

Trusting God with Our Prayer Requests

"Trust" - Letting God decide the best way to answer our prayer request.

If you believe [trust God], you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. (Matthew 21:22)

This verse, spoken originally to the disciples, gives us a basic principle that is applicable to *all* of us. The verse focuses on *trusting* God, rather than having a *distrust* in him (or in what he can do). Simply stated, we must trust God, when we ask him for something!

Even so, there are other passages in Scripture that give further requirements for receiving answers to our prayers. We need to take into consideration these additional passages, if we want to gain a full understanding of what prayer and prayer requests are all about. "Believing" (trusting God) is only *one* of the requirements for receiving what we ask for!

For instance, our *motive* for asking is also an issue. Why are we praying for such a request? James 4:1-3 reminds us that sometimes we don't get what we ask for, because we have the wrong motives. When we ask for something, is it our desire to bring honor and glory to God, or are we just wanting to gratify our own desires?

Hebrews 11, often called the "faith chapter," shows us another factor that influences how our prayer requests are answered. This chapter gives us many examples of people who trusted God (the way it's described in Matthew 21:22), and received what they had hoped for. Yet the chapter ends by mentioning many other people who did *not* get what they wanted (v. 35b - 38). While God was doing great things for others, it seemed as though God was silent toward those in this second group! Why? Didn't they have enough faith? Yes they did, according to v. 39. Was it that God failed? By no means! Rather, God had *something better* for them, according to v. 40. This is one of the reasons that God sometimes doesn't answer our prayers the way we ask.

Jesus gives us the best example of trust in God while praying. Surely *he* had the trust described in Matthew 21:22! When faced with the issue of dying on the cross, what did he pray? First, he prayed, "*Father, if it is possible, may this cup [of suffering] be taken from me.*" He didn't want to die on the cross. But he didn't end his prayer at that point, like you and I probably would. Instead, he continued by praying, "*Not as I will, but as you will.*" Can you find any better example of trust in God? He trusted God not only to answer his prayer, but to do even better. *He trusted his Father (God) so much, that he was willing to "surrender" his prayer request to him, and to let him decide what was best.* A person who prays that God will "overrule" his request, if it isn't the best choice, will *never* be disappointed in the long run.

Paul reminds us that we really don't know the best way to pray - Romans 8:26-27. Because of this, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, and changes our prayers into something that is "*in accordance with God's will.*" And why does he do this? So that our prayers will seem "unanswered"? No, but because God plans to accomplish *good things* in our lives! The very next verse, Romans 8:28, reminds us that God will use *everything* in our lives to accomplish good. God will answer our prayer requests... but not necessarily the way we ask them.

Paul's prayers, scattered throughout his epistles, are quite instructive. His focus is quite the opposite of what we tend to pray about. We tend to pray for things that have only *temporary* value, and things that *we* would enjoy; his prayers focus on things that have *eternal* value and things that bring honor and glory to *God*. Read some of Paul's prayers, and compare them with the types of things you pray about. (Romans 15:30-31; 2 Corinthians 13:7, 9; Ephesians 1:16-19; 3:16-19 ;6:19-20; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 4:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; 3:1-2; Philemon 1:6. Warning: Taking these prayers to heart could be a humbling experience!)

A personal observation ...

Quite often, we can't see the good God accomplishes, until *later*. Unfortunately, for people who are weak in faith (like me, more than I would like to admit), we want our prayers answered "Yes," and we want it *now*!

There are some things that I have prayed about for years. At this point, it would seem that God is either saying, "No," or, "Wait until later." I guess I won't know until later, which one it is. But there is one thing that is certain, even now: As I look back over the years, I can see how God has used what appears to be a lack of an answer to accomplish many good things in my life. And I have to admit (though I'm not really sure I want to) that the good he has accomplished *wouldn't* have occurred if he had said "Yes" when I wanted him to. This has happened several times... and looking back, I have no disappointments in what God has done.