



OUTSIDE READING ASSIGNMENT

How to get results through Prayer

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How to Get Results Through Prayer

Two men can go fishing at The Navigator's Eagle Lake in Colorado. One can come back without anything—completely skunked—while the other comes back with his limit.

What makes the difference?

How can two men fish in the same lake and one catch his limit while the other hardly catches anything?

The one who gets hardly anything doesn't know a great deal about fishing. He just puts his lure on his rod and flicks it out into the lake. When he reels it back in, there's nothing on the line. He puts it out again and reels it back in—still nothing. So he walks down the shoreline 20 or 30 yards thinking the fish might be biting there. He flicks the lure in and still nothing. Perhaps during the course of his afternoon or evening he might make one catch.

The other man will go up, cast his line and immediately pull one in. A few more casts and he'll pull another one in. The difference between the two is that the man who catches his fish has taken the time to learn something about the fish—not about fishing, but about the fish. He knows where the fish are. He knows their habits. He knows the time of day they strike. He knows the kind of lures or bait that attract them. He knows the effect of the wind, rain and sun upon the fish. And he adapts his fishing methods to the fish he is trying to catch. The methods he would use at Eagle Lake will not work down in Texas where there is a different kind of fish with different habits. You might say that the effective fisherman catches fish on their terms. He has taken the time to learn about fish and adapted himself to their habits.

The man who doesn't catch anything is just playing at the game. He's just going up for the fun—for a little relaxation. If he happens to

catch a fish, fine. If not, fine. He might wonder, "Why is my 'luck' always so bad? Why does this other fellow always have such good 'luck'?" The reason is he has never taken the time to learn about fish and how to catch them on their terms.

Perhaps you are wondering what fishing has to do with the subject of prayer. Two men and women can kneel down to pray. One of the two can consistently and regularly see God answer his prayers. This person is known as a prayer warrior. While the other person prays quite frequently, he has never taken the time to learn about God and about God's conditions and method of prayer. So he doesn't pray on God's terms. The one who consistently receives answers to his prayers is the man or woman who prays on God's terms. Many people pray helter-skelter—when something is happening.

For example, the other day I was having radiator trouble and I prayed, "Lord, help me to get to the garage before this thing blows up." Or maybe we are convicted that we ought to remember Grandmother and so we pray, "God bless Grandma." And that's about the extent of our praying. All of us can be like the successful fisherman. We can become prayer warriors, if we will take the time to study God's Word and His conditions for prayer.

God's Conditions

Let's consider some of God's conditions for prayer. Most of these conditions are couched in the form of promises. God gives us a promise regarding prayer. That promise is conditional; if we pray in accordance with these conditions, then God says we will receive our answers.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). Notice that Jesus is talking about doing His works. First, the works

that He does and then the works we are going to do on His behalf.

“Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13,14). This is the first condition we want to consider.

What does it mean to ask—to pray—in the name of Jesus? All of us probably conclude our prayers with this term or something similar, “Lord, we ask this in Jesus’ name.” We are not just signaling people that this is the end of the prayer so that they can open their eyes and look up. And, hopefully, it is not just a formality that we have fallen into because that’s the way we always have heard other people pray. To pray in the name of Jesus is much more than this. Notice again that the context is doing His work. We are praying as His agents—as His representatives. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:20, “...We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” What was he saying? “I am an agent, I am a representative.” The term he actually uses here is “I am an ambassador”—an official representative of Jesus Christ.

As the treasurer of The Navigators, I have to use our line of credit at the bank from time to time. For those of you who are not familiar with finances, that means I borrow money. So I call up one of the vice presidents there, and say, “George, The Navigators have a situation where we need \$4,000 for a year to use in Indonesia.” Of course, he doesn’t care where we are going to use it. He says, “Fine. Come on down. I’ll fix up a note. You sign it and we’ll put it in the Navigator account.” Now that’s very easy. In fact, I could probably walk in off the street and if he happens to be free, we could consummate this transaction in about ten minutes.

But suppose I were to go down and say, “George, I would like to borrow \$4,000 for my personal use.” Well, he would clear his throat, take off his glasses, look at me and say, “What are you going to do with it? What’s your security?”

What makes the difference in his attitude? In

the first case, I am the representative of The Navigators. He doesn’t care about my personal bank account. What he cares about are the resources of The Navigators. Because The Navigators have a good credit standing with the bank, I can go in and very easily transact this business. I am simply a representative of The Navigators.

Two things are involved. First, The Navigators have a good credit standing. You might say The Navigators have earned the right to borrow that \$4,000—by the figures on our balance sheet, by our past performance, etc. The second is that the money is going to be used for The Navigators. He is depositing it in The Navigators account—not mine. I’m simply acting as an agent of The Navigators.

Now when I come to God and pray in Jesus’ name, I’m coming first of all in His merit. There is absolutely no reason within me why God should answer any of my prayers. Considering myself, I am utterly bankrupt. I have no credit with God. But I’m not coming as myself. I’m coming as a representative of Jesus Christ. Secondly, I’m coming on His behalf. That’s what it means to ask in the name of Jesus—in His merit and to ask on His behalf.

You notice that He says in John 14:13, “...I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son...” This is the end result of all prayer—that God has purposed that the Father may be glorified in the Son. An article entitled “I Was Afraid to Fly” appeared in *Power* some time ago. In it a man had prayed that the Lord would deliver him from a fear of flying. He had a job that took him back and forth across the continent all the time and flying was the only practical means. Yet he always ended up riding the train and wasting time because of his fear of flying. Finally, there came a time when he was on the West Coast and his wife was on the East Coast and a call came that she was going into the hospital for emergency surgery. He knew he needed to fly, but he was still afraid. He got down on his knees and said, “Lord, for your glory I ask that you would deliver me from this fear.” And God did when he finally came to

the place where he wanted it for God's glory—then he might be used in the life of someone else. He finally learned about God's prayer requirements.

According to His Will

There is a companion passage in 1 John 5:14,15. "And this is the confidence which we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of Him." Now this is a very categorical statement. John says that we know that we have the request we make of Him if we ask according to His will.

Naturally, the question comes up, how can we know we are praying according to the will of God? If we have a Scripture passage we can say, "Well, Lord, this is what You say in Your Word so it is Your will." But so often it's not that clear-cut. There are many decisions in life for which there is no clear guidance in the Scriptures. You have to determine the will of God. It's the same way in prayer. If we would take the time to determine the will of God concerning this matter of prayer, we might pray less but we would receive a lot more answers. John plainly says that if we ask according to His will, we have those requests made of Him. It's as simple as that.

Let's consider the situation where we do not know what God's will is. We can come and say, "Lord, I've given thought to this. I've thought about Your Word, about Your character (who You are) and I've tried to put myself in Your position. I've tried to see the situation as You would see it. As best as I know, I believe that this is Your will and this is what I'm asking."

When you come on these terms, you can come with confidence. You have not just rushed helter-skelter into the presence of God. You have, as it were, prepared your case. You can come and say, "Lord, to the best of my knowledge, I believe it is Your will for such and such to happen. This is what I'm praying." In Matthew 18:19 Jesus says, "...if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done

for them by my Father in heaven." Jesus is getting at the same thing here. It's not that Bud and I just say, "Well, we are going to agree to pray to God that it will rain this afternoon." But assume that Bud and I get together and discuss this and consider the Scriptures and agree that, according to our understanding of the Scriptures, such and such is the will of God. Then we agree and pray together. Jesus says that kind of prayer gets answered. This is thoughtful prayer. It's doing our homework before we come into the presence of Almighty God.

There are some specific things we know are according to the will of God because men of God in the Word have prayed these prayers or told us they were praying them. We know these are according to the will of God.

Praying for the Healthy

I told my Bible class a few weeks ago that it is pretty hard to get prayed for unless we're sick or out of a job. Stop and think about that for a moment. It's not so funny. Ninety percent of the prayer requests concern someone who is sick or out of a job. The implication is that someone who is healthy and working doesn't need prayer. That's not true.

Let's look at some of the things we can pray for those who are healthy and working. Psalm 119:18 says, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." Have you ever opened the Word of God for your quiet time or Bible study and found it just like dry dust? You just didn't understand it. Get down on your knees, or however you pray, and pray, "Lord, open my eyes—the eyes of my understanding that I might behold the wonders in Your law." God says that if we ask according to His will, He hears us. This is according to His will. If we pray that, God is going to open the eyes of our understanding, and we are going to begin to get things out of the Word of God.

I can guarantee that if we will begin to take God seriously when He says if we pray according to His will, He hears us, we will begin to see answers to our prayers. So often we are like the

fisherman who casts out his lure and hopes that a fish just might happen to be swimming by about that time. We pray hoping that God might just happen to answer that prayer. Let's get on a footing where we have the assurance that God is going to answer. Then we will begin to see some answers.

Ephesians 3 contains a prayer which Paul is praying for the Ephesians. In verses 17-19 he says, "And that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

The greatest need we have today is to be filled with the love of God—to be overwhelmed by the insight and perception of God's love for us. If during the nitty-gritty of daily living when the little things come in and take away our joy, we could just be gripped by the love of God through Jesus Christ and filled with all the fullness of God, our lives would be transformed. Paul said he was praying this for these people. I think Paul knew what the will of God was. I can pray for myself, my wife, and everyone I pray for might come to know the love of God and be filled with all the fullness of God. God says if we pray according to His will, He hears us and answers.

In Colossians 1:9 Paul tells the people at Colossae what he is praying for them. He says, "And so, from the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." You know, it's the will of God that you and I be filled with the knowledge of His will throughout spiritual wisdom and understanding—through insight into God's ways, God's character, God's person. Paul prays that the Colossians might lead a life that is worthy of the Lord. I'm sure you want this. If you are working with some young Christians trying to help them in the Christian life, it is certainly the desire of your

heart that they lead a life that is worthy of Jesus Christ. God says we can pray this according to His will. A study of Paul's epistles and prayers reveals that they are all different because they were adapted to the particular needs of each church. These things were all prayed according to the will of God.

Personal Prayer

I want to draw your attention to one more prayer of Paul's. In Ephesians 6:18-20 he requests prayer for himself. He says to pray at all times and begins to give them some brief instructions on prayer. In verse 19 he asks them to pray for him ". . . that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel." Usually we use this verse from Paul as an instruction to us that we can and should pray for boldness in evangelism. But if you go back and read the Book of Acts, you will discover that Paul was a very bold man, and he certainly knew how to articulate the Gospel. He was not afraid to stand before kings, judges, soldiers or anyone to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Yet he was asking that these people pray that God would give him boldness and clarity of expression.

What was he doing? He was asking that they would pray that God would enable him to use the gifts God had given him. Paul was an evangelist. He had a special task of proclaiming the Gospel throughout the whole Roman Empire. This was his calling. It was his gift. He was praying that God would help him to use that gift which required boldness and clarity of expression. Now whatever your gift is—whatever it is God has called you to do in the Body of Christ—you can pray according to the will of God that God will enable you to develop and fulfill that gift. My particular responsibility in The Navigators is in legal and financial affairs. The thing I need more than anything else is wisdom in making decisions. I need wisdom to know how to handle my responsibilities. The Navigators have relationships with some 20 or 30 state governments, as well as the federal government. The State of Colorado made a decision this year which cost us \$5,000. I need wisdom in our dealings with them. God has

given me the responsibility for making many financial decisions.

But I'm not alone. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him." I believe with all my heart that God will give me the wisdom that I need to make the necessary decisions. If I didn't believe that, I'd walk out today and quit because I couldn't take it. I said to someone the other day, "I really don't see how an unsaved man makes it in the business world. There are just too many contingencies and unknowns. Too often you just have to make a choice. I'm grateful today that God had given me the promise that I can ask for wisdom."

You may say that the main responsibility that God has given you right now is raising your children. You can pray to God for the necessary resources, for the poise, grace, wisdom and patience to do a good job of raising your children. God has not left you alone. Whatever it is He has called you to do, you can pray according to His will, and He will give you the resources to do that job. Isn't this a wonderful assurance? This is the kind of thing that gives life a solid foundation. This is why we can plant our feet firmly on the Rock of Jesus Christ and face the things of life that come to us. But if we have never come to this assurance, then we are easily shaken and battered with all the winds of circumstances that come our way.

Often we pray for a particular need which we believe is for God's glory and is according to God's will. We pray and say, "Lord, I need \$1,000 to fix the leaky roof and get rid of the termites under the house, etc. Uncle Ned died a few months ago and I might be in his will." But suppose Uncle Ned hasn't died. There is just no way in the world that we see how God can provide \$1,000. The amount really doesn't matter. In these situations our expectations are rather low. We say in our minds something like, "Well, Lord, I'm going to pray and ask You for this, but I don't really believe you are going to answer because I don't see how you could." If we were really honest with God and expressed

our thoughts, this is how it would come out, "You know, Lord, it's just a long shot. I'm going to pray and see if something just might happen."

Believing God

In 2 Kings 6 the northern kingdom of Samaria was besieged by the Syrian army. The food situation had become so critical that two women had agreed together to boil their children and eat them. The king of Israel comes to the prophet Elisha who says that tomorrow this siege is going to be lifted and food is going to be so plentiful that it will be on sale. It is going to go at bargain prices (2 Kings 7:1). "Then the captain on whose hand the king leaned said to the man of God, 'If the Lord Himself should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?'" (2 Kings 7:2). If God would open the windows of heaven and rain down grain, could this thing be? I don't see how this thing can possibly happen. I don't believe it will happen. Then Elisha says, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it" (2 Kings 7:2). Elisha was telling the captain, you will see this happen, but you won't partake of the blessings.

The next day three lepers who were sitting on the wall of the city said to themselves, "Let's go out to the camp of the Syrians. They have food. Now, we might die, but that's going to happen to us anyway. On the other hand, they might give us some food." When they got there they found the Syrians had deserted their camp.

After these three lepers began to eat, they said to one another, "It isn't right for us to be out here enjoying all of this. We ought to go back to the city and tell the good news." So they went back and told the people who then began to go out and gather up the food. So, as Elisha had prophesied, the next day they did have barley and wheat on sale at bargain prices. And what happened to the captain who said, "Can this thing be if the Lord were to open the windows of heaven?" The king told the captain to go stand in the gate of the city and take charge of this operation. So he posted himself there and the masses of people going back and forth trampled him to death. Thus, Elisha's proph-

esy that he would not partake of the food was also fulfilled.

As the passage illustrates, God is not limited to our ability to see how He is going to answer prayer.

In Jeremiah 32 God told Jeremiah that the southern kingdom of Judah was going to be taken over by another country, and they would be taken to their captor's country—they were to be exiles out of their land. Then out of the blue one day God said to Jeremiah, “Jeremiah, go buy this field.”

Suppose someone were to come to me and say, “You know, Jerry, there is not going to be any water in Colorado Springs three years from now. All the sources of water are going to be dried up. The people are going to leave here by the thousands. In view of this, I want you to go down and buy this piece of property.” Now what would my reaction be? I would not be interested in buying a piece of property in a ghost town. This is, in effect, what God was telling Jeremiah to do. But God went on to explain, “Jeremiah, they are going into exile 70 years, but I'm going to return them again into this land. Your heirs are going to own and enjoy this piece of property you are buying.” So Jeremiah paid the money and the deed was executed. Then he prayed in Jeremiah 32:16,17, “After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed to the Lord, saying: ‘Ah Lord God! It is Thou who hast made the heavens and the earth by thy great power and by Thy outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for Thee.’” Then he proceeds to tell God how impossible it is and how foolish the transaction was. So God comes right back to him in verse 26, “The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: ‘Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for Me?’” God does not need our help. He does not need our assistance figuring out how He is going to bring certain things to pass. A cross-reference of this thought is Genesis 18:14 where God said, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” to Abraham concerning the son He was to give him.

Ephesians 3:20 is a well known verse, “Now to Him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.” The idea we carry with this is that God is not only able to answer our prayers but far beyond whatever we could even imagine, ask or think. God is able to answer all our prayers. I'd like to just point out to you that the context of this verse is the prayer I referred you to earlier where Paul says he is praying that they might be filled with the love of God. He says that God is able to do this. He is able to do “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” Look at that prayer. He says you may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, length, height and depth, and know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. It seems like Paul has pressed his prayer request right out of the very outer limits—that you may be filled with the fullness of God. You can't reach any farther than that. Then he says, “Now unto Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above this.” When I have thought of the greatest prayer request I can think of, God's resources have just begun to come into operation. Never take time to try and figure out how God is going to answer that prayer. Very likely He will fool you. For even if you think you know how He might answer that prayer, He'll probably come up with a different way just to keep you on your toes.

The end of all this is found in John 16:24 where Jesus says, “Hitherto you have asked nothing in My Name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” We started out by talking about asking in His Name that the Father may be glorified. In the same prayer that glorifies the Father, we find that our joy is made full. There is nothing—*there is nothing*—that provides greater joy than to see God answer prayer and to know that we have a direct line with the King of kings and the Lord of lords.