

We believe discipleship is a direction  
not a destination.



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**Prayer: Does it Make a Difference**

**Week 4**

# Course Outline

- **Unraveling the Mysteries**
  - ~~Week 3 Ch 6-8~~
    - ~~What's the point~~
    - ~~Wrestling with God~~
  - **Week 4 Ch 9-11**
    - Does prayer change God?
    - Ask, Seek, Knock



# Course Outline

- **The Language of Prayer**
  - **Week 5 Ch 12-13**
    - I pray all the time, but...
    - It takes time and practice
  - **Week 6 Ch 14-15**
    - What do I say?
    - When we don't hear anything



# Course Outline

- **Prayer Dilemmas**
  - **Week 7 Ch 16-17**
    - Unanswered prayer, whose fault is it
    - Living with not knowing
  - **Week 8 Ch 18-19**
    - Prayer and healing
    - What to pray for if not healing



# Course Outline

- **The Practice of Prayer**
  - **Week 9 Ch 20-22**
    - How do I pray?
    - Should I “forward this prayer”
    - Rule #1 Love the Lord your God
  - **Week 10 Review, Conclusions**



# Unraveling the Mysteries

## *What Difference Does It Make?*

Chapter 9

Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar, saints pray ...

SHAKESPEARE, RICHARD III



# Does Prayer Have an Impact?

- “Does prayer have any real impact in the outer world or is it merely a private conversation with God?”
  - Consider
    - Jews praying in concentration camps
    - Men praying in fox holes
    - Hurricanes coming
    - Abuse
    - Divorce



# Time Magazine

- In 2005 *Time* did a cover story
  - The 25 most influential Evangelicals in America
  - Evangelical leaders were invited to the White House weekly
    - What do you think they thought after meeting in the White House?
    - I'm really influencing power now!





# -Our Strongest Weapon-

- Remember Jesus never got invited to Rome
  - The only time He was invite to a seat of power was on His way to the cross
- What does this all mean?
  - Would you say the man who has the ear of the president of the United States more influential then
    - The little old lady that speaks to God daily



# Our Strongest Weapon

- Where do we place prayer on our list of tools for helping?
  - Is it above the churches bank account?
  - Above the call to action we can put out?
- Philip Yancy says he asked a foreign missionary
  - “How can churches in America help?”
  - His response, “You can pray for us.”
- Yancy thought, “Yes but we really want to help.”



# Our Strongest Weapon

- Are we guilty of placing prayer as a secondary tool, a secondary weapon
  - Is it because we don't know who we are fighting against?
- For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. Ephesians 6:12



# Our Strongest Weapon

- The big question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?”
  - “We live on a planet ruled by powers intent on blocking and perverting the will of God.”
- What weapon is best at countering those wishing to stop God's will?



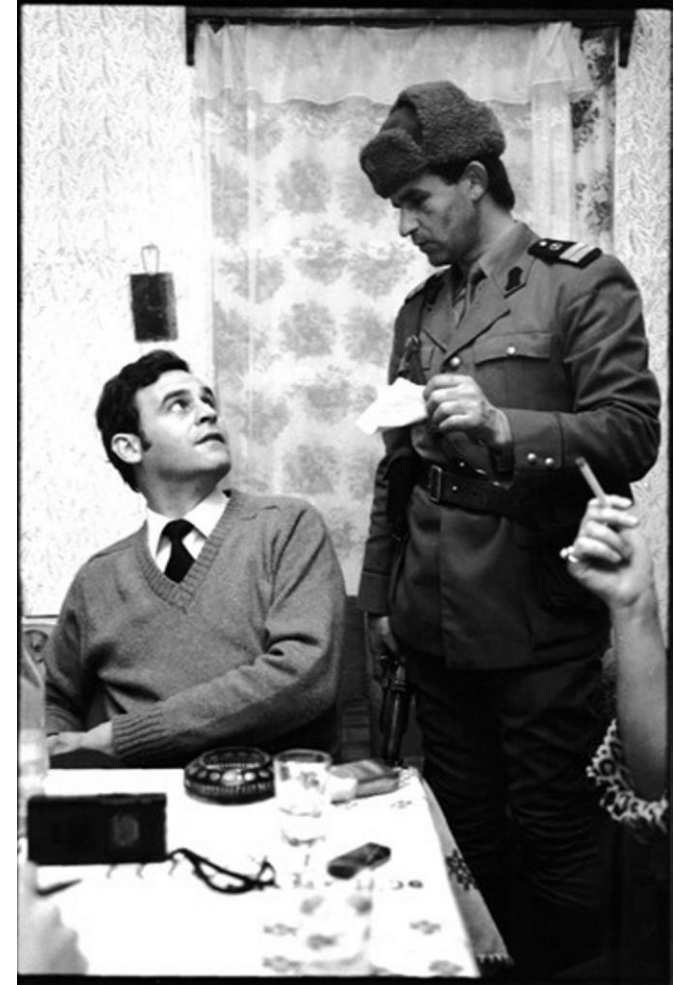
# A Warning

- In the U.S. we have power, wealth, political influence
- In the developing world they have disease, poverty, political corruption
  - The developing world has nothing but prayer to use
  - They must lean on God through prayer
- We in the U.S. should lean more on prayer than our own power



# -Scenes of Uprising-

- In 1980 a pastor, Laszlo Tokes, took over at a church in Hungary
  - He was outspoken against the communist Romanian government
  - He prayed for change
    - He also did a lot more



# Scenes of Uprising

- Leipzig, East Germany 1989
  - People met at a church for candlelight prayer marches
  - Every Monday night
  - And every Monday it grew
  - To ½ million people
- Then in Berlin and the wall



# -Angle of Repose-

- When we pray, we plead with God, about the conditions around us
  - Through prayer we can be embolden to act on those conditions
    - To join God in His work
- Remember, we pray so we can see the world through God's eyes
  - And then we can act as God wills





# Angle of Repose

- What is the “angle of repose”?
  - It is the angle at which a boulder will rest on the side of a hill rather than come crashing down
  - This is where prayer and action meet



# Where Prayer and Action Meet

“Bonhoeffer grasped the nature of prayer as partnership with God’s activity on earth. He scolded German Christians who retreated into piety while resigning themselves to the evil around them (“That’s just the way things are”). We cannot simply pray and then wait for God to do the rest. At the same time, Bonhoeffer cautioned against an activism that opposed the forces of evil without drawing on the power of prayer. The battle against evil requires both prayer and prayerful action.”



# Prayer and Action

- There is a tension between praying and acting
  - You can pray for the family struggling
  - And • ~~Or~~ you can act and bring them dinner
  - You can pray for people hurt in hurricanes
  - And • ~~Or~~ you can act and help clean up
- Opps
  - It is not prayer or action it is **and** action

# -A Spur to Action-

- Don't let the action overtake the praying
  - We can get so involved in the action that we forget about the praying
- The prayer is what spurs us to action
  - The prayer is where God speaks to us on where to act



# Unraveling the Mysteries

## *Does Prayer Change God?*

Chapter 10

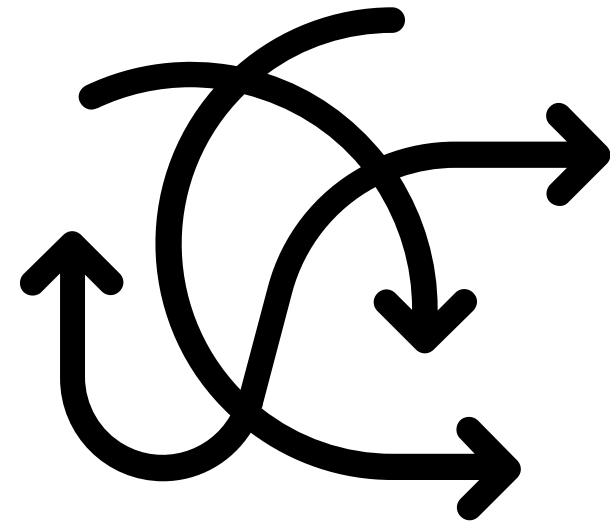


# Does Prayer Change God?

- “I the Lord do not change” Malachi 3:6
- “My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused” Hosea 11:8
- How can they both be true?
- Also, God knows all and has predetermined it all
  - So, what is the point to ask for change?

# Does Prayer Change God?

- Some may not care and just accept this as “the way it is”
  - Are you in this group?
- Others greatly overthink it
  - Are you in this group?
  - Let’s overthink it together



# -The Bible's View-

- <sup>7</sup> When you pray, don't babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they'll be heard for their many words.  
<sup>8</sup> Don't be like them, because **your Father knows** the things you need before you ask him. Matthew 6:7–8
- Then Jesus says, “You should pray like this:”
- We should pray even though God already knows
  - Why?
    - Because the Bible says to





# The Bible's View

- God already knows everything about us
  - Our needs
  - Our heart aches
  - Our Joys
- Yet God still listens to us
  - God calls us to pray



# Scriptures

- “Ask, and it will be given to you” Matthew 7:7
- "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well James 5:15
- “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.” James 5:16



# Do Not Pray

- Has God ever told us not to pray?
  - “As for you, do not pray for these people. Do not offer a cry or a prayer on their behalf, and do not beg me, for I will not listen to you. Jeremiah 7:16



# -A Work in Process-

- “If you ask why he ever answers prayer at all, the answer must be, Because he is unchangeable.” Charles Finney
  - Gods character is unchanging: Love, Mercy
    - God changes course because a repentant sinner
      - Changes course
- An unchanging God changes because He is unchanging?!



# A Work in Process

- C.S. Lewis on why God can change His mind based on our prayers:
  - Because that is the way He made it
    - Roughly summarized by Brad
- If you say, “Why pray it is already decided”
  - Then why wash your hands?
    - If God wants them clean, they’ll be clean
  - Why ask for salt, why wear boots, why anything



# A Work in Process

- God created the story we are in
  - But we as the actors are allowed some freedoms
    - We can change some of the minor details of the story
- It is a mystery as to why, but it is clear we are allowed
  - God gave us prayer to initiate change requests



# -Timeless Complexity-

- Can you pray for the results of a cancer test after they have been taken?
  - The results are what they are going to be, right?
    - You might as well wait for the answer to come
- Can God change the results of the test?
  - Are the results even decided until you read them?

# Schrodinger's Cat

- What is the Schrodinger's cat thought experiment?
  - This means the cat is both dead and alive until you open the box
    - And see if Whiskers survived
- What's all this mean?
  - This world is more complicated than we can fully comprehend





# Timeless Complexity

- God created this universe
  - The rules it obeys, God created
- God is more complex than this universe
  - What makes us believe we can understand God
    - When we don't understand what He created
- With this said, God tells us our prayers matter
  - So pray



# -Making Requests Known-

- God does not act the same way whether we pray or not
  - Prayer influences God
- Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, **present your requests to God.** Philippians 4:6
- Prayer allows us to get involved with God and His workings
  - Get involved



# Unraveling the Mysteries

## *Ask, Seek, Knock*

Chapter 11



# Ask, Seek, Knock

- Luke 11:1-13
  - The Disciples ask, “Teach us to pray.” (1)
  - So, Jesus teaches the *Lord’s Prayer* (2-4)
  - Tells a story about an annoying neighbor (5-8)
  - So, Ask, Seek, Knock (9-13)
- We should pray like salesman, never giving up or taking no for an answer

# -Battering the Gates-

- Luke 18:1-8, The Persistent Widow
  - Another parable of someone persistently
    - Botheringly, annoyingly, wearily
    - Asking God for help
  - And the person is powerless, poor, old, and a woman
- The Judge has no fear from this little old lady
  - But will listen to her because of her persistence



# Battering the Gates

- She must have known there was no hope of getting what she wanted
  - But she never stopped
- The lesson is no matter whether we think we will get what we ask for
  - We must ask over and over, never giving up



# -Once is Not Enough-

- What is something your kids REALLY want?
  - My kids REALLY want a dog
    - And my firm answer has been
      - NO!
- From my no my kids now know more about dogs than most other kids
  - How to care for them
  - Clean up, feed, breeds, sicknesses



# Once is Not Enough

- My kids have studied dogs, written about dogs
  - All because I have said no
- “Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.”
  - Well prayer can change God, but it can also change us





# -Winning by Losing-

- Lastly when the answer is no
  - Paul asked for healing
    - It never came
      - But humility came
  - We ask for relief from trials
    - It never comes
      - But we learn patience
- Prayer opens us up to change enacted by God



# Summary

- Some prayers will have no answers
- God restrains from fixing all our problems
- It is ok to argue and bargain with God
- Three stages of prayer
  - 1st Child like request for something I want
  - 2nd A kind of meditation
  - 3rd Submission



# Summary

- We partner with God through prayer
- Prayer has an impact on our world
- It is prayer AND action together
- Prayer does change God
  - Prayer also changes us
- We don't understand how prayer works
  - But it works and we are called to pray



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