

YOUR HEART: FAITH VERSUS DOUBT

Let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. (James 1:6–7 HCSB)



When you pray, you should rest in the fact that God is not unaware, unable, uncaring, unwilling, or unlikely to answer. That's why He keeps prompting you to ask in faith. Your heart can be right with God and with others, and yet your doubts during prayer can create roadblocks.

Peter, for example, unnecessarily denied Jesus three times. Sometimes we, too, might quietly deny God's faithfulness, goodness, or ability in our hearts when we approach Him. This lack of faith will clog up your prayer life. You'll quit wanting to come close to God if you don't trust Him or believe He is good.

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So if you don't feel like praying much anymore, the diagnosis probably lies in one of the following four misconceptions about God's heart and identity.

1. *God doesn't know or understand my needs.* Yes, He knows you. He knows you better than you know yourself. The theological word for this quality of God's nature is *omniscience*, or all-knowledge. He knows every time a sparrow falls to the ground (Matt. 10:29). He knows the number of hairs on your head (Matt. 10:30). "He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them" (Ps. 147:4). "All things are open and laid bare" before His eyes (Heb. 4:13). And as we've already seen, He completely "knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matt. 6:8).

"But if He already knows what's in our heads," you might ask, "why does He want us to pray? What's the point?" Remember, prayer is about (1) intimately knowing, loving, and worshiping God; (2) conforming our lives to His will and ways; and (3) accessing and advancing His kingdom, power, and glory. All of these require interaction. God could do things without us. But He's too good and kind to kick us to the curb.

Besides, if you could possess the ability as a parent to know everything that's in your children's minds, would you prefer they ignore you? Would you want them continuing to struggle or running into trouble? Or would you rather they remained in a relationship with you so they could experience your love and wisdom in a personal way? *Of course* you'd want them close. And God does too. Yes, He does understand. And He's always here for you.

The second misconception is . . .

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2. *God isn't able to help.* The apostle Paul answered this objection with one of the most resounding exclamations in the Bible, declaring that God is able not only to do whatever we can imagine Him doing, but He is “able to do *above and beyond* all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20 HCSB). The original Greek words that go together to form this sentence carry the idea of superabundance, exceedingly high amounts, an ability that goes beyond all forms of human measurement. That’s what God has. That’s who He is. Total ability and power. *Omnipotence.*

Look at the stars and look in the mirror. His creation reveals His ability to do things well. If you truly believe this, then you should have no trouble believing “if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14). Or that with faith no larger than a “mustard seed,” you can “say to this mountain”—whatever the mountain is—“‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move” (Matt. 17:20). Believing in such an omnipotent God means that even people like us can still be made to “stand in the presence of His glory with great joy” (Jude 24). He can truly do anything. Jesus even said, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). Look at His perfect track record and don’t doubt His ability when you pray.

3. *God doesn't care.* The natural follow-up question, even after a person accepts God’s omniscience and omnipotence, can make you ask: “If He knows everything—and can do everything—then why won’t He help me? To know and not care . . . isn’t that the worst quality of all?” Lack of immediate action should never be interpreted as lack of concern. Jesus pointed to the birds of the air to prove that God cares.

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If He cares for them, how much more does He care for you? Every breath is a gift from Him, shouting from above that He cares.

Jesus provided two *prayer-ables* in Scripture that paint polar opposites to the caring character of God. A man gets caught off guard late at night by unexpected company. His pantry isn't stocked so he runs to a neighbor's and asks if they might spare a little bread. "Don't bother me!" comes the answer from inside. "The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can't get up to give you anything" (Luke 11:7 HCSB). But the man is persistent, and finally the neighbor gives him what he wants to get him to go away.

A second example is the story of a widow who was being mistreated. Bothered by the injustice, she keeps approaching a local, heartless judge to plead her case. But this official remains cold and unwilling to help. Not until she's almost worn him down by her endless pestering does he finally give in and grant her request (Luke 18:1-5).

An uncaring friend. A dismissive judge. Jesus pointed out that in both stories, the persistent requestor got what he or she asked for. His point is that God is not a calloused, uncaring judge or a sleeping neighbor in bed. Therefore, how much more quickly and willingly will He answer our requests than the judge and the sleeper? He said, "Will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night?" Jesus asked, rhetorically. "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly" (Luke 18:7-8). So He says to us, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9). Not

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only does He care; He cares for you more than anyone else in your life. There goes another breath He just gave you.

4. *God isn't likely to do anything anyway.* That's not the impression you get from Mark 11:24—"I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you." Yes, He is willing to listen and respond and counsel and comfort and encourage and direct and rescue.

"I am willing," He said to a leper who came to Him, begging for help. He was "moved with compassion" by the faith of this broken man, and answered his prayer by healing his body (Mark 1:41). *We* are the ones who are weak and unwilling . . . unwilling to believe, unwilling to wait, unwilling to accept or have all of our questions answered. Jesus was willing to go to the cross for you. He is willing to go so far as to "save those who come to God through Him"—how?—"since He always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25 HCSB). Yes, even now, Jesus is praying and working.

As we've seen, of course, He is not a genie who grants our wishes. We should be glad of that, since we'd soon learn the horror of worshiping a God who was controlled by us, rather than one who rules all and takes all things into account. God has given us the capacity to trust that His reasons are in keeping with His wisdom and His will. Because God is sovereign, He may or may not choose to do something, even though He certainly has the ability. But whether or not He does exercise that ability, it's our job to believe He can and that He has a willing heart.

So the *Battle Plan* for your life includes the kind of praying that:

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- *expects* Him to know your heart and what you truly need from Him
- *believes* that no limitations apply to Him, that He can do anything
- *anticipates* that He will respond to you with love, compassion, and mercy
- *assumes* that He is there and listening, willing to come to your aid and help you

Daily ask the Lord—in prayer—to reveal more about Himself to you as you absorb His Word, follow His teaching, apply His promises, and grow in knowledge and wisdom. Because the better you know Him, the more time you'll want to spend with Him. And the more time you spend with Him, the weaker all these misconceptions will be and the greater your faith.

And there goes another breath. He's so good.

Lord, I believe in Your perfect knowledge and understanding of me. I believe in your total, unlimited ability to accomplish Your holy will. I believe You care and are willing to help me, that I can be certain You will take the best, most loving, most appropriate actions toward me and my needs. So keep me coming to You, Lord, where all my hopes are safe and secure. And keep me asking You in faith knowing You are aware, able, caring, willing, and likely. In Jesus' name, amen.