

Does Prayer Really Make a Difference?

Matthew 17

Introduction:

1. As Christians, we pray for our families, our work, our sick friends and loved ones, our trials we are going through, our church, lost souls, etc.
2. Many unbelievers would scoff at this. What we would call answered prayer they would call coincidence.
3. But if the truth was known, even we as believers many times struggle in believing that our prayers are really making a difference. We can begin to view prayer as a waste of time.
 - Not that we would ever **say** that out loud, but our lack of prayer demonstrates it.
4. In other words, we aren't convinced that our prayers are really accomplishing anything or making any difference.
5. Yet the Bible emphatically states the opposite – our prayers are accomplishing much. We see evidence throughout the Bible that God works on the earth **through** the believing prayers of His people.
6. But here is the kicker – even Jesus Christ believed in prayer and practiced a vibrant prayer life! If you would think that anyone would be above needing to pray, it would have been Jesus. He was the perfect, sinless Son of God, yet He thought it was necessary to pray. What do we see in His life concerning prayer?

Jesus taught that prayer makes a difference.

1. Jesus Christ continually drove home the point to His disciples that prayer is extremely necessary if we are to see God work in and through us.
2. There was a child that was possessed by a devil, and the disciples could not help the boy. The father brought the boy to Jesus, and Jesus delivered the child from the bondage that he was in.
 - The disciples asked Jesus, “Why couldn't we deliver the boy?” Look at Jesus' answer. Matthew 17:20-21
 - Notice that Jesus did not say, “Because I am the Son of God and you are just men.” No, Jesus identified the problem as a lack of prayer.
 - “*Fasting*” simply means that you are really serious about prayer to the point of praying instead of eating.

3. It's interesting that Jesus never represented His marvelous works as something that only He could uniquely do because of who He was. In fact, He told his disciples that they were capable of doing greater works than Himself in the future. John 14:12
4. Let's examine another illustration. Matthew 21:18-22
 - Jesus basically says to them, "Are you willing to pray the price?"
 - There are obvious dispensational considerations here. He is speaking to the twelve who would represent Him to Israel when Christ went away. There are also considerations of true need and God's will. If you don't need a mountain removed, God isn't going to remove it.
 - Jesus is making a point through an illustration. He is saying, "Guys, prayer makes a difference. You have to pray if you expect God to work."
5. Prayer is what gets God involved in any situation. Let's look at few more examples.
 - In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus told Peter that Satan wanted to destroy him, but then He said, "Peter, I have prayed for you that your faith won't fail, and you will be alright." Why? Because Jesus prayed for him.
 - In Luke 22:40, 46, Jesus taught the disciples that the only way to be delivered from fleshly temptations is to pray. "*Watch and pray lest ye enter into...*" Again, prayer is the key.
 - In Luke 21:36, we see that in light of the fact that Christ would be returning to earth and that things would get really bad before His return, He told them to pray. Prayer is what would prepare them for the future and for upcoming trials.
 - In Matthew 9:37-38, Jesus taught them to pray for laborers, and if they will pray, God will send them.
6. Jesus did not teach people to do things that had no benefit.
7. Jesus would not have taught people to pray and put such an emphasis on it if it was unnecessary. Jesus taught that prayer truly makes a difference.

Jesus Himself prayed constantly.

1. When you think of Jesus with all of His mighty power to heal people, cast out demons, and even raise the dead, it may cause you to wonder.

- You may have thought, “With all that power, He sure didn’t need to pray.”
2. Jesus had all that power to do some mighty things **because** He prayed so much. Jesus was constantly praying to His Father. Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 11:1
 - Jesus knew He had to pray. If He needed to pray, how much more should we?
 3. Jesus made it clear that He had no will of His own, and no power except that which came from the Father. John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28; 17:4
 4. What other way would He have been able to demonstrate His dependence on the Father other than prayer and communication with the Father?
 5. Just as we are to function in dependence on Christ, Christ was our example. He depended completely on the Father for all things – this is why that without prayer and communication with the Father, He could have never accomplished what He did.
 6. Jesus knew this, and that is why He communicated constantly with the Father. Mark 6:46
 - John 17 is a prayer to the Father and contains over 600 words.
 - His last action was a prayer from the cross. *“Father, into thy hand I commend my spirit.”* **Luke 23:46**

Jesus’ example inspired others to pray.

1. In Luke 11:1-10, the disciples were so moved by watching Jesus pray, that they asked Him to instruct them on how to pray like Him. They said, *“Teach us to pray...”* (**Luke 11:1**).
2. Jesus did not say, “Oh, that is something just for me, you don’t need to bother with that.” No, He proceeded to show them how to pray and even told a story designed to stress the importance of continual prayer.
3. Did Jesus mislead these men that He loved dearly? Did He just intentionally teach them to do something that would accomplish nothing? Obviously they didn’t think so.
4. After Jesus left this earth, the first thing they did was get together and have a prayer meeting. Acts 1:14
 - When trials came, they prayed! Acts 4:24-31

In Conclusion:

1. Today, I hope that Jesus' example has also inspired **you** to pray; to pray more fervently than ever before.
2. Prayer touches the heart of God because it demonstrates faith and humility. It shows God that we need Him, and we are depending on Him.
3. Paul told the church to "*pray without ceasing*" (**1 Thessalonians 5:17**). He said, "*in everything by prayer...let your requests be made known unto God*" (**Philippians 4:6**).
4. Remember this truth – God is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). How are you going to implement what you heard today into your life? What are some changes you could make to your life and schedule in order to pray more?