

July 28, 2019
Luke 11:1-13
The Church of the Pilgrimage

Does God answer our prayers? Daniel, a pastor friend of mine recently lost his wife Dawn to pancreatic cancer leaving him and his ten year old daughter behind. She was in her mid forties. The cancer came out of nowhere and took her just as quick. So many people prayed on their behalf, including us. I'm sure many prayed for healing but she still died. Those prayers surely don't seem answered. I look to our passage, "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." It sounds like God will answer our prayers but what exactly does that mean? If we pray how Jesus teaches us to pray will our prayers be answered?

Let's look at the second part of that passage, "For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." See? It says right in the bible that if I pray my prayers will be answered right? Maybe. Maybe just not in the way I think they should, or in the time that I think they should be in. Maybe God has bigger plans.

Back a few years ago I knew a man named Paul. He was a devout Catholic and would say over and over that I would come to my senses one day and come "back" to Catholicism. I asked him "what do you mean back?" He knew his church history and said that everyone was Catholic before Martin Luther and that true believers would "come back" to Catholicism. He was only half joking. We were in a bible study together so I got to know the level of this man's faith, which was deep. Paul was the father of 3 young children, an 8 year old, a 3 year old and a baby. Paul was diagnosed with brain cancer. It didn't look good. The doctors said they would do surgery and chemo but realistically he probably had about a year. There was a MASSIVE prayer

campaign asking for a miracle, hundreds of people on prayer chains, in many different churches. Paul had surgery. Then Chemo. Then a year went by, then two years, then three. It *was* a miracle. The cancer stopped growing. It wasn't until five years later when his youngest started kindergarten, that his cancer returned, grew very fast and mercifully took him quickly. At one of the largest funerals I've ever been to his wife thanked God for the miracle that kept Paul alive long enough so that his youngest would have a father to remember, and he had the chance to witness to countless people and bring them to faith. He died, but prayers were still answered, just not entirely in the way we would have liked but definitely in the way God's plan unfolded to show God's glory.

So when Ella my oldest was a little over 1 I started to pray for another baby. Lets give you a little background here. At this time I was very involved in family ministries at an Evangelical church and was part of three small groups including one of new mothers. It was normal to pray for everything and everyone and laying hands on someone was a common occurrence. So I'm praying for baby number 2. Pray pray pray. No baby. I talk to my mothers group, they lay hands on me pray pray pray. No baby. Everyone was praying. This went on for four years. Pray pray pray negative test, over and over. I made an appointment with my OB to see if there was something wrong, then before I got there, Positive pregnancy test. Prayers were finally answered. I was pregnant. What happened at this point is I got sick. Horrible morning sickness and I was so tired *all* the time. It was nothing like my first pregnancy. It was so much harder. I got big. Really big, then at around 6 months this baby I prayed for decided that hanging out on my sciatica would be a fine idea and I now had to walk with a cane. I realize now that God had in fact answered my prayers, just in God's time. Had I gotten pregnant when I prayed to get pregnant I would be a huge hobbling pregnant woman chasing after a toddler, and I know

that would have been awful. I'm so glad God waited to answer my prayers, until Ella was 5 to give me Emilia. I still say "If God gave me that baby when I asked for that baby it would have killed me." pray pray pray, wait wait wait. I got what I needed, just not in the time I thought.

Sometimes God just says no. Flat out no. Prayers are answered but with a flat out no. In 2 Cor 12 Paul talks about a thorn in his side, his countless trials and hardships. He prays and prays. He asks God three times for his hardships to end and God answers "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." What? Paul, the man that spreads Christianity all up and down the mediterranean and writes a good chunk of the new testament; the guy most likely to succeed is shot down. God said no. There would be no end to his hardships. Paul goes on to tell of why (Paul is really good at figuring this stuff out) and says that he gets all his strength through Jesus and Jesus looks better along side Paul's suffering. Paul's words in verse 10 are "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Paul was clearly a better human than I, he took no like a champ.

So I go back in our passage to where Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. Yes we all know the Lord's prayer but I've had a chance to reflect on it, bit by bit and I'd like to share with you what I've found. First, hallowed be thy name. Jesus wants us to praise God hold God in the highest regard. Next, give us each day our daily bread. This tells me that we are to be thankful and pray for our daily *needs*, not necessarily our *wants* and only one day at a time. Now here to me is the most important part. "And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us" This to me is the most important line because we are told to actively *do* something, not just pray but *actively* forgive our debtors, to actively pray. I think this is the most important because if we want our prayers answered we are asked to do something to make that

answer happen. To also actively pray we must “forgive everyone indebted to us” in other words, we need to *be* the answer to someone else’s prayer.

So many of you know I’m in recovery and not only do I pray that I stay sober but many people pray that I stay sober. Does just asking keep me sober? Nope. It takes work. Knowing that y’all pray for me is very helpful and it helps me feel accountable, but I still need to actively stay away from drinking and drugs. In AA they say that it is more important to give sobriety to keep it. People in recovery pray through their action. My prayer of staying sober is answered through work and perhaps, if I am lucky, I am part of the answer to someone else’s prayer.

Ok so so far through the Lord’s prayer, we have praise and thank God, pray for needs not wants and be an active participant in prayer. In the next part of our passage, we find the story of the man looking for bread. Now remember, a man has a guest come to him in the middle of the night and he has no bread to serve the visitor. The man bangs on the door of his friend for help and the friend tells him to go away but the man keeps asking. In this passage we find two main things. First, the man is asking for bread on behalf of someone else, not himself. He is looking to serve his guest. The man keeps asking even though the friend is slow to give him what he needs. He is persistent. Persistence in prayer helps us to understand God’s plan. Back to how we pray. We have praise and thank God, pray for needs not wants, be an active participant in our prayer, pray on behalf of someone else and be persistent.

So now if we do all that will our prayers be answered?

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” Again, I look at this part of the passage and I see active participation in praying. In my case, asking that I stay sober, knocking, looking towards God’s

will. Through my intentions and actions God opens doors of possibilities, I may get what I asked for if it is God's will, but even better, because as it says in verse 13 "how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" God may not answer my prayers the way I want or when I want but God will always give me more than I ask. God knows what is best for me and will give me the greatest gifts, things I wouldn't even think to ask for.

Let's go back to my friends Daniel and Dawn. Daniel is a prolific writer and humble preacher and he wrote a blog detailing their cancer journey from diagnosis through Dawn's death. To say this blog is inspiring doesn't begin to describe it and I imagine, knowing Daniel, it will end up somewhere that will help others going through the same situation. Pancreatic cancer is slow moving but is rarely discovered until it is too late. That was the case here. The blog is on the Caring Bridge site and I can get you the link if you want it. It spans from February through Easter, the day of her death.

Each of the blog posts have a few things in common. There is a thankful list and a prayer from the Puritans (Daniel is kind of a geek that way) Most of the prayers were around navigating God's will, and a need by Dawn to "Do this well" speaking of her impending death. She did. She did it well. Like a boss. Faith in tact. In a journal post from early April Daniel wrote, about a conversation between Dawn and her doctor, "'Decisions not wishes," Dawn would say. She asked how long. Dr. Larson was honest and straightforward:... "Less than a month," he said, most likely. She said thank you, and apologized to him for his having to be the bearer of such hard news. But then added, "of course, you chose to be an oncologist."' Their goal at this point was for Dawn to make it to Easter, which she did. In one of I think the most moving posts, Daniel writes "That Dawn holds her faith with such fierceness these days is inspirational, but it also reflects her deterministic sense of God's will. She'd never accuse God of giving her cancer nor

ever put forth such pabulum as "there must be a reason," but her unrequited prayers (echoed by hundreds of others) for miraculous healing does press her to accept what is as word." Daniel goes on to quote the book of Job which says, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" Then about Dawn he says, "And she does accept [this scripture], with both fury and grace" Daniel and his daughter are missing Dawn, but they are active. They recently went to Washington to speak on behalf of people with pancreatic cancer. I have faith that they will be ok, and Dawn's death has brought many people together from all over the globe, thousands of us got to pray together.

Does God answer our prayers? I'm going to give that a yes. Does God answer them like we think God should? Occasionally. Am I inspired that God will give me more than I ever thought was possible? Absolutely, Absolutely Absolutely. We should keep praying, asking, searching and knocking. We should pray for each other and actively look for God's will. We should praise and thank our God, and be persistent. Through all of this we are sure to receive God's greatest blessings for us. Amen

<https://www.caringbridge.org/visit/dawnharrell>