper Walk with God** and it seems incredulous that you would try to have a series about a deeper walk with God and not talk about prayer. Before we get to that, I want to mention a couple of things.

First of all, LAUNCH starts next week for those guys here and for you guys who are online. Next week, please consider inviting a younger guy between 25 and 40 years of age who is looking for strategies that would help him build his family and his career and basically get better integrated into the community. We've said a lot about this. At Man in the Mirror, we teach churches, we work with thousands of churches all around the country. All total, we've worked with 35,000 churches. Did you know that, Man in the Mirror has had at least a transaction or more with 35,000 different churches?

We teach a concept called all-inclusive ministry to men. So, we teach a church, if you have a hundred men in your church, six guys that meet on Wednesday mornings at O-dark-30 and 12 guys that get together once a month to have burn pancakes on a Saturday morning. What's the size of your men's ministry and most will say, "Well, 6 plus 12, that's 18. We have 18 men in our men's ministry," but what we teach is if you have a hundred men in your church, then the size of your ministry to men is a hundred, not just the men who will go into the men's only silos, but if you were the devil and you could say to the pastor, "Well, I'll let you have 18 of your men be out now for Jesus as long as you continue to give me unfettered access to the other 82," well, that's about what has happened in many cases.

So, it's the same thing in our community. We're not willing that any man who would like to know how to walk with Christ would be denied that opportunity, and so this is a way for us to help a new generation of guys be included in what we're doing in an all-inclusive ministry to the men of our committee. So I encourage you to take one of these cards, invite those guests, we've got that all set up next week. John Crossman, the president of Crossman & Company, they manage all the Publixes that Publix doesn't own directly throughout the country and a huge real estate company. He's going to come and talk about his story and what he's learned, especially in the area of career. So, if you have a younger man, 25 to 40, who's thinking about that, next week would be good for him. And then you guys online, if you want to just see your group expand then, and you want to do this and your church, I encourage you to use this as a resource as well.

Okay, so we're going to do a couple of shout outs as we usually do and the first one goes to **Kingdom Man**, 10 guys just getting started on Sunday mornings in Paris, Arkansas at their church, South Side Baptist. Fabio Nass is the leader. Their mission is to create a discipleship group for men so that they can

encourage men to become or continue to be a kingdom man. This would be, I'm guessing, I don't know for sure, Fabio, but I'm guessing based on my dear friend's book, Tony Evans, he wrote the book **Kingdom Man**, and so we want to welcome you this morning.

Then also an area director and shout out to Jonathan Murray from Birmingham, Birmingham Alabama. Birmingham, and he's a great guy. Just a wonderful brother. I wonder if you would join me in giving Kingdom Man and Jonathan Murray a very warm rousing Man in the Mirror welcome! Yeah, one, two, three. Hoorah. Okay, so welcome.

And then now to the topic of the day, **A Definitive Guide to What You Can and Cannot Pray For**. That's the title. So two weeks ago, two weeks ago, we said that loving God is a relationship, not a task. We all know that one of the most important aspects of a relationship is communication, and prayer is the means by which God has provided for us to communicate to him.

Of course, his Word is the way he principally and through his spirit communicates to us, but prayer is how we communicate to God. Now, there are obviously different kinds of prayer, right? What might be some of the different kinds of prayer? Just shout them out. Okay. Intercessory prayer. Thanksgiving, prayers of Thanksgiving. Asking, prayers of the asking kind. Prayers of adoration, worship, praise. Supplication. Healing. Petitions of all different kinds. Yeah. Prayers for protection. Don't let us fall into temptation. Deliver us from evil. Repentance. Confession, asking for forgiveness, prayers of petition, we said that. Prayers for provision, "Give us this day our daily." All kinds of different prayers.

THE PRAYERS THAT SEEM UNANSWERED

So today we're going to zero in on prayers of the asking kind where we're asking God for something. So we're going to begin, at this point, the prayers that seem unanswered. Here's what Jesus had to say in various places, and I'm not going to give you the addresses for them. I'm just going to read the verses.

"Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find." This is Jesus speaking. "Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, the one who seeks finds, and the one who knocks, and to the one who knocks the door will be opened." Elsewhere he says, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there and it will move.' Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. You may ask for anything in my name and I will do it. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. I chose and appointed you to go and bear fruit so that whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you. Until now, you have not asked for anything in my name, ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

Do you feel a tension? Why is it then that sometimes we pray and we get what we ask for, but sometimes we pray and we don't? This is the core question I want us to thoroughly address in a definitive way this morning. How do we reconcile these? Here's a core question. Do my prayers have causality or are my prayers merely me putting my desires on the record, or said more simply is prayer simply wishful thinking? Is prayer just a roll of the dice? Is it hedging my bet? So, scholars have been trying to understand this for centuries. Pascal wrote that through prayer, God has given us the dignity of causality. In other words, through prayer, we can cause things to happen that would otherwise not happen. And then C.S. Lewis in his book a **God in the Dock**... And I have worn this book out, I've got pages falling out of it, I have this big clip to keep my book together now. I love this book.

Lewis points out that actually God has given us two forms of causality, work and prayer. The normal conclusion would be that since, when I work, I see a result and when I pray, sometimes I do, but sometimes I don't, therefore work is a more powerful form of causality, but Lewis, with a great insight, points out, accurately I think, that actually work is a lesser form of causality, a less powerful form of causality than prayer. Because prayer is so much more powerful than work, God has had to put some limits on prayer. Otherwise, you would destroy yourself, you would destroy every person you love, you would destroy the complete cosmos. You would wreck the universe if God gave you as much power in prayer as he gives you in your work, and so he's put limits and restraints on prayer.

I know that just from my own life, I spent the first 14 years of my business career working in praying, praying hard by the way, praying in earnest reading passages and Proverbs and claiming them as my own, just claiming them in the name of God, that this is going to be, this is going to happen, the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied. So, I spent the first 14 years of my career working and praying to achieve something that would absolutely have destroyed me. In fact, almost did destroy me. In fact, I think that one of the reasons that that I'm not a celebrity... I write, I've written 21 books. Did you know that? Okay, so why am I not a famous celebrity?

I'll tell you why. I'll tell you why. It's God... God's.. self-publish. What? Who said that? What was it? I didn't even hear what he said. I just heard bad.

Oh. I still didn't get it, but anyway, so the bottom line is, is that I was working, praying to achieve something that would have absolutely destroyed me and I believe that today, God knows my heart. I am so susceptible to the human pride and ambition and getting swept up in achievement that God in his grace and mercy has put a ceiling on what I would do. I am actually so thankful and so grateful that I'm not more successful than I am. Now, how twisted does that sound? But I'll guarantee you that if I had continued on the path in business that I had been on, I'll guarantee you, because I am just like Donald Trump, I would be a billionaire, I would be divorced, my children would hate me and I would hate myself, and I would probably at some point do harm myself.

I know that. I know that about myself and so I am grateful. So here it is. Here it is. A little child is playing at the beach and sees the twinkling surf, and while mommy and daddy are talking to each other, the little three year old takes off across the sand, running blissfully towards the pounding surf, the five-foot pounding breakers, thinking that this is going to be so much fun and exciting, not understanding that it's rushing to its own destruction. It's getting what it wants at that point, but then the loving father sees the little child about halfway across the sand and leaps to his feet and sprints to his little child. And just as he his little child is like five feet away from getting pulverized by a five-foot breaker, the father rushes in and scoops up his little child.

And what does the little child do, the little three-year-old child? "Oh father, thank you from sparing me from certain destruction." What does the little child do? It throws a temper tantrum because he didn't get what he wanted. Matthew chapter six verse eight says that God knows what you need before you even ask. Of course, then that begs the question, if he knows what we need, why should we, why do we need to pray? It's because he then goes and tells us how to pray in the Lord's prayer. You should be at Matthew, at Luke chapter 11. It is a similar prayer to the prayer in the sermon on the Mount.

It looks to me like he is giving this as a sample prayer, a shortened version, it looks to me like it was given at a different time, and so with all of this going on in prayer, all of these promises that God has, Jesus has made about prayer, and the fact that we pray sometimes and receive what we want and other

times we don't, and we're trying to figure out why should we have to pray at all if he already knows what we need, we need some kind of a definitive guiding principle. So, we find that here in Luke chapter 11. In verse one at the end of the first verse it says, "Master," one of his disciples say, "Master, teach us how to pray," and so Jesus said, "Well, when you pray, say 'Father, reveal who you are. Set the world, right.'" Oh, I'm still in the message. Let me get out of the message. I should be in NIV. Oops.

NIV current, he said to them, "When you pray, say father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us and lead us not into temptation," into temptation. Then Jesus said to them, "Suppose you have a friend and you go to him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread.' A friend of mine on a journey has come to me and I have no food to offer him, and suppose the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. So, I say, 'Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.'"

And so, if you would look especially at various eight, he says, "Because of your shameless audacity, he will surely get up and give you as much as you need," as much as you need, and so here is a definitive guiding principle for your life of prayer taken from this verse. This is the Big Idea for the day. **Ask God for anything with shameless audacity, and then trust him to give you as much as you need.** This word "shameless audacity" is rendered differently in different versions. The Greek word means shamelessness, so because of your shamelessness, you should have shamelessness. That's the Greek word. He invites you to have shamelessness in your prayer. Many versions render it persistence, because of your persistence. The ESV says, "Because of your impudence." NIV 1984 says, "Because of your boldness." The Living Bible says, "Keep knocking long enough, keep knocking long enough, and he'll give you as much as you need."

Then the message says, "If you stand your ground knocking and waking, all the neighbors." The NIV renders it shameless audacity, and I love that. I love that. The idea that we would, we are invited in our prayers, basically we're invited to pray for unbridled success. We're invited to pray for complete healing. We're invited to pray for a mid-engine Corvette. We're invited... You can pray for anything you want to with shameless audacity, but then, we're told by scripture to then trust him to give you as much as you need because he understands whether or not you're getting ready to run into a five-foot breaker that's going to crush you or whether it's going to be a good thing for you.

SHAMELESS AUDACITY: THE CONFIDENCE TO ASK GOD FOR ANYTHING

Now let's just take a look at shameless audacity in a little bit more detail, so let's just call this the confidence to ask God for anything. The foundation of course for this is this verse 11, chapter 11 verse eight of Luke. So, we can pray with shameless audacity because prayer doesn't merely align us with what God was going to do anyway. So, we're going to do a definitive guide to seeking God's will because that would, a deeper walk with God would not be complete without talking about God's will, right? So we will do a separate message on a definitive guide for seeking God's will, but let me say this about God's will. I understand as an academic how God's will breaks down.

I've got a chart, I'll show you the chart right there, but there are certain things that God has decreed and certain things that God has not decreed. God has decreed the day of your birth. You can't change that. God has decreed that the cosmos would exist. You can't change that. God has decreed your height. You

can't change that, except as you get old you can. And then there are... So there are things that God has decreed. You can't change it, and then there are things that God has not decreed. So, among the things that God has not decreed, there are two kinds of things that God has not decreed: things that he has prescribed and things that he has not prescribed. So, God has not decreed how you love your neighbor or yeah, let's just leave it there.

God has not decreed how you love your neighbor, but he has prescribed that you would do that. On the other hand, God has not prescribed who you might marry or what house you might buy. Those things are... And now we're getting into the area you see where we can pray. For the things decreed, if you pray for something that God, against something that God has decreed, that's not going to happen. If you pray for something that God has not decreed and it's something that he has prescribed, like neighbor love, then he is going to come alongside you and grant that. If it's something that's not prescribed, like which house you should live in or who you should marry, so for those we need wisdom. We need wisdom, so there are ways to get to that, and one of them is through prayer.

So while I don't want to get any further into that today, when we are asking for things that have not been decreed by God, we can either pray for the ability to obey that which he's prescribed or for wisdom for those things. I didn't say that exactly right. For the things that are not prescribed, we can pray for wisdom for the things that... Okay, you know what? I'm going to get off of that because I want to show you this from the chart when I show it to you. So shameless audacity, the confidence to ask God for anything. There are plenty of examples in scripture. Elijah, in James chapter five, it's in your questions if you want to look at it later, but the idea was that that he says that the prayer of a righteous man is both powerful and effective.

Elijah prayed that the heavens would close up and for three and a half years it didn't rain, and then he prayed that it would rain and then it did. And there are other great examples as well. So, I think the takeaway here for me is this, is that I don't want to under ask God, I don't want to under ask God. I'm invited to have shameless audacity. Watch this. You might want to write this one down. Don't put a limit on God that God doesn't put on himself. Jesus has invited us to pray about everything and with shameless audacity, so why would we put a limit on God that God didn't put himself? Well, I'll tell you a couple of reasons.

Number one is that you don't believe that prayer really works. Number two is is that you are ashamed and guilty, and you don't feel like you deserve it. Number three is you don't understand the gospel, that everything that you have done has been forgiven and you don't have to atone for your sins by suffering. Jesus has already done all the suffering for you, and there are a few other reasons too. The Big Idea today is this. **Ask God for anything with shameless audacity, and then trust God to give you as much as you need** because this is what he promises to do.

TRUSTING GOD: BELIEVING HE WILL GIVE YOU AS MUCH AS YOU NEED

Then, the last piece of this is trusting God. So trusting God, another way of saying it, believing he will give you as much as you need. So, faith is the foundation of efficacious prayer. What is efficacious? Prayer that works. You have heard of the efficacy of a drug trial, right? The efficacy of a drug trial means that it worked. All right, so efficacious prayer, prayer that works. The foundation of efficacious prayer is faith is believing God's word. I'm going to tell you a little story. So, one of these verses here, it was Matthew 21 that I read you, whatever I did with that. Did I give that to somebody? I can't remember. So Matthew 21 and 22, I read you, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." So in

February of 2018 in my regular daily devotions, I was reading the whole text. The verse before it Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go throw yourself into the sea and it will be done.'"

Now, is that what he really means or is that hyperbole? What he's trying to do is get across the power of prayer to do incredible and impossible things, although there are people who have said the mountains to be taken up and cast into the sea and made it happen, if you've ever seen The Jetty. And then he says in verse 22, "If you believe," and I'm reading this in my devotion, "If you believe you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer," and I said out loud, "That's not true." I said it. I said it out loud. That's not true.

In February of 2018, I was wrapped in an electric blanket turned on high for four hours in the morning and could barely keep my eyes open. I had been praying for, at that point, about seven months for a healing, a healing of an undiagnosed autoimmune disorder. So, I'm reading along and I'm thinking about just how fervently I've been praying and the shameless audacity with which I had been praying to God. I read that verse, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." I said, "That's not true," and so I obviously knew I had a little problem that needed to be addressed. So, I asked God to rehabilitate my theology of prayer, and so I was reading all these other verses, but my mind also was taken to First John chapter five verse 14. I would invite you to turn there. It's the one of the two texts at the top of your outline. First John chapter five verse 14.

How are we doing on time? Okay. This is the confidence we have in approaching God. The word confidence is literally freedom of speech. That's what the Greek word says, means. This is the freedom of speech we have in approaching God, so this is in support of having this shameless audacity that if we ask anything according to his will, and again, not according to his decreed will, but according to his not decreed will, he hears us or he will listen to us. If we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him. So, God will grant you... Watch this. This is... Just take this in. God will grant you whatever you ask for if it's in his will, but never less than as much as you need.

If you take these two verses at the top of your sheet and put them together, this is what you come up with. God will grant you whatever you ask if it's in his will, but never less than as much as you need. And that is why the Big Idea for today is, **Ask God for anything with shameless audacity but then trust him to give you as much as you need.** Let us pray.

Our dearest Father, we all find prayer so encouraging and confusing and mysterious. And Lord, I just pray that you would help each of us to have new or renewed faith, that we can have confidence that you will in fact grant the requests that we ask when they're in your will, and that you will always give us at least, at least, as much as we need. I pray that you would burn this into our hearts as well as our minds and grow our faith, in Jesus name. Amen.