

Unanswered Prayer: Doubt

1. Consider carefully the definition of faith: a) a belief in the actual existence of the living God, and b) placing a trust in His words and engendering an obedience to them. How does this affect your understanding of “ask in faith?” What impact does doubt have here? What do you observe of its impact to a doubting Believer’s life?

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and **doubting**; (1 Tim 2:5-8, NKJV)

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no **doubting**, for he who **doubts** is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (Jas 1:5-8, NKJV)

2. Consider how a discussion about doubt explores the meaning of the power of prayer. How did Jesus do what was done to the fig tree? What was He teaching?

So Jesus answered and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not **doubt**, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” (Matt 21:21-22; Mark 11:22-24, NKJV)

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Teacher Notes

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Ask the student: in his letter to Timothy, what is the truth that the apostle Paul is referring to? Encourage the student to mark up the text! What do you observe?

The truth: there is one God and one Mediator between the invisible God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all.

With Jesus Christ as the Mediator, you can pray to God through Jesus.

Ask the student: carefully observe what the author of James says about asking God for wisdom – who can ask God? Can a Pharisee ask? Who is granted the wisdom of God?

Notice that the wisdom of God cannot be gained through human learning and reason; God gives wisdom as a consequence of becoming a Believer. It is simply faith in Jesus and His work on the cross that grants one the wisdom of God. This also means that no Believer should take pride with this wisdom.

Ask the student: what is a double-minded man? What does the text tell you?

A double-minded man is one who vacillates between following God's way and his own wayward way. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew terms for "fool" and "foolish" describe a person who does not believe in God and is ignorant of wisdom based on God's moral standard.

If an astute student asks: what is the difference between wisdom and knowledge, you can point to a few passages for further study. It is important to teach the student that when the Bible speaks of wisdom and knowledge, they are in the context of God, and are not easily separable concepts as in English.

Wisdom: Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Cor 1:18-29, NKJV)

Knowledge: For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Col 1:9-12, NKJV)

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Ask the student: when you are uncertain of what a passage is teaching, take some time to search for other passages that might provide clarity. One method is to use a concordance and patiently work the problem. In your search, you may come across this passage:

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As your faith grows, you learn more about God and His will. The more spiritually mature you become, you pray more in accordance to God's will and plan. The power of prayer is seen in the context of God's will and plan.

Doubt disrupts this process of growing your faith and inhibits your ability to learn of God and His will and consequently lessens your ability to pray effectively.