

Wil Owens

When Your Prayers Hit the Ceiling; John 14:12-14

GPBC

1.9.22

Introduction – Let’s make a few observations from the text. First, notice Jesus is speaking to believers, “whoever believes in me.” Second, note the astounding declaration, “will do the works that I do.” That’s startling. We’ve been studying through the gospel of Matthew and we’ve seen Jesus do incredible, miraculous works. He says His followers will do those works, and then He goes even further and says, “and greater works than these will he do!” Greater works than Christ! Third, note the vehicle, the means, the instrument whereby His people will do these greater works – Whatever you ask in my name, this will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.” So prayer is the means whereby we as followers of Christ will do these greater works.

Jesus promises essentially the same thing in 15:16. And again in 16:24. That’s absolutely amazing isn’t it? Three times in three chapters, Jesus compels us to pray in His name and He will answer! And when He answers these God-sized prayers, He is glorified and we are filled with joy. Praying is the most powerful, effective, life-changing activity that we as believers will ever engage in. And yet, we often do not experience the promise of these verses. We don’t see our prayers answered so eventually we stop praying. Many believers have experienced this and so came the phrase – I feel my prayers go no higher than the ceiling. Ceiling prayers.

What I want us to see today is that when we are not enjoying an abundant prayer life where God is answering our prayers, the issue is not on heaven’s side. The issue is not that God doesn’t care, that God isn’t listening, or that God is absent. The issue of unanswered prayer and a dry, weak and frail prayer life resides on our side. You see there are conditions for a vibrant prayer life. And if we can correct our ways with God’s grace, the prayers of God’s people at Grassy Pond would be the most effective, powerful prayers in the world.

- I. Two Prerequisites for an Abundant Prayer Life
 - a. We must be saved in order for God to hear and answer our prayers!
 - i. Jesus says in John 14:6 no one comes to the Father except through me. Paul says in 1 Tim 2:5 there is one mediator

between God and man, the man Jesus Christ. Hebrews 4:15-16 says that Jesus is our High Priest therefore we can approach the throne of grace with confidence.

- ii. You must know and trust and embrace Jesus as your Savior and Lord to have access to the throne of God. God hears and answers the prayers of His children. The first prayer God hears and answers is Lord Jesus, please save me from my sin.

- iii. III. Visiting defiant unbeliever in the hospital

- b. We must pray. It's really a no brainer but it must be said. God doesn't answer prayers that are never prayed. In order for us to experience an abundant prayer life where we see God move in incredible awesome ways, we must be praying. James 4:2 says you have not because you ask not. Daily Bible reading/study and prayer are absolutely essential to the Christian life.

II. Five Obstacles to an Abundant Prayer Life

- a. Half-hearted or heartless praying. Just mouthing routine words with no passion or burden or urgency.
 - i. In Matt 7:7 Jesus say ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. Ask, seek, and knock are in the Greek present meaning keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking – we need an urgency to our prayers.
 - ii. James 5:17-18 says Elijah was a man just like us and he prayed that it wouldn't rain and it didn't rain for three years. Then he prayed that it would rain and it did! But it also says he prayed fervently.
 - iii. Here are some helps to our heartless prayers. For ourselves, when we understand that nothing happens in our lives apart from God's grace, for others, put ourselves in their shoes, if God doesn't intervene they won't be helped, they won't change, and most tragically, they won't be saved.
- b. Unconfessed sin. Isaiah 59:1-2. Psalm 66:18
 - i. Some of us today are living in sin, and we know we are living in sin, but we refuse to repent and change because we love our sin more than we love our Savior. We have convinced ourselves that we have a better plan for our lives than God. So

we are holding on to our sin and our prayers are bouncing off the ceiling.

- ii. To have an abundant, thriving prayer life, we must get right with God. Prov 28:9 says if one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.
- c. But not only must we get right with God, the third obstacle to prayer is when we are not right with one another. We must seek to be reconciled with one another. Humble ourselves, go in prayer to each other, apologize, ask forgiveness, be forgiving, restore and renew that relationship.
 - i. Broken relationships with one another hinder our prayer relationship with God. Matt 5:23-24
 - ii. Those verses come in the context of Jesus teaching us not to be angry. Don't let that hurt or offense turn to anger or bitterness or distrust – go be reconciled and be free from the hurt and be renewed in your prayer life!
 - iii. We can actually hurt ourselves more than those who hurt us. Repair those broken relationships as far as you can.
- d. Fourth obstacle – mistreating your spouse. If we are not loving our spouses as we should, being patient and kind to one another, if we are harsh in word, take advantage, manipulate, abusive, unfaithful, not helpful or encouraging one another in the Lord – God will not hear our prayers.
 - i. 1 Pet 3:7
- e. Fifth obstacle – selfish or sinful motive behind our prayers. You see God not only hears the words of our prayers, but more importantly, He is listening to the reason and motive behind them.
 - i. And often we are simply asking God to get us what we can't get – selfish prayers. We need to stop and think maybe God has not allowed this in my life thus far because my desire here is for my own glory and has nothing to do with Him!
 - ii. Sinful prayers – when we try to bargain with God and reason with God to make an allowance for our choice to disobey Him. We choose to rebel against God and then we ask Him to bless our rebellion. God does not hear those prayers.
 - iii. James 4:2-3

- f. There are some things we need to rid ourselves of today in order to enjoy a thrilling, vibrant prayer life – to see God move in our lives and the lives of those around us in miraculous, saving, life-changing ways. Today, let us examine our hearts and confess and repent and seek God’s grace for these things.
 - i. First, be saved.
 - ii. Second, pray.
 - iii. Third, remove these 5 obstacles (heartless praying, unconfessed sin, broken relationships, mistreating or spiritually harming our spouses, and selfish, sinful motives)
 - g. These are the things we must put away from our lives for abundant prayer, and there are two things we must be sure accompany our prayers. In fact, if we are pursuing these two essential ingredients, the obstacles will vanish.
- III. Two Essential Ingredients for an Abundant Prayer Life
- a. Believe. We must believe that God is willing, that God is able, that God is good and faithful and true to His own. We must believe and have faith, not in our prayers and not in our faith, but in God – who is Lord over all!
 - i. Matt 21:21-22
 - ii. Pastor, I want to have faith when I pray but sometimes when I’m praying I’m actually doubting God will answer while I’m praying!! I know. I do that too!! So what do we do when we know we are not praying with faith in God. We ask Him to give it. Help us believe in His might and in His grace, to give us the grace to pray with faith, believing and trusting in Him.
 - b. Pray in His name. To pray in Jesus name means that we are praying for His will to be done and not ours, for Him to be glorified and not us, and that what we ask is in line with Scripture both in motive and request.

Conclusion – practical appl. Use a notebook or prayer journal. Closing thought. Jesus says He came to give us life and that abundantly – but church we are missing out on the abundant life in Christ when we are not people of the Word and people of prayer. May God help us to pursue Him as never before in 2022 in the Word and in prayer! Let’s see what God will do!!