

Transcript 133

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Today we're going to be continuing our series on talking about prayer, some of those frequently asked questions about prayer. So there's been two other episodes before this one, where we discuss how to pray. Why is prayer important? How to respond to unanswered prayer and so forth. So today we're going to be kind of covering some of the other frequently asked questions we receive about prayer. But we're not going to be spending a ton of time on any of them. We're going to be jumping around to each of these questions.

Shea Houdmann

And so you know the three of us, Gwen, our administrator for compellingtruth.org, and also our volunteer coordinator and Nelson, the director of video content, are joining me today. And each of us we know the questions that are on the list. But we don't know entirely which questions we're going to receive. So Gwen, why don't you start us off? Let me pull one of these questions out and here we go. So Gwen, why is corporate prayer important? And for those who may not be familiar with the term corporate, it just means group prayer. So praying with a group of people, why is it important?

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, a great question. I think we see a lot of examples of corporate prayer in the Bible, so just number one like that it is a legitimate thing that believers have been doing for years. Even in the Old Testament when you think about the Psalms, those were often prayed together. In the New Testament, when Jesus gives the example of the Lord's prayer, that's our father, which kind of indicates that we're praying together. You see the believers and Acts gather together to pray a lot and just sharing in that. So I think it's it's part of our corporate worship to God and just part of what it means to be the family of Christ.

Gwen Sellers

But I think sort of from a personal standpoint of what's important other to it other than just the fact that it's something we do, is that I think the way it helps it reminds us that we are the family of God and that we come to him together as a group and as a community. But I think it also builds our bonds together as a family. It's one of the ways that we bear one another's burdens. When you're with a group you know like you're at Bible study or something, and you share your prayer request and then you actually pray together with one another, I think that's an encouragement to the person that you're praying for. And it's a reminder to you in the group to be praying for them and continually praying for them like throughout the week. Do you guys have anything to add about corporate prayer?

Shea Houdmann

I remember when probably the first time I ever attended a group prayer meeting. I came to faith in Christ as a teenager, so I wasn't really familiar with what churches were like. What went on in churches. And my main question was when someone else was praying is like what am I supposed to be doing while someone else is praying? My just I know I'm just sitting here with my eyes closed, hands folded, I'm being quiet. Yeah, but what's the point of group prayer if only one person praying? Wasn't until later well, I really came to learn that we're supposed to be praying silently in our minds, in agreement with

what the person praying, so that it's not just one person talking to God. We're all communicating to God. Its just only one of them generally is speaking is actually praying out loud. So that may seem like a no brainer, but for me early on in my Christian life that was something that initially didn't make sense to me. It's like what's the point of this if only one person is praying anyways. So that was kind of a eye opening experience for me to finally figure out no, a group prayer like all of us are supposed to be praying, not just the person who's praying out loud.

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, well, that's a great point because group prayer looks like a lot of different things that can be that like the one person is praying kind of for the group, but yeah, but you're all joining in that attitude of prayer and that similar purpose. Or sometimes sometimes there are group prayers where it's just everybody in the room praying, but like praying about different stuff. And and then there's sometimes like people do popcorn prayer, and yeah, so there's a lot of different ways that group prayer looks, but it is all still that we're all united coming to God together.

Nelson Domingues

I think there's two misconceptions about group prayer sometimes that I feel come up often. When we pray together, you know the more people we have, the more God will listen to our prayer as if you know we have two or three or four or five or a group of people. Now God's really gonna listen. Now we're really going to get on his good side and then, perhaps He'll answer our prayer. And that's obviously not how prayer works. We're not going to bend God against His will just because we have more people praying for that thing that perhaps is against his will. And so I think Gwen you're right, when we prayed together, the point isn't to amplify the power of the prayer by how many people are gathered in the room. It's simply that on gathering where we encourage one another by praying for each other, by listening to each other, by yeah, and just lifting up one another and hearing someone pray for you is a blessing in itself. And so we're not looking to magnify the power of prayer. We're not going to change God's mind just because a lot of people are praying.

Nelson Domingues

Also, in Matthew 18 and talks about, you know where two or three are gathered in my name there I am among them. People will also look at that text and think, well now if I have two or three God's going to have to listen to meet my prayer. Again it's the same concept. It's not. In fact in Matthew 18, that's that's really taken out of a church discipline passage, where that's that's really the the full scope of that particular passage about church discipline and people coming before the church and agreeing together on a particular action and process. And so, yeah, so corporate prayer is about being together about encouraging one another. It's not about magnifying prayer or making it loud enough so God hears us. He hears us even if we pray silently.

Gwen Sellers

Yeah. Excellent point.

Shea Houdmann

Let's go ahead and jump to question #2 for you, Nelson. So question #2, should we pray to the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit?

Nelson Domingues

Sure, you know it's it's hard to pray to just one isn't it? Because it's we pray to a triune God, and as we pray for the father to the son and to the Holy Spirit. And praying to one is praying to all. And when we think about praying to the father, we can think about it as we prayed to the father through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. And so, as I pray particularly, I typically pray to God the father in general, but the scriptures have many examples where we can pray to Jesus Christ or pray in the spirit. Other times where we invoke Jesus name in a sense. Where we say I'm praying in Jesus name. We talked about that in the last podcasts as well. And so there's not a particular way we have to pray where its just to the father or just to the son or just the Holy Spirit. But as we pray, we're praying to God, our triune God. And he hears us no matter how we address it, or how we might begin that prayer. We're praying for the father's will through the son and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Shea Houdmann

I think a lot of people will point to the the Lord's Prayer where Jesus, in giving an example, not a something, if the legalistically you follow, but here is your, the types of things you should pray. He starts off with in our father. So some people interpret that as saying you should only pray to the father. Well, that's not the teaching of scripture, but I mean, generally speaking, I'm with Nelson. I usually start out my prayers like father or our father or father in heaven. But again, our God is triune. So by praying to one we are praying to all. It's not as if Jesus and the Holy Spirit don't hear our prayer when we're addressing them to the father and the other way around. So generally speaking, it seems since the one example of Jesus teaching us how to pray you pray to the father, that's seems to be if there is a biblical instruction, then that that would be it. But again, I don't think that this is the only way to do it, is more of this is the the general or the standard way to do it. God perfectly hears our prayers in their adjusts to Jesus or addressed to the Holy Spirit so you don't need to worry about that, but it's more of just realizing who God is, that he is triune. And that it's more important that we're praying in Jesus name. Praying according to God's will. Then how we open our prayer. Just saying Father, Jesus or Holy Spirit doesn't really impact whether Gods going to answer that prayer in the sense of those are determined by whether we're praying according to God's will and so forth. As we talked about in the previous episode, so that's a really good question. I've seen a lot of people get really, really hung up on no, you absolutely have to pray to the father and you have to start off with our father. And it's like that's that's not the point either. So there's dangers on both ends of that.

Gwen Sellers

When I think one thing I mean, I too normally address my prayers, Father God or Lord or something like that. But when you think about all the different names that God has in the Bible, I mean sometimes a particular name of God is really relevant to you in the moment or in your prayer you know. So sometimes you're like almighty God. Or using a different name of God. And so, like you guys are saying, you're still addressing your prayer to our triune God, like through the power of the spirit in Jesus name, but sometimes just a particular name of God or a particular attribute of his is is really relevant. So that's how you kind of address the prayer.

Shea Houdmann

So alright, let's jump into question #3 and I'll take this one so question three. So what is the prayer of salvation? This one is really interesting for me. I remember I was this point probably 15 years ago. There was a mine in Pennsylvania that collapsed and I think some like 15 miners were trapped way down deep in this mine. And they were so deep it took the rescuers a long time to get to them. And at one point like they were running out of oxygen. And ended up only one person end up being rescued. Only one person survived and once he recovered they were interviewing him on national TV and they asked him, so like what were some of the last moments? And he's like, well, one of the people in the mine was led us all in the sinners prayer. And so what would happen in terms of Got Questions was, for the next few days are what is the Sinners Prayer article shot to the top, I mean thousands upon thousands of people were Googling what is the sinners prayer? Because they have no idea what he's talking about.

Shea Houdmann

So both the prayer of salvation and the sinners prayer goes back to this idea that we pray in order to receive Christ. A evangelist will share the gospel, and then at the end we'll invite people, if you're ready to receive Christ, please pray this prayer. Now, the Bible actually nowhere teaches us to pray a prayer in terms of receiving Christ. The Bible calls us to repent, to trust, to believe. But with that said, I think saying a prayer or just communicating to God that you have believed, that you are now trusting in Christ, is a perfectly appropriate way to express what has happened. But the danger is some people get hung up on the idea that, oh, I prayed a prayer when I was ten years old, as if like, there's a certain words that you can say that will make you go from unsaved to saved, and it's not the words. It's not anything we say or anything we do. It's whether we've received Christ.

Shea Houdmann

So if you've trusted in Christ as your Savior. Believing his death was a full penalty for your sins and his resurrection proves his victory and guarantees your salvation. If you're trusting in that, then you are saved and you can express that your faith in God through a prayer. But as long as it doesn't go to the extent of, I'm saved because I prayed a prayer. That's a that's unbiblical and it's very dangerous because you never want to be trusting in anything that you've done. You want to be trusting in Christ and the salvation that he is provided. So yeah, the prayer of salvation is something not explicitly biblical. That doesn't mean there's no value in it. That doesn't mean it can't be done in conjunction with trusting in Christ. We I just don't want our attention to be so much on saying a prayer versus OK, who are we actually trusting in?

Nelson Domingues

Scripture teaches us that God knows our heart and he knows exactly what we want to say. He knows our belief. He knows who we believe in. He knows our sincerity, whether or not we we truly are repentant of our sins. We were truly trusted in Jesus Christ as our Savior alone. And so I've had that same question come to me through maybe the youth ministry or other times in church where people say you know, what do I say? And it's like often like just express yourself to God. Are you sorry about your sins? Let him know. Are you trusting in him? Say that, do you believe in Jesus Christ as the one and only savior? Say that? Use your words and communicate in a loving, humble way to God, those things. And he knows and who accept that prayer. So you don't need to be worried about saying the wrong thing or not having enough content in it or being theological in any sort. By theological, I mean by quoting verses or something like that in Scripture. You don't need to worry about those types of things. He knows our

heart. He knows what we're going to say even before we say it. So just express your heart to the father, to our God, and he hears those things, and he'll accept that genuine prayer of salvation.

Shea Houdmann

Gwen, let's go ahead and jump to the next question. This one's for you, so Gwen. Is it OK to pray silently?

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, I think this is an interesting question because sometimes people also wonder is it OK to pray out loud in public? So in Matthew 6, Jesus talks about this. Kind of compares a pharisee and a tax collector, and you know so, or maybe that's not the comparison, but anyway, so some people you know pray to be impressive and out loud and everybody see it. And he says, don't be like that go, you know alone and pray and the father who is in heaven hears you. So God obviously knows all of our thoughts so it's not like he doesn't hear our silent prayer because oh those were thoughts I was having to myself. He knows what you're thinking, whether whether you're praying or not.

Gwen Sellers

And there's also in First Thessalonians 5:17 to pray without ceasing. So of course, we're going to be praying silently. I mean, I think we do that. Sometimes even you know back to that conversation on corporate prayer like we talked about when somebody else is praying, you often are joining them silently in that. So yes it is certainly OK to pray silently. And I would say a lot of our prayers end up being silent prayers. And it's also OK to pray out loud. It's also OK to write down your prayers. Like it's all communication with God who knows, like Nelson said, who knows our heart, he knows you completely. So silent prayers arrive to him as well.

Shea Houdmann

Now, the one danger I would warn against with praying silently. It's not related to praying silently other than the question is. People will ask us should I pray silently so only God can hear my prayer and not Satan. As if when you pray silently, God can read your mind. Satan can't. Therefore you can keep these prayers a secret from Satan. So Satan doesn't know what you're praying about. And it's like, no, that's that's not, it's not necessary in any sense. And ultimately the answer to that is that even if Satan himself is hearing your prayers, he absolutely can do nothing to prevent God from responding to your prayer and the way that God sees fit. So there's nothing that we need to try to keep secret from Satan and his demons. There's nothing they can do could prevent God from answering your prayer. So there's no secret language, secret code language. No, only God can read your mind type of things. That's not the purpose of silent prayer. A silent prayer, it's appropriate sometimes. Obviously would be strange if you're in a big group of people, if you suddenly started praying about things involving the people around you. So there are times and places to pray silently, just between you and God. But but keeping stuff secret from Satan and his demons is not at all a biblical purpose for praying silently. So just to clear up that one misconception, and I'm sure Gwen you spend more time in the community system than I do, I'm sure you've seen that question in there quite a bit as well, and it's a lot of people have that mistaken understanding of what silent prayers really all about.

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, and I would say it kind of related to that, there is also that mistaken understanding that somehow this like a spoken word carries more power, like oh, we're manifesting it by speaking it out. And that's you know, equally not true. So yeah, it doesn't have to be silent to stay secret, and it's not more powerful if it's spoken. Because again, when we understand that prayer is communication with God, and when you're a believer, the Holy Spirit indwells you like there's not, yeah, these kind of magical thoughts about speaking words aren't, it's just not biblical.

Shea Houdmann

So all right. So next question. This one for you, Nelson. So Nelson, what is imprecatory prayer? And then after you answer that one followed up with can we pray imprecatory prayers today?

Nelson Domingues

An imprecatory prayer. You see it a lot in the Psalms and with David praying against his enemies, praying for their destruction. Praying for God's wrath to fall on them. And you'll see that several times throughout those Psalms and other places in the Old Testament. You see in the New Testament Jesus also quoting some of those same prayers for these things, and some are even prophetic. Or they they prayed and they've come true. And so we see them work out that way. Now that's what when Precatory prayer is, it's praying that God wrath would fall on someone either for their death or for the destruction, or for your gain. Perhaps like a a war or battle fighting against each other. Many examples in Old Testament like that. Well, how are we to respond to imprecatory prayers in the New Testament here today and one of the things that we have to keep in mind is that Scripture calls us to pray for our enemies. And so as we pray for our enemies, we should be praying for their salvation. And that is a whole lot different than praying for their destruction. Praying for their salvation helps us have a heart like God to help soften our attitude. Perhaps we haven't forgiven for some reason. And so how we ought to be praying would be to pray for their salvation.

Nelson Domingues

We could pray for justice. If someone has greatly harmed you. If someone has greatly done something and hurt others, we can pray that the truth would come out. We can pray that that the the law would side on on truth. That a judge will see clearly what's supposed to happen. We can pray for those things. But against the person to pray for their destruction, they pray that they might go to hell or something like that is not something a Christian should do. In fact, you know even saying those words is a very dangerous, wrong way to think. We're supposed to be loving our enemies. And so what we can pray for someone who has hurt us greatly is that the Lord's will be done in this situation and that that person who hurt us, that they would find salvation. That they would confess their sin, that they would know Jesus Christ as their savior. 'cause I guarantee if they hurt you and then they've turned towards God and accepted salvation through Jesus Christ. They'll come to you asking for forgiveness in your heart will turn as well for that person. So that's ultimately what we want for individuals who've hurt us. Not to condemn them. Not that hell and brimstone and fire would fall on them. We should pray for their benefit, for their salvation, and for the Lord's will to take place in that particular situation that you're struggling with.

Gwen Sellers

I think Ephesian six can be a helpful passage here of that. It reminds us that our enemy is not, you know, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual powers and authorities. So, like you're saying, Nelson, I mean, it's completely appropriate to pray for justice, for evil to be exposed for, you know, the plans of Satan to be thwarted, but not, but like so we're praying for spiritual realities that we want to happen, not against that particular person who hurt us. Like you said, God's heart for them is that they would turn to him.

Shea Houdmann

I believe it's in Romans where Paul's talking about loving your enemies and it says in doing so you will heap burning coals on the persons head. And some people interpret that oh basically this person is getting scorched by me loving them. Like no. The burning coals were a symbol of repentance. That by loving our enemies, loving those who mistreat us, we'll hopefully bring about repentance in them. And they see wow, I treated this person terribly and they're still loving me. Maybe I should look into what's different about them. And then hopefully we can use that as an opportunity to share the gospel. So yeah, like Nelson said, the New Testament instructs us to love our enemies and to pray for enemies. The idea of wanting God's judgment on them, that goes completely against what our attitude should be towards those who don't know the Lord.

Shea Houdmann

So one of those things that they record in the Bible, in Psalms and elsewhere their prayers where people are inviting God, asking God to destroy someone. So I don't know if I could ever say that there's never a situation today that that wouldn't be appropriate, but that still definitely goes against how Jesus taught us to pray and how Jesus responded to those who are his enemies and invites us to do the same. So now I don't. I've never prayed in a precatory prayer. I asked Gwen ahead of time if she ever had and she hasn't. I'm imagining Nelson never has either, but this is not the heart attitude result to have it towards our enemies according to the New Testament.

Shea Houdmann

So OK, so question #6, the final question for this episode, is it appropriate to lay out a fleece before God in prayer? So for those who may not be familiar with this concept, in Judges Chapter 6, God calls Gideon to lead Israelites in battle against the, forgetting the name of the tribe, but invading force had basically conquered Israel. And Israel were crying out for God's help. God chooses Gideon to be the leader of the Army. And Gideon's very hesitant. He's like I'm the least in my tribe. Why are you calling me? And then he asked God it's OK tomorrow I'm going to lay out this fleece and I want I can't remember the order. One time he asked, can the fleece be wet and everything else dry and the other time it was can everything else be wet and the fleece dry? And both times God does exactly what Gideon asked. Proving to Gideon yes, God was legitimately calling him to do what God had told him to do. And so some people can I do the same thing with God in prayer? Can I say well God, if you really want me to do this, can you give me a sign?

Shea Houdmann

So I don't find anything in Scripture that says we can't ask God for something like that. Obviously major life decisions like leading an army against overwhelming force of invaders seems like a reasonable request to ask God to confirm what he wants you to do. At the same time, I don't think it's something

we should do all the time. Especially if it's something that's in God's word of God's word tells us to do this or do not do this, then we don't need to ask God for confirmation because clearly he doesn't want us to do this or does want us to do that. But major life decisions, if we're unsure of what God wants us to do, I don't think it's wrong to ask God for some sort of confirmation. To ask God please make it very, very clear to me what you want me to do.

Shea Houdmann

And to be a. This reminds me of James 1:5 where God says if any of you lacks wisdom, ask God and he will provide it. Asking for wisdom is similar to asking for a sign. If God wants us to do something, he will make it clear that he wants us to do, and if that involves confirmation, so be it. But again, I don't think this is something we should count on every time or ask for every time, but often God made it abundantly clear the first time what he wants us to do. And our job is to do it rather than asking God to repeatedly confirm what he has already said. What about you two? Have either of you ever asked God for some sort of, you know, confirmation for something you thought he maybe wanted? What did you do?

Nelson Domingues

I find myself when I'm facing large decisions and I'm not sure what direction to go into, my general prayer is almost always the same Lord open or close the doors in the direction that you want me to go or or away from a place that you want me to be. And that's one of the ways that I, I ask for Lord to to make it very abundantly clear to me that if the doors seem to be benevolently opened to me, then that's a good direction. Also, I also I also pray for peace in the decision. If I'm struggling between one thing or another thing, I just ask Lord, help me make this decision. Give me the peace to know which is the the path that you want me to go on. And sometimes that peace is just a personal peace that I have with myself and I just feel very confident. And that this is the Lords direction, or perhaps that peace comes through an encouraging word through another believer. Perhaps even my wife, as we both agree on the very same path to move forward. That peace can often come through through there. So those are the types of things that I often ask for if I'm looking for some sort of confirmation. It's the Lord's peace and for his benevolent opening of doors or closing doors in that decision making process.

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, I would say I also look for that more general confirmation and you know, just pray like God, make it clear to me. Then necessarily like set up a specific test that like if this then. But I will say that there was one time that I did set that up. It was kind of like OK God, this is my plan, but if this certain thing happens before this certain time, then I won't do it. But I couldn't wait. So then and then that thing happened. You know, like at that certain time. And I am confident that I made the right decision. But you know, it kind of showed me like oh like I set up this sign and then I didn't wait for it. And then I didn't do it and so like yeah, I just don't find it helpful to to set up like specific tests. Uhm, I think it's better to, you know, like a search for confirmation. I mean, you know now there are sometimes when closing a door or opening a door will be clear. You know when it's like well, for instance, my family is considering a trip, but there's like it won't work unless this one appointment is changed, and so the prayers kind of like OK, well God, if that appointment changes then we can do the trip but if not then we'll assume it's not your will. But that's still kind of like the doors open confirmation thing. It's not like

oh well, if you know if my boss today is wearing a purple shirt, then I'll know that that this is what you want.

Shea Houdmann

Exactly so. Gwen, Nelson, thank you for great conversation on prayer, and we would encourage you to listen to the other two episodes 'cause this one was more kind of like, this covered the other miscellaneous questions about prayer, but a lot of what we talked about today is built on the foundation of things we covered in the previous two episodes. So please check out those as well. This has been the Got Questions podcast on common questions about prayer. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.