

**IX** 9Marks

# What If I Don't Desire to Pray?



**John  
Onwuchekwa**

**Church Questions**

## **Endorsements for the Church Questions Series**

“Christians are pressed by very real questions. How does Scripture structure a church, order worship, organize ministry, and define biblical leadership? Those are just examples of the questions that are answered clearly, carefully, and winsomely in this new series from 9Marks. I am so thankful for this ministry and for its incredibly healthy and hopeful influence in so many faithful churches. I eagerly commend this series.”

**R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Sincere questions deserve thoughtful answers. If you’re not sure where to start in answering these questions, let this series serve as a diving board into the pool. These mini-books are winsomely to-the-point and great to read together with one friend or one hundred friends.”

**Gloria Furman**, author, *Missional Motherhood* and *The Pastor’s Wife*

“As a pastor, I get asked lots of questions. I’m approached by unbelievers seeking to understand the gospel, new believers unsure about next steps, and maturing believers wanting help answering questions from their Christian family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. It’s in these moments that I wish I had a book to give them that was brief, answered their questions, and pointed them in the right direction for further study. Church Questions is a series that provides just that. Each booklet tackles one question in a biblical, brief, and practical manner. The series may be called Church Questions, but it could be called ‘Church Answers.’ I intend to pick these up by the dozens and give them away regularly. You should too.”

**Juan R. Sanchez**, Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

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Desire to Pray?

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John Onwuchekwa

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They devoted themselves to the apostles'  
teaching and the fellowship, to the  
breaking of bread and the prayers.

*Acts 2:42*







Prayer is like oxygen for the Christian. It's how we breathe.

But praying is hard. It often feels like duty, not delight. Like eating our vegetables, we know it's good for us. We feel guilty for not doing it, yet we shove the plate to the side. So it is with prayer.

Our prayerlessness isn't rooted in a lack of ability but in a lack of desire. We know *how* to pray. You could stop reading right now, close your eyes, bow your head, and pray. But instead, you've picked up this book because you realize your problem isn't that you don't know how to pray. It's that you simply don't *want* to pray.

What do we do when we don't *want* something we should want? A how-to manual won't help. Again, the problem is the heart, not the head. So how do we train our hearts to want something more? Is that even possible?

In short, yes, we can grow in our desire for prayer. If Jesus can transform hearts of stone to hearts of flesh (Ezek. 36:26), he can certainly reshape our affections and give us the desire to pray.

### **Don't Give Up! You Want to Want to Pray**

If you're struggling to pray, don't throw in the towel. The very fact that you're reading this book shows you're moving in the right direction. It shows you *want to want* to pray. That impulse should be celebrated.

Let me encourage you with a few other thoughts about this struggle.

#### *1. You're Not the Only One*

If I've learned anything from my years of using Google as my *de facto* problem solver, it's this:

I'm not the only one struggling with this problem. I just typed "struggling to pray" into Google and got 31,000,000 results. Clearly, you and I are not alone in this struggle.

The Bible told us as much. Just consider the twelve disciples. This group of guys spent over three years with Jesus. They'd eventually become pillars of the church (Matt. 19:28; Eph. 2:20). And yet, they found themselves struggling to pray on more than one occasion. In fact, Mark 14 records that when Jesus commanded them to pray on the eve of his death, they closed their eyes, bowed their heads—and fell asleep (Mark 14:37–41)! If you've nodded off in prayer, remember the apostles did the same.

Not to mention, *I'm* with you in this struggle to pray. I'm writing this book not because of my successful prayer life but because of my own struggles. You're not the only one.

## *2. This Won't Be the Last Time*

If you're struggling to pray, this won't be the last time. You'll be here again. Not wanting to

pray isn't like the chickenpox—experience it once, and then you're immune. Prayerlessness is rooted in pride, and pride is more like the flu—different strands are always evolving, and there's no immunity this side of eternity.

A host of things can awaken pride. Tragedy can cause us to forget God's promises and make our pain the focus of our lives. When we sow seeds of bitterness, crops of prayerlessness spring up. Prosperity can also make us forget God, leading us to prayerlessness (Deut. 8:10–18).

Regrettably, there's no one-time vaccination for pride. It finds a way to rear its head again and again. We cannot completely eradicate it, but we can know what to do when it comes back. I'm hoping this book will provide a set of directions for you to follow whenever the pride of prayerlessness appears.

### *3. People in Worse Situations Have Changed for the Better*

Finally, people in worse situations have changed for the better. You can begin to *want* to pray. At

the risk of sounding like an infomercial, you can change—maybe even before the end of this book!

Remember those disciples who nodded off while praying? They went from falling asleep at Jesus's prayer meetings to leading a movement fueled by prayer (Acts 2:42; 4:23–31; 6:1–6; 8:14–15; 12:1–5; 13:1–3; 20:36).

What transformed these sleepy apostles into tireless men of prayer? And how might our hearts change to desire more prayer? That's what we'll discuss next.

## **The Resurrection of Christ: The Source of Desire**

Christianity isn't primarily a set of rules about how we should live. Christianity is fundamentally about an event: the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Listen to how Paul describes the gospel, and you'll get a vision of what will transform your prayer life.

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you

received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Cor. 15:1–8)

The gospel message is primarily about what Jesus accomplished for his people by his death and resurrection. Jesus defeated death by dying. He absorbed God's wrath against the sins of his people and then rose again from the dead, conquering death itself. He proclaimed this victory

to his disciples with more than mere words. He proclaimed it by *appearing* to them in all of his resurrected glory. Jesus was alive and well. This one fact animated the apostles' ministry and transformed them from sleepy saints to leaders who prayed relentlessly.

We often assume that our response to a pitiful prayer life should be to redouble our efforts, institute a new prayer regimen, or reorganize our schedule. Certainly, we may need a fresh dose of resolve or a change of schedule, but those things can't sustain a life of prayer. Instead, perhaps our cold, prayerless hearts need to stop focusing on prayer so much and start focusing on the person and work of Christ. Jesus's resurrection changes everything, including our desire for prayer. How we pray emerges from and reaffirms our belief in the resurrection. Christ's resurrection should change our prayer *life*, not merely our prayer *regimen*.

Perhaps a story from my marriage may shed light on how beholding the resurrection of Christ ignites prayer in our hearts. My wife, Shawndra, is incredibly organized. In my house,



everything has its place. And yet, after twelve years of marriage, I still don't know where to find the measuring cups. I should know where they are, but I don't. I forget . . . frequently.

When I need measuring cups, I ask Shawn-dra. She doesn't like that. At all. Sometimes she'll respond, "You should know where these things are by now." Sometimes she'll riff on Jesus's words, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know?" (John 14:9). My personal favorite is: "What would you do if I weren't here?"

Of course, it's a rhetorical question, but I sometimes respond, "But sweetheart, you *are* here." Why would I go searching for answers on my own when I can simply ask my wife and have my problem solved?

The disciples surely felt the same way after they saw Jesus raised from the dead. Why would they try to tackle problems on their own when Jesus was alive and well? In fact, read through the first six chapters of Acts, and you'll find that at every opportunity the apostles turned to the resurrected Lord for help. At every point—from lacking direction when Jesus ascended (Acts

1:9–14), to picking up the pieces after being betrayed by a close friend (Acts 1:15–26), to struggling with a growing church (Acts 2:37–42), to feeling weak and afraid as they were confronted with hostility to Jesus (Acts 4:13–31), to wrestling through issues of ethnic tension that threatened the unity of the church (Acts 6:1–6)—the disciples prayed. They turned to Jesus because they knew he could help.

Prior to the resurrection, the apostles often responded to challenges with cowardice and fear (Mark 14:50, 66–72). But after the resurrection, they chose to gather and pray. They didn't keep their problems to themselves or attempt to work out solutions among themselves. They *prayed*. They *always prayed*.

Every problem the early church encountered was met with prompt, and often impromptu, prayer meetings. Every one. They didn't go searching for answers on their own. Why? Because they'd seen Jesus get up from the grave. He was *alive*. They simply couldn't unsee it.

Maybe they were tempted to think, "What should we do with these problems now that Jesus

isn't here?" But then they immediately thought, "But Jesus, you *are* here." Just like I say to my wife when looking for measuring cups.

Jesus is alive. It's this vision that leads to prayer. Beholding by faith the resurrection of Christ fuels our desire to pray. So, if you're lacking desire to pray, consider how you can meditate on the person of Christ and what he achieved through his cross and resurrection.

- Consider reading large portions of the Gospels or memorizing important texts in Scripture that unfold the glories of Christ's death and resurrection (such as Rom. 3:21–28 or 1 Cor. 15:1–8).
- Consider prayerfully reading a biblical reflection on the person and work of Christ such as Mark Jones's *Knowing Christ* or Mark Dever and J. I. Packer's *In My Place Condemned He Stood*.

If we want our hearts transformed, then we need to meditate on the person and work of Christ. We need to behold him in his resurrected glory.

If you are a Christian, then you know that prayer is important. Like eating your vegetables, you know it's good to do—but what about times when you simply don't want to pray? John Onwuchekwa encourages Christians to talk with their heavenly Father even when it's hard. This short treatment on prayer will help you understand the basics of why, what, and how to pray as you worship and serve in the local church body.

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**Church Questions** is a series that seeks to provide ordinary Christians with sound and accessible biblical teaching by answering common questions they have about church life. Each volume offers biblical answers and practical applications with the goal of nurturing healthy church practice and commitment.

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PRAYER