

The Lies Corrupting Our Prayers

Dare to Believe the Truth

By Kyle Davison Bair

The lies we believe about prayer make it far more challenging than it should be.

Prayer should be the easiest experience for any Christian to delve into. Prayer is communication, talking with our heavenly Father. It should be as easy as a child talking to a loving parent.

Yet, the lies we believe corrupt our perception of prayer until it feels difficult, confusing, powerless, or empty. We don't try to believe lies. But over the centuries, a myriad of false ideas have crept into Christianity from cultures and other religions, until our experience with prayer feels rote, boring, or worthless.

Let's uncover a few of these lies and peel them away from prayer, leaving the actual, joyous experience of true prayer shining brighter and clearer.

Lie #1: "I need a mountain of faith to move a mustard seed."

Most of us know Jesus' words:

"Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt. 17:20).

We know the words—but believe the opposite. We believe that we need to muster up as much faith as we possibly can to accomplish even the smallest answered prayer.

If we truly believed that a mustard seed of faith—the smallest possible amount—can move mountains, then we would never stop moving mountains. We would hunt them down, ready to send them running into the sea.

You might not have a lot of faith that God can heal this cancer, or provide for this need, or save this loved one. You might not have a lot of faith, but you probably have a little. God's Word says if you have any faith whatsoever you can still command that mountain to move, and it will obey you. With the smallest possible faith, "Nothing will be impossible for you."

Why don't we believe this? Often, pride gets in the way. We might not like that we contribute so little to the outcome. Other times, we want an excuse for failure: if it didn't work, it's because I didn't have enough faith. At other times, we find ourselves so conditioned by our society of condemnation and cancellation that we can't accept Jesus' words of pure grace. Our salvation is by grace through faith, not because of works. So are the answers to our prayers.

If we can set aside the lies and genuinely believe Jesus, then we will destroy mountains left and right.

Lie #2: "I have to convince God to care."

Often in prayer, we try to convince God of the merits of our case. We tell Him why it's important to get the answer we want. We bargain, offering Him anything we can think of in exchange for an answer. We plead and explain and try to manipulate, doing whatever we can to get God to care enough to answer.

We know the words: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). We know them—but we don't dare believe them.

If we believed that God cared, our prayers would look different. We wouldn't try to make God care. We would trust that He already does. We would know His character summed up in this short declaration: "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear" (Isa. 65:24).

If we believed God cared this deeply, our prayers would be comforting, not exhausting. We would collapse into the arms of our Father who loves us, confident in His concern, assured that He knows best how to handle the situation. We could pray boldly, passionately, and powerfully, without defaulting to praying manipulatively or desperately.

Why don't we pray this way? Often, we tend to see God as we see people. If we feel like we must twist people's arms to get them to do anything, we can default to seeing God in the same way.

At other times, we let culture, experience, and human teachers shape our view of God. Our modern world bombards us with flashy videos, blogs, and memes purporting to tell us about God. Yet, they can never portray Him as clearly as He revealed Himself in His Word.

God demonstrated the depths of His compassion for us by dying in our place on the cross. If Jesus cares about us so completely that He died *our death* to save us, how will He not also care about all the other things that are important to us?

If we believed the depths of His concern for us, we would never hesitate to run into His arms and unload everything wearing us down.

Lie #3: “If I am feeling sinful, I shouldn’t expect anything in prayer.”

We really, really like the lie that our behavior affects God’s ability to answer our prayers. We like to believe that if we’ve lived a great day full of obedience to God, then He will be delighted to answer our prayers. How could He not? We were so good today!

But on the days when we fail, we believe God won’t answer our prayers anyway, so why bother? Try harder, be better, and when we’ve cleaned ourselves up, maybe then God will answer.

God knew how pervasive this lie would become. He addressed it at the beginning, in the life of Abraham.

When Abraham lied about his wife Sarah, claiming she was his sister, Abraham got caught. Abimelek, the king whom Abraham deceived, brought Abraham into his court to confront him and accuse him of his lies. Abraham stood guilty. He had no defense. Because of his lies, a plague had infected Abimelek’s entire household.

Yet God had told Abimelek: “Now return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live” (Gen. 20:7).

Abraham was sinful. He stood exposed in sin, confronting a room full of sick people, all of whom suffered because of his lies.

But Abraham prayed. Even in his sinful condemnation, God answered: “Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again” (Gen. 20:17).

Abraham had no time to get clean. He had no chance to fast for a week and devote himself to spiritual disciplines. In the same court where his sin was exposed minutes before, Abraham

prayed—and God answered.

Why was God so gracious? Why did God answer when Abraham was so sinful? Why is God so good?

Because this is who God is. Our sins don't change His nature. God is equally as good when we're sinful as He is when we're righteous.

If we really believed that God is always good, we would pray to Him in every circumstance, without ceasing.

When people believe a certain ritual is good luck, they do it all the time. When people believe a hobby is good fun, they do it all the time.

When we believe that God is a good Father, we will run to Him all the time.

Lie #4: "My prayers aren't doing anything."

Even when we think God might be good at answering other people's prayers, we can believe the lie that He won't be as good at answering ours. But we can prove this lie false by ourselves.

Grab a prayer journal or start a note on your phone. Record everything you're praying for. Pray for the requests often, if not multiple times daily. Track every bit of progress and every answer.

In a short time, you'll build up solid list of answered prayers. You won't merely see that prayers get answered. You'll experience God answering your prayers. You won't merely be looking at an answered prayer. You'll have the memories of all your prayers informing each answer, showing you that God answered when you asked.

Some prayers are better answered sooner, and others later. Pray for a diverse list of requests to make sure you always have several whose answers are actively popping up. Use their answers to encourage you as you continue to pray for those answers yet to appear.

If you still doubt that God could be this good, then make it one of your prayers. Pray daily to see God as He really is. Pray daily to trust in His goodness. Pray daily that God will expose anything in your life that is keeping you from Him, and then remove it when exposed. Make sure these prayers are on your list, and record everything God exposes, every time you see His goodness, every time you see God more clearly.

Genuinely Believe

Your prayer life will be emboldened when you realize how much your prayers are actually accomplishing.

As long as we live in a fallen world, we will encounter lies threatening to corrupt our views on prayer. But the closer we draw to Jesus and the more we genuinely believe what He says about prayer, the more powerful our prayer lives will become.

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