

Text: James 1:5-8  
Theme: How to be confident of answered prayer  
My purpose for this message: To challenge Christians to go deeper and longer in prayer.  
Delivered: Nov. 6, 2005 @ KEFC

## Wasted Praying

### PRAY.

In the last couple of years I have made it my practice to preach 10 sermons a year on prayer, and now it's time for the second 5 of this year. (I would like to point out to you the insert in your bulletin that calls us to a month of prayer and fasting.)

I preach all these sermons on prayer, not because I have a gift of prayer, not because I can't wait to race to my prayer room, or because I'm especially good at prayer. Like you, I have a hard time carving out time to pray. Sometimes I'm weary of prayer after just 20 minutes. Like you, I sometimes feel like my prayers don't get farther than the ceiling. Like you, sometimes I'd rather do *anything* than pray.

But I nag you to pray—first of all because it is the wine of our communion with God; His Word is the bread, but prayer is the wine. But I also nag because as far as the church is concerned, humanly speaking the success of everything we *do* depends on it. Prayer makes evangelism efforts succeed. Prayer makes our SS ministry effective. Prayer raises up nursery workers and youth workers where there were none. Prayer revives a dysfunctional church. Prayer prompts sinning Christians to repent. By prayer a church of self-centered people is changed into a Christ-centered, others-serving church. Through prayer, individual lives are changed, addictions are snapped, marriages are mended.

Yet in many American churches prayer takes a back seat to our new buildings, mass mailings, carnival-like VBS programs, gift-assessment and evangelism classes. We scramble to do, do, do, while God is likely shaking his head, sighing, "I just wish they'd ask, ask ask. Then I will do, do, do."

Over these next few weeks I want to highlight Keystone's various prayer efforts that you can—and should—be part of. You can sign up to be part of our Intercessors' Network, individuals who agree to be phoned to pray for an individual need. You can sign up to intercede an hour each week for specific needs in the congregation. Weekly you'll receive an update of matters to pray for.

The second Friday evening of each month we hold a prayer and praise service here called POWER NIGHT, an introductory level prayer meeting. Scripture, singing, praying in small groups or large, for each other, and the world. There's nursery care and children's prayer classes up through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Children older pray with the adults. We encourage short sentence or two prayers, and discourage the longer stuff that intimidates people who fear they can't pray as good as another person.

And then the backbone of our prayer ministry is our weekly corporate prayer meetings held downstairs in the fellowship hall. 4 times a week: Tuesday evening at 7 (women only), Wednesday and Friday mornings at 6 AM, and Saturdays at 7 AM. The purpose of these 30 minutes or so, is not to pray for individual needs like we do in the Intercessors' Network or the one hour/week group; instead of focusing on the trees, we concentrate on the forest: the church. We pray for *corporate* things like unity, a passion for lost people, new missionaries, for various ministries from youth to the diaconate; we pray for a church-wide brokenness over sin, for a love for each other, a spirit of forgiveness, for crumbling marriages, and so on. If this is your church, if you love your church, if you desire the power of God to be manifested in your church, you should part of one of those groups, even if you and your spouse have to alternate.

Today I want to talk about wasted praying. Find James 1. When we began the study of James I skipped over the verses we're about to read, saving them for this message, "Wasted praying." Wasted praying is prayer we shouldn't even bother with because God's not going to say yes to it. READ Jas.1:5-8

Promise: Christian, if you need wisdom, pray for it and you *will* receive it. Pittsburgh Steelers coach Chuck Noll used to say: *Some coaches pray for wisdom. I pray for 260 lb. tackles. They'll give me plenty of wisdom.*

The wisdom James initially had in mind was what was needed for his friends to endure their persecution. But the text seems to suggest this applies to other needs, not just wisdom. For example, v.7 warns that not only will the doubter not receive wisdom, he won't get "anything" from the Lord. So, in view is wisdom and possibly...? But is it a promise God will say "yes" no matter what we're after: a Hummer, a raise, an X-box, the love of someone you idolize, a few inches taller, good grades on your final exams? No. I'll tell you why by the end of the message. I'm just saying it *may* include more than just wisdom. We'll get back to this.

James warns us not to bother praying if we're not going to pray, believing; if we're going to doubt God will come through. (By the way, from now on this morning, I'm going to stop using the NIV word "believe" in v.6, and use what the Greek text and most of the more literal translations say: "in faith.") We should ask "in faith and not doubt." Why does this person doubt? Is he a skeptic, a pessimist, a realist, what?

Our friends in the Word of Faith churches think we can simply stir this up, "I believe, oh I *really* believe, I just *know* God's going to do this." They believe that if you then make declarative statements, they will come true, and this will be faith.

"I am not sick." Saying it is the exercise of faith. But this so-called "positive confession" certainly doesn't illustrate the practice of NT faith. So, what does? Let's look at Jesus for a bit; His life and His teachings on faith and prayer.

### The Promise of Answered Prayer

Lk.11:1, 5-10. Ask, you will receive; seek, you *will* find; knock, the door *will* be opened.

Matt.21:18-22. Cursed fig tree. *...if you have faith and do not doubt*, you can even give orders to mountains to relocate. *If you believe faith, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.*

Lk.17:6. Mustard seed sized faith will enable you to order trees to relocate themselves.

### The Presence of Little Faith

Lk.12:28: *...O you of little faith!* Disciples were noted by their little faith.

Matt.8:26. Storm came up and disciples were afraid they'd drown. *You of little faith...*

Matt.9:29. Heals 2 blind men. *According to your faith will it be done to you.*

Matt.13:58. In his hometown: *...he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.*

Lk.18;1-8. Story to illustrate we should pray and never give up. *But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith in the earth (8)?*

### The Product of Little Answers

Luke 9:41 *O unbelieving and perverse generation...*

Matt.17:17, 21-22. *O unbelieving and perverse generation...* Couldn't drive it out because you have *so little faith*. Also, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can tell mountains to relocate.

Mark 9:19 *O unbelieving generation...*

Mark 9:29 *This kind can come out only by prayer.*

Think about Jesus; have you read in Scripture how he'd go off by himself and pray; sometimes all night. Prayer was so evidently central to Jesus that his disciples finally pleaded with him to teach *them* to pray (Luke 11:1). But the only time it's recorded that any disciples tagged along with Jesus on his nights of praying was the night God temporarily gave Jesus back His heavenly glory while Peter, James and John looked on in awe. The rest of the time these commissioned preachers and missionaries were...? Missing in action. Even the night Jesus was arrested, they couldn't stay awake and pray for an hour even though their master asked them to. He's agonizing in prayer, sweating drops of blood while they slept. Once, twice, three times he came back to find them asleep. Don't think they were veterans of this prayer thing. *An because* they weren't, they had little faith.

But after Jesus is gone, they began praying like crazy. They're together all the time praying: Acts 1, Acts 2, Acts 4, Acts 12. And they changed the world. No more "how come we can't cast out demons..." Because of much prayer they had much faith; and because of much faith, their prayers had much power. Not because now they could get that Hummer. But because of their prayer communion with God, they now knew God's will better and better, and could pray according to that will. *That's* why they usually got what they asked for. READ 1 Jn.5:14-15.

### Concl:

You want your prayers answered; want confidence that God *will* answer? Develop a life of prayer. The more you pray, the closer you draw to God; the closer you draw to God, the clearer His formerly unrevealed will becomes. And now you know how to pray.

Our microwave went belly up last week. 23 years old. You punch in the time and it would begin counting down the seconds, but no heat; nothing cooking. Maybe you pray for a few minutes but nothing's cooking and you wonder why? Doesn't James say that you'll get what you pray in faith for.

But the Bible is not a book of formulas, it's a book of faith. It doesn't outline how to do something, it outlines how to know Someone. So if you look at passages like this and start dreaming and scheming how you can gain fame and fortune from God, you'll be disappointed. We can't reduce God to a vending machine that cranks out the snack as long as you follow certain instructions to the letter; no, this is a relationship.

The Word of God is the bread of communion with God, but it is prayer that is the wine. Andrew Murray says: *If we want to know where and how our faith is to grow, the Master points us to the throne of God. It is in prayer, in the exercise of faith I have in fellowship with the living God, that faith can increase. Faith can only live by feeding on what is Divine, on God Himself.* (School, 87)

Matt.6:33: *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.*