

What If We Prayed? (Part 1) – Various Scriptures

Eph 3:14-21; As we approach another ministry year, I want to spend a few weeks on a little mini-series titled “What If;” And I want to start with prayer
It’s one of the *pillars* of our church; It should be a pillar in *every* church; And for some time now, the Lord has been impressing it on me
To pray, pray consistently, and pray more
And not just personally, but as a church; Corporately; Together

Which, if we’re honest, we don’t do very much; We don’t pray very much
Whether it’s a Night of Prayer every now and then, or our *pre-service* prayer every weekend – very few participate
And if that’s a reflection of your *personal* prayer life, I want to encourage you to change it; I want to encourage you to pray
We’ll never be a praying church, if we’re not praying people (**Intro**)

- So I want to encourage you to change that; As we get ready to kick off a new ministry year, I want to encourage you to pray; And do so by two means:
(1) By preaching about it
(2) By giving you opportunity to do it, in real time; As I speak

That’s what the chairs are for; 2 prayer stations, for you to fill, 5 minutes at a time, while I speak; Literally; Calling out to God for the very things the early church did
That’s what the prayer cards are for

And I’d like for both stations to be filled at all times; All the way through the message
When one person gets up, another step in; Seamlessly
Just come forward, sit or kneel, and begin praying quietly as God prompts you
Whispering or speaking in hushed tones so that only those with you can hear
I want to give you an opportunity to apply the message, as I speak

So let’s start by filling these chairs right now; 8 people; Just come forward, bow your head, and start praying; No longer than 5 minutes at a time; Maybe even 2 or 3
And when you’re done, just get up, and make way for somebody else; Who’s first?

- The Apostle Paul is writing in Eph 3, & I can’t think of a better passage to frame all this
[14] *For this reason* [he says; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God would be brought to light (v9-10)] *I bow my knees* [I pray] *before the Father*, [15] *from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named* [as in, given their characteristics and destiny], [16] [I pray Paul says] *that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you* [us, the church] *to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being*, [17] *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith* [that’s the first reason he prays in this case]

[Second, he prays]—*that you, being rooted and grounded in love*, [18] *may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth*, [19] *and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge* [exceeds our understanding], *that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*.

He prays that we would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit
He prays that Christ would dwell in our hearts

He prays that we would comprehend his love
And he prays that we would be filled with God’s fullness

And then he finishes with this
[20] *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us*, [21] *to him [God] be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Have you ever wondered why we say “Amen” at the end of our prayers? That’s one of the reasons; Paul did it

But the main reason I read that passage, is to point out the fact that Paul *prayed*, and prayed like he did, b/c he *believed* in it
It’s either that or the whole paragraph is a farce; Which *obviously* isn’t the case, b/c of all he endured to record such a prayer; And all that his life stood for
No, Paul prayed b/c he believed; He believed in it; And the fact is, most people don’t

Most people don’t pray because they don’t believe in it

Not really; And I’m not talking unbelievers here, I’m talking about the church; I’m talking about people who are *functional* unbelievers; And I fear that includes us

We believe in Jesus, totally; We trust him to save us from our sins, sure; And we love and follow him as Lord of our lives for the most part
But when it comes to prayer, there’s a disconnect
And while part of the reason could be laziness or busyness or complacency, the primary reason, is unbelief; We don’t pray b/c we don’t really *believe* in it

We don’t believe it does any good; And we don’t believe it’s worth the time or effort
In theory we do; In theory we believe; But it’s just head knowledge; It’s not heartfelt
If it were, if we *really* believed, there’d be no stopping us; We’d be at our prayers early, and late, and everywhere in between; If we really believed, we’d act like it

- Like the Afghani refugees Becky and I used to know, who wanted a phone
They had just arrived in the United States, 4 sisters; We were helping them get settled
And they had the cultural mindset that if you just spoke to the right person, you could get what you want; And they wanted a phone, a home phone

And we told them that they not only didn’t have enough *money* to get a phone, but they weren’t *allowed* to by the resettlement agency
Far too many had abused the privilege and run up exorbitant bills

But that didn’t stop them from trying; That didn’t stop them from talking to every Tom, Dick, and Harry they came in contact with
Or asking *us* every time we saw them; They were relentless

B/c they believed; They believed that everything was decided by whim instead of law, and if they could just find the right person at the right time, they’d get their phone
And lo and behold, the phone rang in our house one day, and the caller ID said Faheema Faquiri

The point being, they asked, they acted – b/c they believed; Just like Paul in Eph 3

And we don't, we don't ask, we don't pray – b/c we *don't* believe

➤ But what if you did? What if you *admitted* your unbelief, and confessed it, and . . .

What if you prayed like you did believe? (Mk 11:23-24)

What if you called out to God with the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen?

What if you exercised the same faith in prayer, as you do in salvation?

What if you prayed like you believe?

I'll tell you what; You'd see mountains moved, wrongs righted, hearts softened, people saved, and lives changed; Just like Jesus said would happen; **Mk 11:23-24**

Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. [24] Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

You can't divorce that from 1 Jn 5, that says if we ask anything *according to his will* we receive it, but you can say that *belief* in what you're praying for . . .

Is absolutely prerequisite; Even if it is God's will; You have to *believe* in prayer

What if you did that? What if you actually prayed like you mean it?*****

What if you made this the year, to pray like you believe?

➤ And not just believe in a nebulous sense, but very specifically; According to the truths found in God's Word; Like the fact . . .

• **That God cares (1 Pet 5:7)**

What if you really believed that the God of the universe actually cares about you?

Like it says in **1 Pet 5:7** – *Humble yourselves . . . casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*

What if you really believed that was true?

You'd do it, wouldn't you? You'd pray; You'd cast off your burdens like it was nobody's business*****

What if this was the year you started believing that and doing that?

2nd, what if you really believed . . .

• **That God hears (1 Jn 5:14)**

It's one thing to care, and another thing to listen; And God does

1 John 5: 14 says – *This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.*

How do you know that what you're praying for is God's will? Pray what's in this book;

Pray the things *he* inspired; The stuff that's near to *his* heart

And when you do, he'll hear

What if you believed that?*****

What if you trusted God to hear you, just like you trusted him to save you?

What if you believed that far from an impersonal, disinterested power somewhere – he's a loving God, with his ear bent to your heart?

3rd, what if you really believed . . .

• **That God answers (Ps 3:4)**

That he doesn't just care and hear like a friend who's speechless from time to time

But actually answers from the inexhaustible, unfathomable depth of his wisdom and knowledge; What if you believed that?

What if you actually believed what the Psalmists said over and over again?

Like David in **Psalm 3:4** – *I cried aloud to the Lord and he answered me from his holy hill.* God answers

Or Ps 34:4 – *I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free.* (Ps 118:5)

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. (Ps 118:21)

When I told of my ways, you answered me (Ps 119:26)

In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. (Ps 120:1)

On the day I called, you answered me (Ps 138:3)*****

From beginning to end, the Psalms bear witness to the fact that God answers us when we pray; What if you actually believed that? In faith; Starting right now

4th, what if you really believed . . .

• **That God gives (Lk 11:9-10)**

That he actually *gives* us what we ask for, as long as it's good for us; As long as it's best Sometimes even *beyond* what we could ask or imagine; What if you believed that?

What if you really believed what Jesus said in Luke 11? As he taught his disciples to pray, and emphasized the importance of persistence? (**Lk 11:9-10**)

I tell you [he said], ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [10] For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

What if you made this the year, to not only pray persistently, but expectantly?*****

Believing that God gives

5th, what if you really believed . . .

• **That God waits (James 4:2)**

That he *waits* to hear your prayers before he acts; *Before* he gives

That's the implication of James 4:2 – *You do not have, because you do not ask.*

God doesn't give if there is no plea; God doesn't answer if there is no question

Are there exceptions to that? Yes; Sometimes God gives *far* more abundantly than we could ask or imagine

Think Isaac, given to Abraham and Sarah; There was no question from them; They had Ishmael; And yet God gave them a son

Or how about heaven and our place in it? God didn't wait for our plea on that; He didn't wait for us to ask for it

And the same would be true of unexpected blessings in *your* life

So yes, there are exceptions to this; But generally speaking, God waits for us to ask; He waits for us to pray; He waits for us to petition him

I think, to emphasize our dependence, and glorify his power; He waits

What if you believed that? And prayed accordingly?

6th, what if you really believed . . .

- **That the Spirit helps (Rom 8:26)**

That when you pray, he intercedes for you; Like it says in **Rom 8:26**

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

It's not just any kind of help we receive in prayer, but *supernatural* help; Communication at a level *far* deeper than our words or thoughts

Adding weight, and urgency, and fervency, and clarity, and substance – to prayers already fueled by the assurance of things hoped for; The Spirit helps us

What if you believed that? And prayed accordingly*****

And last, what if you really believed . . .

- **That it's powerful (James 5:16)**

That prayer is potent? That it can and does have great effect?

That circumstances *can* be altered and lives changed?

That nations can rise and rulers fall?

That churches can flourish and worship explode?

That love can deepen and life extend?

What if you really believed that prayer is that powerful?

B/c the Bible says it is; **James 5:16** – *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.* Not just power, but *great* power

And the Bible is full of ordinary people who achieved extraordinary things, b/c they believed it, and did it

➤ How about you? What if you really believed these things? And prayed like it?

How might it change you? What might your *life* be like?

How might our church be different? And your neighborhood? And the world?

What if we prayed this year like we really believe? (**Summary**)

Bowing our *knees before the Father* . . . *that according to the riches of his glory he may grant [us] to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in [our] inner being,*

[17] so that Christ may dwell in [our] hearts through faith (Eph 3:16-17)

What if we did that?

What if we prayed for the *strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth* [of God's love]? (18)

What if we prayed to *know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that [we] may be filled with all the fullness of God.* (19)

And what if we prayed with the quiet confidence that he *is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us?*

What if? What if we prayed?

Prayer – Father, forgive us of our complacency and unbelief; Forgive us of our laziness and doubt; Help us to pray; Our spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak

We give now of our tithes and offerings, and pray that you will multiply their impact

For your *glory in [our] church, and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations*