

Does Prayer Really Make A Difference? Matthew 17

Introduction:

Webster's defines prayer as "an address to God in word or thought." For believers in Christ, prayer is unhindered access to God whereby we may talk to Him at any time about anything (Romans 5:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Hebrews 4:16). Because of Jesus' sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, He made a way for us to be restored and reconciled into a right relationship with God. It may not be ongoing or continual, but as Christians we pray for our families, our work, our sick friends and loved ones, our trials we are going through, our church, for lost souls, etc.

Something non-believers and believers can have in common, with regard to prayer, is doubt and unbelief. Many times, we struggle to believe that our prayers are really making a difference. Often, we can begin to view prayer as a waste of time, and although we may not say that, our actions display it by our lack of talking with God. So, how do we change our thinking and ultimately our implementing of prayer on a regular basis? We must look to Jesus. Of anyone who seemed to not need to pray, it was Jesus, but on the contrary, the things that we think of that He accomplished were only done because He prayed and depended on God. So what did Jesus teach through His words and actions regarding prayer?

The Focus:

- **Every believer must understand that prayer really makes a difference. How? By understanding...**
 - **Jesus taught that prayer makes a difference.**
 - **Jesus Himself prayed constantly.**
 - **Jesus' example inspired others to pray.**

If we want to see God work in and through us, Jesus taught that we must pray. In the text, there was a child possessed by an evil spirit, and the disciples could not help the boy. The father, full of faith, brought his son to Jesus, and his son was delivered from the spiritual bondage and oppression that enveloped him. Upset and frustrated, the disciples ask Jesus, "Why couldn't we deliver the boy?" Jesus said, "*Because of your unbelief...*", but then He replied with how they too could help those who are overtaken by spiritual darkness, saying, "This wickedness is only removed by *prayer and fasting*" (Matthew 17:20-21). Jesus never responded by proclaiming His position as the Son of God, nor did He put them down by stating that they were only human. No, Jesus stated that the reason they weren't able to relieve the boy was a lack of prayer and fasting. Jesus never taught or instructed people to do things that were harmful or that weren't beneficial. Jesus taught that prayer was important.

Thinking and reflecting on the life of Jesus – His mighty power to heal, to cast out evil spirits, and to raise the dead, it should cause us to wonder. Oftentimes, we think of the result of a situation rather than the preparation that precedes it. The misnomer in different situations in life is that our focus and attention are usually on the outcome and not on the time and dedication put in on the frontend. Prayer speaks to a well-known principle of discipline and planning, and that is, if we are going to endeavor to do something, we must begin with the end in mind. If we are

going to see godly, Christ-honoring results in our life, we are must pray to that end. Jesus had power to do some mighty things because He prayed. Jesus was constantly praying to His Father (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 11:1).

As stated previously, our focus is often on the wrong thing, causing us to look at the results and not on that which was done to establish the ground work. If Jesus stated that He had no will of His own and no power except that which was given to Him by the Father, what way, other than prayer, could Jesus have demonstrated His reliance and dependence on His Father, God (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:28; 17:4)? It is prayer that allowed Jesus to accomplish all that He did, and Jesus knew this. That's why He communicated constantly with the Father (Mark 6:46). Jesus valued His relationship with God, His Father, so much, that His dying words were a prayer (Luke 23:46).

Jesus, the ultimate disciple-maker, led by example, and it was His life, words, and actions, that provoked His followers, the disciples, to ask Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). Christ's response was not about His supernatural ability because He was deity, but rather, He began to instruct them in what connects us relationally to God; He taught them to pray. Knowing that prayer, simply put, is talking with God, we must deduce from our human relations how we are to interact with Him. If God is going to move on our behalf, we must tell Him our needs, concerns, requests, desires, etc.

If we never talk to a person, how can we expect to know them? In the same manner, if we never talk to God or if we never read His Word, how can we expect to witness His power, the same power that Christ demonstrated and people witnessed? Jesus impacted the disciples so much that when He left, ascending to heaven to be with His Father, they gathered together in a room to pray, asking for and anticipating the power of God (Acts 1:8, 14; 2:1-4). Do you pray? Do you believe that prayer is important and necessary to live righteously and victoriously in this world? Do you believe that prayer really makes a difference?

Response to the Sermon:

Hopefully Jesus' life and example has challenged your thinking on prayer and has inspired you to pray – to talk to God more. Prayer is very dear to God; He desires to have intimate conversations with us. He wants us to know Him as much as He knows us. Prayer is how we show God that we need Him, and how we tell Him our desire to follow Him. Our response to Jesus' life and teaching should be to pray, to seek God in faith, knowing He hears us and desires to work in and through our lives (Philippians 4:6; Hebrews 11:6). Will you pray?

Bible Study Thoughts & Questions:

Prayer moves the heart of God. When we reach out to Him, it demonstrates to Him that we are depending on Him. When we come to Him, it shows our lack of understanding in a given situation, our complete inability to know what decision to make, or our inability to move the hearts and minds of others toward a desired end. Prayer says, "Lord, I need You..."

1. According to Luke 22:31-32, what did Jesus do for Peter? What specifically did He petition God for on Peter's behalf? How can you apply this in your life right now?

2. According to Luke 22:40-46, what did He teach and model regarding prayer? According to verse 45, what drove them to sleep? And what was Jesus' challenge and promise to the disciples (vs. 46)?
3. According to Luke 21:34-36, what truths can we learn from Christ's instruction? What did He teach that prayer does in our life? Why is this important for us to understand?

Application Questions:

Oftentimes, people will disregard or shun believers because of their faith in Jesus, but when the trials and the tribulations of life come, who do they often turn to? They turn to those who have a relationship with God. But if we are going to have influence and true impact on the lives of those that come to us, what must we do? In Matthew 17:14-18, a father, in a multitude of people, bursts out of the crowd to meet with Jesus. He informs Jesus that his son is completely overrun with evil spirits (vs. 15). As well, he tells Jesus that he previously brought him to see the disciples, but they were not successful at removing the spiritual oppression that had overtaken control of his body (vs. 15-16). However, Jesus was successful at removing the spiritual darkness, providing a way for light to enter his life (vs. 17-18). So, what was it that Jesus said allowed Him to expel the devils that the disciples could not (vs. 20-21)?

1. According to verse 19, the disciples demonstrated a wrong focus. What might be a question they should have asked instead of the one they asked Jesus? How does the disciples' question challenge us in our thinking and approach to problems or situations?
2. According to verse 20, what was Jesus' answer to their question in verse 19? How does this challenge you, and how does this apply to you in your communication with God?
3. According to verse 20, what must we have to overcome spiritual wickedness? Why is this an important truth to understand and apply?

Prayer:

- Pray that you would spend time with God, talking to Him (Matthew 17:20-21).

- Pray that you would come to God in faith, completely trusting He hears you and that His response is right (Hebrews 11:6).
- Pray that you would pray in everything and in every situation, giving everything over to Him (Philippians 4:6).
- Pray that you would have a mind and heart to be ready and willing to pray in any moment (1 Thessalonians 5:17).