

Why Your Prayers Don't Get Answered

It's one thing to pray; it's another to be assured you have what you ask for. What is the secret of believing prayer?

When Jesus was on earth, He made an incredible promise to His disciples regarding prayer that is recorded in Mark 11:24: "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." This promise of answer to prayer is one of the most wonderful in all Scripture. But in how many hearts has it raised the question: How can I attain the faith that knows it receives all it asks?

It is this question our Lord would answer today. Before He gave that wonderful promise to His disciples, He spoke another word, in which He points out where the faith in the answer to prayer originates and ever finds its strength: "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever ... does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says" (v. 23).

"Have faith in God." This word precedes the other, "Have faith in the promise of an answer to prayer."

The power to believe a promise depends entirely on faith in the promiser. Trust in the person begets trust in his word.

It is only where we live and associate with God in personal, loving intercourse, where God Himself is all to us, where our whole being is continually opened up and exposed to the mighty influences that are at work, where His holy presence is revealed, that the capacity will be developed for believing that He gives whatsoever we ask.

This connection between faith in God and faith in His promise

will become clear to us if we think what faith really is. It is often compared to the hand or the mouth, by which we take and appropriate what is offered to us.

But it is important to understand that faith is also the ear by which I hear what is promised, the eye by which I see what is offered me. On this the power to take depends.

I must hear the person who gives me the promise: The very tone of his voice gives me courage to believe. I must see him: In the light of his eye and countenance all fear as to my right to take passes away. The value of the promise depends on the promiser: It is on my knowledge of what the promiser is that faith in the promise depends.

It is for this reason that Jesus, before He gives that wonderful prayer-promise, first says, "Have faith in God." That is, let your eye be open to the living God, and gaze on Him, seeing Him who is invisible.

Believing God is just looking to God and what He is, allowing Him to reveal His presence, giving Him time and yielding the whole being to take in the full impression of what He is as God.

Faith is the eye to which God shows what He is and does. Through faith the light of His presence and the workings of His mighty power stream into the soul. As that which I see lives in me, so by faith God lives in me too.

And even so faith is also the ear through which the voice of God is always heard and intercourse with Him kept up. It is through the Holy Spirit the Father speaks to us. The Son is the Word, the substance of what God says; the Spirit is the living voice.

This the child of God needs to lead and guide him. The secret voice from heaven must teach him, as it taught Jesus, what to say and what to do. An ear opened toward God—a believing heart

waiting on Him, to hear what He says—will hear Him speak.

The words of God will be more than the words of a Book; proceeding from the mouth of God, they will be spirit and truth, life and power. They will bring in deed and living experience what are otherwise only thoughts.

When faith now is in full exercise as eye and ear, as the faculty of the soul by which we see and hear God, then it will be able to exercise its full power as hand and mouth, by which we appropriate God and His blessings. The power of reception will depend entirely on the power of spiritual perception. For this reason Jesus said, before He gave the promise that God would answer believing prayer: "Have faith in God."

Faith is simply surrender: I yield myself to the impression the tidings I hear make on me. By faith I yield myself to the living God. His glory and love fill my heart and have the mastery over my life.

Faith is fellowship; I give myself up to the influence of the friend who makes me a promise and become linked to him by it. And it is when we enter into this living fellowship with God Himself, in a faith that always sees and hears Him, that it becomes easy and natural to believe His promise as to prayer.

Faith in the promise is the fruit of faith in the promiser: The prayer of faith is rooted in the life of faith. And in this way the faith that prays effectually is indeed a gift of God—not as something that He bestows or infuses at once, but in a far deeper and truer sense, as the blessed disposition or habit of soul which is wrought and grows up in us in a life of intercourse with Him.

Surely for one who knows his Father well, and lives in constant close intercourse with Him, it is a simple thing to believe the promise that He will do the will of His child who lives in union with Himself.

It is because very many of God's children do not understand this connection between the life of faith and the prayer of faith that their experience of the power of prayer is so limited. When they desire earnestly to obtain an answer from God, they fix their whole heart upon the promise and try their utmost to grasp that promise in faith. When they do not succeed, they are ready to give up hope; the promise is true but is beyond their power to take hold of it in faith.

Listen to the lesson Jesus teaches us this day: Have faith in God, the living God. Let faith look to God more than to the thing promised; it is His love, His power, His living presence that will awaken the faith.

A physician would say, to one asking for some means to get more strength in his arms and hands to seize and hold, that his whole constitution must be built up and strengthened. In the same way, the cure for a feeble faith is to be found in the invigoration of our whole spiritual life by intercourse with God. Learn to believe in God, to take hold of God, to let God take possession of your life, and it will be easy to take hold of the promise. He who knows and trusts God finds it easy to trust the promise too.

God's promise will be to us what God Himself is. It is the man who walks before the Lord and falls on his face to listen while the living God speaks to him who will really receive the promise.

Though we have God's promises in the Bible, with full liberty to take them, the spiritual power is wanting, except as God Himself speaks them to us. And He speaks to those who walk and live with Him.

Therefore, have faith in God. Let faith be all eye and ear, the surrender to let God make His full impression and reveal Himself fully in the soul.

Count it one of the chief blessings of prayer to exercise

faith in God as the living, mighty God who waits to fulfill in us all the good pleasure of His will and the work of faith with power. See in Him the God of Love, whose delight it is to bless and impart Himself.

In such worship of faith in God the power will speedily come to believe the promise too: "Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them." When you do in faith make God your own, the promise will be yours too.

The precious lesson that Jesus has to teach us this day is this: We seek God's gifts; but God wants to give us Himself first. We think of prayer as the power to draw down good gifts from heaven, Jesus as the means to draw ourselves up to God. We want to stand at the door and cry; Jesus would have us first enter in and realize that we are friends and children.

Let us accept the teaching. Let every experience of the littleness of our faith in prayer urge us first to have and exercise more faith in the living God, and in such faith to yield ourselves to Him. A heart full of God has power for the prayer of faith. Faith in God begets faith in the promise, in the promise too of an answer to prayer.

Therefore, child of God, take time, take time, to bow before Him, to wait on Him to reveal Himself. Take time, and let your soul in holy awe and worship exercise and express its faith in the Infinite One, and as He imparts Himself and takes possession of you, the prayer of faith will crown your faith in God.

Read a companion devotional.

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