

Transcript 129

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Just recently recorded another episode on prayer, so we'd encourage you to watch and listen to that one as well, because a lot of times we talk about that week, which was more how to pray. A lot of people approach prayers if they have to say things a certain way in order for God to hear their prayers or answer their prayers. That lays a really good foundation for what we're going to be talking about today, which is more some of the misconceptions about prayer, and also just how to respond to unanswered prayer. So joining me again today is Gwen. Gwen is the editor of compellingtruth.org and also the manager of all of our volunteer teams and Nelson. Who is the director of video content. So Gwen, Nelson, thanks for joining me again today.

Shea Houdmann

I would say in our 20 years of answering people questions, the two most common misconceptions we receive in questions about prayer are one that's somehow saying in Jesus name Amen at the end of your prayer or saying I pray this according to God's will are some sort of like magic formula. That you're just saying the words, and that somehow impacts whether God will answer them. And there's obviously there's two different verses which we'll cover today to talk about if you pray anything in Jesus name, he will answer. If you pray anything according to God's Will, God will grant the request. So some people have this misconception that it's just a matter of saying certain things. Well, that's not what these two passages mean, so we're going to dive into these texts and study them with you 'cause still, we're still on a learning process as well. So Nelson why don't you start us off from what does it mean to pray in Jesus name.

Nelson Domingues

Sure, we see that in John chapter 14, verses 13 and 14 it reads, whatever you ask in my name this I will do that the father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. And when we hear that it sounds like the perfect formula, it sounds like a perfect way to get what you want. You want to do is ask for in Jesus name. And a lot of people do pray that way, thinking that they will gain whatever they request if they say those specific words that maybe have a tag to you know the end of the prayer.

Nelson Domingues

And I've been guilty of using repetitive words and different prayers, and sometimes I even say this and I pray this in Jesus's name. And I don't mean to add it as a cliché. I don't mean to add it as some magic formula at the end. I truly mean it when I pray. But I want to pray in his name. And what I mean by that when I say these words and follow this passage, what I mean is in the heart attitude of Jesus Christ himself. I'm lifting up this prayer to you, Father God in the same heart, in the same will, in the same direction as Jesus Christ, the Son of God would. And as he shed his blood for me, redeeming me, putting his robes of righteousness upon me, it's on his authority that I claim that even have the privilege to even ask anything of God the Father.

Nelson Domingues

And so when we pray in Jesus name, that's what we're really doing. We're praying His authority. We're praying in His will, we're praying on behalf of the fact that He allows us to go straight to the Father and pray. And so when He asked His disciples and He talks about this in scripture, that's what He's really saying to us to pray in Jesus name is to pray that way. It's not just to say the word, it's not some formula to tack on the end to get what you want. And maybe if you forgot to say it or something like that you wouldn't get it, that's not it at all. It's what our heart attitude is.

Nelson Domingues

And there's something I want to point out to you, even in that the very next verse, verse 15. It says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. And so we're just instructed to pray in Jesus name, which again is to pray in his authority. To pray in God's will, wearing the robes of righteousness that Christ offers us, right? But we have to do these things through a relationship with God. And we display that relationship by our behavior in different ways. We're not saved by what we do in any sort of way, but if you are saved, you will act a certain way. And like a tree Peachtree will bear peaches is right? And so we we think about these things that Christian will bear good fruit, will bear out the works of righteousness. And so if there's no obedience modeled in the person who's praying, if there's no will to follow what Scripture says. If there's no desire to do what God himself asks us to do, then why would we think that God hears our request? Or why would we think that we would get those requests? And it's through loving God. It's through a real relationship with God that we have the privilege to speak directly to him and make those requests in the authority of Jesus. Because without an authentic relationship with Jesus with God, we don't have that authority to stand behind. We can't say we're part of God's kingdom if there is absolutely no sign that we are. If we're walking in complete disregard for his will and desire for our life. And so a life of obedience will be displayed also in the person who's praying. So as we pray those words, I pray this in Jesus's name, it's a display. That I'm part of the kingdom of God. That I love God. That he's giving me His Son and it's in His righteousness I stand. And it's with His authority I'm praying these words. And I lift these up to you Father, God, asking if it is your will that you would grant me these requests. And I'm praying through faith that you would. And we stand. And we wait, and we hope in in the very best outcome, knowing that if He says yes or no that He will in fact give us those things in His timing.

Shea Houdmann

One of the best illustrations I think I've ever heard of doing something with someone named is the sense of like an ambassador. So the United States sends ambassadors to every other country in the world. So we have an ambassador to England, the ambassador to China, ambassador to Australia, etc. And those people are to represent essentially the President United States but also, the country as a whole. So any thing that they do or say needs to be in agreement with what the President has instructed them to do. So if an ambassador were to make a decision or say something that didn't accurately represent what the President wanted him to say, that would get the ambassador in a lot of trouble, and then that his words would be considered null and void once the President spoke up.

Shea Houdmann

So in essence, we are Christ's ambassadors, things that we say should be the things that Christ has taught us to say. The stuff that Christ has taught us to pray for. Even the we pray for things that are for his sake in the sense of what would honor and glorify Christ? So when we say I'm praying in Jesus name,

it's praying the things that Christ wants us to be praying for, that Christ wants us to have that are explicitly stated in Scripture. These are the things you should be praying for, so it's to me that was a really powerful example. But like, yeah, I mean I am an ambassador if I'm doing things in Christ's name, I better make sure they accurately represent him. And that's what praying in Jesus name is supposed to be about.

Shea Houdmann

So thank you, Nelson for those pointers there. And Gwen why don't you jump in, there's another passage that talks about praying according to the will of God. So in your study, what does it mean to pray according to God's will?

Gwen Sellers

So I think the passage you have in mind is First John 5:14 through 15. So I'll read that it says, this is the confidence we have in approaching God that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him. So I think a few things come to mind when thinking about praying in God's will. One is really just encouraging to know that God only answers prayer according to his will. So if I pray for something that's not good for me, even if I you know like I think that it will be a good thing, God isn't going to just give it to me because I asked for it if he knows that it's not going to be a good thing for me. So I think there's just that level of trust that God answers prayer according to His will, and because we know who God is, we know that that's good.

Gwen Sellers

So then the question becomes ok, so how do we align our prayers with God's will? And I think that really comes through knowing God, which often comes through reading the word. I mean there are explicit things in the Bible that tell us what God's will is, and even specifically linked to prayer. So like for instance, First Timothy 2:1-4, first of all then I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people. For kings and all who are in high positions. That we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth. So there we have praying for others is good. Praying for like the good and peace of your country. Praying for your leaders who are making decisions, asking for wisdom for them. We know that God desires that people would be saved, so praying for salvation for other people. It's all in God's will. You hear in other places, I think it's in First Thessalonians. This is God's will for you, your sanctification, so praying for your own sanctification, and for that of others.

Gwen Sellers

We see in in the epistles oftentimes well, so like in Ephesians 1, some of the things that Paul prays for is that the believers would have a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you. What are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the Saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe according to the working of his great might. And just that idea that people would deepen in their faith and would know God more and more. Obviously, we know God's will is not for us to sin, so we can pray you know, like in the Lord's Prayer lead me not into temptation. So we pray

for God to give us strength and just like power to resist those temptations when they come. Jesus is prayed for unity in the church for believers. If you look at John 17 like the last part is for us, believers who lived you know, long after and he's praying for unity. So we pray for church unity. Jesus also told his disciples the harvest is plenty. The workers are few. Pray for workers to go out, so we pray for gospel messengers. So just this idea of over and over again in the Bible we get to know God's heart and His will and so anytime we're praying those things, we're praying in accordance with his will. And we're also that's part of how we're transformed and become more in line ourselves with who God is and how He's calling us to live.

Shea Houdmann

That's excellent Gwen. I think so many questions we receive are about like how can I know God's will? And so when you're saying you need to pray according to God's will, it's like, well, how am I supposed to know what that is? And your point to you know God's will by studying scripture. Because there's many, many different passages where it says and this is my will for you and this is what I want you to do. So it's not like it's a mysterious thing, God wants us to know His will so that we can both pray for His will and follow His will. When I think of maybe the key to knowing God's will I always go back to Romans 12:1-2, which reads, I appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice. Holy acceptable God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God. Which is good and acceptable and perfect? So if you want to know God's will submit yourself to God, offer your life to Him as a living sacrifice and He will reveal His will to you because he wants you to know His will. Again, not just for knowing what to pray for, but knowing how to live your life.

Shea Houdmann

So will of God is not supposed to be a mystery. He wants us to know His will. Not always intricate detail that we'd want. I mean, I would love to know God's will for every single detail in my life. This He doesn't always reveal it to us that specifically because He wants us to use the biblically informed discernment that he's given us. He wants us to make decisions he gave us. Whether a certain degree of free will for a reason, so that we can make decisions in harmony with who He is in His will. But God's will is not a mystery, especially in relation to prayer. He wants us to know what to pray for because He delights in answering our prayers that are asked according to His will in His name and so forth.

Shea Houdmann

If I would want to point to the next most common question about prayer, it's people who have thought they're praying according to God's will, or praying in Jesus name, but don't seem to be getting what they're asking for. And again, we discuss this some last episode. Prayer is not supposed to be about us asking for things, but asking for things, petitions is a part of prayer. So what do you do when you ask for something and don't receive it? Let me start off with you, Gwen. What do you? What's your experience with unanswered prayer? What's what seems to be the things that blocks people from receiving answers to their prayer, or what's maybe ways that people their prayers are a little misguided that results in their prayers going unanswered?

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, well, I mean, you know, I think sometimes there is in James that passage of you have not because you ask not. And when you ask, it's with wrong motives. So I think sometimes people are praying sort of that like God is a genie, I just want what I want. Rather than praying with this sense of submission to God. Like I really want to know God's will. And I'm really willing to follow it. You know, like James one talks about, if any of you at lacks wisdom, ask God and He'll give it to you. So like God will give us wisdom in specific situations, but then it goes on to talk about asking in faith. And I've heard this explained as kind of like asking as if like God is going to give you the plan and you're going to follow it. You're not kind of going to do your own thing on this side, so I think sometimes there's that just misunderstanding of prayer. I think sometimes people just don't notice honestly, the answers to prayer. You know we might, because sometimes they don't come in quite the way we expect. So for instance, you know you've probably heard the joke, pray for patience and then, like you're going to have a lot of awful things happen to you that give you the test for patience. And you know that can be true sometimes. So you might feel like, oh, I'm praying for patience and you know what? Like, I lost my temper with like standing in line I just couldn't handle it. It's like that actually is an answer to prayer. You've you're asking God to develop this characteristic in you, and he's giving you opportunity to practice it.

Gwen Sellers

So I think sometimes it's just maybe we aren't really paying attention to what that answer is, or it's difficult for us to see. I think for me the the hardest thing about unanswered prayer is when it's a prayer that we know honors God and we know is in His will, such as salvation for a lost loved one. I mean there are people who you know they've been praying for 20 years for like this family member to be saved and there just seems to be no change. And I think there too, you know, that gets into salvation. That person heart needs to change like God can't just isn't going to just force them into it. But I think sometimes prayers answered in increments and like, so we're not necessarily noticing the changes that God is doing in our heart through that prayer, or like the little changes going on in that person. Yeah, so sometimes we just sort of have to trust like, well, God is working in this and maybe then start praying for eyes to see it. Nelson, what are your thoughts?

Nelson Domingues

When I don't receive the answer to prayer that I think I want to, it forces me to this like self evaluation mode. There's a haunting verse in Proverbs, chapter 28 verse 9. It says if one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination. And you know the picture is, you know, a child who is who is so disobedient. Who is so disrespectful. Who could care less with his parents say, or ask, or demand, in any sort of way, shape, or form. But then one day they just walk right up and they ask for this grandiose favor, I mean most parents would probably want to say I don't think you deserve that. And you know you're requesting even even the fact that you would request this good thing from me in light of how you've treated me over these last whatever days, weeks, months, years it it turns my stomach. I think you owe me something else before you start making requests. And I think God looks at us the same way.

Nelson Domingues

And so I kind of I pray sometimes in the way that David prayed Lord, search my heart, see if there's any wayward sinfulness in me that's blocking, that's hindering my prayers as well. Because I want to make

sure that I am not just making requests of God and expecting him to answer my prayers while at the same time living the life outside of His will. And so when I don't receive the answers of prayer, it forces me into self evaluation and I pray that the spirit would speak to me. I pray that I would be drawn to His word. I pray that I be drawn more to prayer. Those are things that God that God wants. Clearly he wants a relationship, but clearly He wants us to pray, to know His word. To spend time with Him. To be obedient to Him, to rid ourselves of sin and so I I pray in those sorts of ways. And and if I'm doing all those things and if I am not finding sin within me and if I'm walking with the Lord and if I am being obedient to the things He's asking me to do as far as I can tell, and as far as He's revealed to me, I take unanswered prayers as a time just being patient and just waiting. When I know that there are specifically things that I believe are in His will.

Nelson Domingues

And then I also have to lean on the fact that God is much more grand than I am. He sees far, far wider and deeper and through time and space far better than I. I can't even compare and so I have to get into, you know, a humble attitude as well and say, well, I think this is the very best thing possible. I think that God would really want this to happened right now. I can't believe that He wouldn't do this and I've heard people pray and say, like, oh, when I get to heaven I'm really gonna have a word with God. And I'm like really like you're really gonna have a word with God because He knows far more than you and I never want to get into that prideful attitude where I think I know better than God. And so even if I believe my whole heart and and think that whatever I'm requesting is part of His will, if He's not answering that prayer, He may be just seeking patience for me. He may be working in time and for a better cause and underwater thing to happen, or he might just know better. And what I think He is something that He wants may not be something that he wants at all. And I have to be ok with that. And so it's a difficult thing not to receive what you're praying for. But we have to trust in a loving God who knows us. Who knows all things, who desires the very best for us and for those around us and for salvation for those who call upon His name. And so I have to trust Him when I don't receive the answers to prayer that I think that he ought to answer.

Gwen Sellers

I think that goes kind of back to our first you know the podcast we did earlier about prayer being part of relationship with God and what you said Nelson called to mind for me people talk about wrestling with God in prayer, referring back to Jacob wrestling with God, and yeah, and I think there is that idea of when prayer doesn't turn out how we expect or when it seems like God is silent, yeah, self examination is the 1st right step. Because sometimes God has already told us something and we're not being obedient to that. So how can we expect something new if we kind of have this track record of not doing what God says.

Gwen Sellers

But then you've brought to mind that idea of persisting in prayer, so you keep bringing it to God. Of you know, I, I thought this was your will. I think this is your will. Nothing is happening and so it draws out patience, but I think it draws out patience or it's meant to draw out patience in relationship. We don't just give up like oh well, I'm just not going to pray anymore, because God doesn't do what I want Him to do. Instead, we keep bringing that to God and you know, help me see this as you see this. Help me understand why this isn't your will right now or help me keep trusting you and we just keep bringing it

back, trusting that God is working on our hearts and molding us and using it as a relationship opportunity.

Nelson Domingues

I just finished a book on prayer by AW Tozer and one of the things that he brought up is that our lives are very busy and we have a lot of things going on in our schedules all around us and even more busy now with all social media and all separate ways, different contact us and and all these different things coming in and being a distraction really, and one of the points that he brought up in his book was that was interesting and he says pray until you pray. And what he meant by that was sometimes it takes some time to even get into a right mindset of being before the Lord in a proper attitude and a proper way to pray to the Lord. And he says, while micro prayers and throwing up prayers throughout the day, they're all good. We're not saying don't do that, but sometimes when when we want to truly petition the Lord on something on some level, whatever it may be. There are moments, I think that we need to get to a space in place with the Lord were were truly praying directly to him and humbleness and His will and assurance knowing that He hears us and that were before the throne. And so sometimes it just time to be there. To sit before the throne in a posture of humility and pray until we pray and that is, of course, praying the Lord's will.

Shea Houdmann

I love that Nelson and both of you raised really good points that really remind me of different answers to prayer that have occurred in my life. I think maybe the one final point that we can touch on is that sometimes God wants us to persevere in prayer. And that there's two references and two parables that Jesus tells one about a friend who needs some bread who keeps knocking on his friends door late at night until the friend finally gives up and gives him some. Or the parable unjust judge where the widow keeps petitioning this judge over and over and over again. And so the point of these parables is not to compare God to the unjust judge or to the friend who doesn't want to get out of bed, but no, to teach us to persevere in prayer, to not give up, to keep asking for something until we're convinced that's not God's will for us to have. Until we're convinced that you know, maybe God is saying no to this because He has something better in mind. Could say that there really is no such thing as unanswered prayer. There's yes, as an answer, no as an answer, and not yet is an answer. It's more of discerning which of those this happened.

Shea Houdmann

For the most powerful example in my life, I would say after I came into faith in Christ there was a Christian girl I had a huge crush on. And for years I was thoroughly convinced that she was the one for me and prayed for her to be God please give me this woman to be my future spouse, 'cause I think she's just amazing. And then so I kept praying for that prayer, just trusting that God would eventually grant it, but eventually God took that desire away. I no longer felt that she was the one that she wasn't, but very quickly after I stopped praying and the next day I heard that the another girl that caught my eye had stopped dating the guy she was dating and then it turned out that that was Melissa that the woman I've been married you now for 25 years and very happily married to. So God taught me to persevere in prayer through that but also taught me sometimes the things we're asking for is not God's best. What like what Nelson said, it's something far better in mind.

Shea Houdmann

So when people talk about, well, do you think God gets tired of me asking for the same thing? It's like no, I don't. As long as you're praying for something that very well could be God's will, keep praying that prayer and until God convinces you otherwise. Until God gives you a very clear no or leads you to pray for something different. This God part of the relationship we're talking about is in petitioning God and asking God for things, which is a major aspect of prayer. God knows our hearts and He wants us to ask Him for things that are good and things are in aligned with His will. But He also wants us to be willing to stop praying for those things when it becomes clear those are not God's will.

Shea Houdmann

So that was a huge lesson learned for me and one that I've applied to other areas of my life in that I no longer think this is something God wants for me, so I'm going to stop asking for it. Big lesson, I think that's a lesson a lot of us can learn in that both perseverance and also submission. And that I'm going to persevere in praying for this until God gives me a clear no. Have either of you had an example in your life, something you asked for a long time. Eventually God led you a different direction.

Nelson Domingues

I think we probably all have different moments like that. Before I I used to teach youth at my church and was very busy and very involved in our church and as I was doing that I thought wow this would be great to do this all the time, right? 'cause I was I was teaching youth and working full time and and doing those things and I just thought this would be really cool if I could do that. But at that time I was already married. I had a house, car payments and bills and it's like I just can't quit my job and go off to seminary. And so I was, I pray to the Lord like how can how can we make this work. I really feel drawn in this direction that you're calling me to the ministry. But how do I get past all these seemingly roadblocks and a house payment car payment, all this sort of stuff. And and I had a good job at the time that was paying well and so I didn't know what to do. But I'm just praying for the Lord to move in that direction and then, lo and behold, one day I got laid off from my job. You know, the government opened up trade agreements and a lot of jobs went overseas. And I was laid off. And in that moment, and I sat in the office, and I was hearing that was being laid off, along with a bunch of other workers at the same time. You know, I I was broken and I I couldn't even explain it or no, I remember getting home and just being, you know, shattered like. What do I do? And then I quickly realized, it was, it was almost surreal how quickly I was sitting there after I got home kind of broken that I lost my job and thought and the Lord just I felt like he spoke to me and just like you were praying for an opportunity to go into ministry.

Nelson Domingues

And because they're the way I lost my job because the government opened up some trade agreements and jobs and overseas they had special programs for those people where they can go to school and how their school paid for for a little while, while they can remain on unemployment. And there was like this amazing opportunity that clearly God cleared the way for me to do that so I could go to the seminary and to Bible college to earn a degree and to move into full time ministry. But yeah I was praying for something. I didn't get what I pray for it in the way that I wanted it, but God did something far greater and took a lot longer. But I'm so glad that the path you chose. And so that was a moment in my life that I always point back to saying that God hears our prayers. He answers our prayers, but sometimes he'll

answer in a way that you might not be ready for right now, but you have to stand in faith knowing that he desires good for you and for His His kingdom.

Gwen Sellers

One that comes to mind for me, I had a skiing injury when I was ten and yeah, hurt my knee, had surgery, and the elders of my church you know, like came over, they anointed my knee with oil, prayed for healing and God did not do a miracle. It was I had basically five years with physical therapy, my last surgery when I was 15 and even still like I don't have full range of motion. But I've come to see the way you know, so yeah, so I wanted miraculous healing. Or like even and sometimes I have those questions like why did God even let this happen? But now I see all the ways that he worked in it, like the things that He used it for for me to kind of reveal and root out some lies that I'd was believing about Him. Just the ways that He used that to shape my character, but hopefully my family was a witness to all the medical people that were involved. And I think God even used it to like to protect me from certain things that would have happened in those age ranges had I not had an injury. So, so while God didn't like miraculously physical physically heal me, He did heal my knee. I mean, it's like it's fine. I can do everything I want to do, but also used it to shape me and to teach me more about Himself. So that's kind of another one of those. I really wanted this and wondered why, but now looking back I can see that God used it for greater purposes.

Gwen Sellers

I do also want to say, uhm, you know, I think that God answers. I mean, obviously He answers prayers according to his will, but He so we've talked about things like, oh, this is all about shaping us in relationship and you know, like serious deep prayer, which is all very good and really part of the Christian life. But God answered simple prayers too, and I was surprised looking through some scriptures in preparing for this. Even seeing the things that people prayed for in the Bible. You know, like they did pray for for physical protection, which I guess isn't necessarily a simple thing. But even looking back on my own life, I mean, I remember when I was maybe like 8, you know? I thought that our cat was lost. And so, like I'm praying like oh God please like let the cat be ok. And where is the cat? And then, like I go down in the basement and turn around a chair and it's like, oh, the cat's here. I mean she might have been there the whole time, I don't know. But but for me, that totally boosted my faith in God. It's like answered a prayer. So God cares about those like little things too. So yeah, I think it's just like we have that invitation to pray about big things, deep things and also wouldn't it be great if I could have a parking space close by the by the grocery store because I'm exhausted? Like God cares about that too.

Nelson Domingues

You know, one day my my son lost the little toy that he just got in a field and we were with a bunch of other people and we were all looking for this little toy just because he was all heartbroken over this thing. And we spent some time I mean, half hour at least, you know, talking about multiple people just looking all around. And then like I literally thought like why don't I pray about this? And you know, just to myself I'm just like Lord, let me find this little toy. He's going to make his day and let us get along with our days too then what testimony would be have to do this? And literally, as soon as I was done praying, I looked down and the thing is like right there in front of me like this, this little toy, and I found it. I picked it up and I showed my son, he was so happy. Then I went to the other people said hey guys, I just prayed for the Lord to help me to find this thing and I found it.

Nelson Domingues

I mean, the Lord doesn't always answer that way, right? But the moments that he does is just like boost in our faith in it. And it's such a testimony to His will that He cares about even the littlest things like a little lost toy in the field for my son. So that was a pretty cool moment to. I got to have an immediate answer to prayer.

Shea Houdmann

Amen, so thank you Gwen. Thank you Nelson for joining me in this discussion today and I hope to our listeners, hopefully you are encouraged by our conversation today to both persevere in prayer, to study God's word, to know the type of things you should be praying for, because those are the type of prayers that God answers. But then also the helpful reminders at the end that God cares about even the little things going on our lives and nothing is too small or nothing too big for us to ask for God's help, to ask for God's wisdom, to ask for God's guidance, ask for God's provision. See He loves having a relationship with us and part of that relationship as our Heavenly Father is providing for us. So never be bashful about bringing things to the Lord in prayer. Just be sensitive to making sure you are praying according to His will, as revealed in His word. So it's been the Got Questions podcast on what to do about unanswered prayer and how to avoid asking for things that are not in His will. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.