

When Faith Enters the Stillness of God

A Reflection on Prayer and the Will of God

Reflections Prayer, Repentance and the Spiritual Life 29 August 2026

Matthew 21:22

Matthew 26:39

Psalms 139:13-17

Isaiah 49:1

Much has been written, taught, preached and expounded about prayer. One reason may be that we have yet to fully comprehend the concept of prayer. I say this because I have observed prayer within the Christian community. Some believe in lengthy prayers which eventually sound like a mini sermon. Some worry that, as a community, we are not involved in prayer much. Some pray ritually at the beginning and close of an event. Some lament that their prayers are not heard, or are not heard when expected. Many believe, rightly, that prayer is the way we communicate with God.

In the light of the above observations, let us examine Matthew 21:22, which reads, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." In most instances, we ask amiss. Here I want to bring in our Lord's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. First He prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). If I may paraphrase this prayer to argue my point, it may read as, "My Father, I am not sure if I want to go through this, but if You desire that I should, let it happen as You wish." Following this prayer, Jesus makes another prayer, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42). Paraphrased, it will read as, "O Father, You know better and may it be as You wish. I am prepared to go through with it."

While His first prayer shows His obedience to His Father, His second prayer is a confession that His Father knew better. I said we pray amiss, because we pray not according to the will of God.

"Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive," seems to open before us an immense, almost boundless horizon of promise. Yet the believer who has walked with God for any length of time knows that prayer cannot be understood merely by counting the things we have asked for and the things we have received.

For there are prayers which have risen from the deepest places of the soul and have apparently returned unanswered. Some godly men and women have prayed for healing and have died. Parents have prayed for children and have continued to wait. Servants of God have pleaded for doors to open, only to find them firmly closed. If Matthew 21:22 means that the strength of our faith compels God to grant every desire of our hearts, then the faithful experience throughout Scripture and history becomes difficult to explain.

Perhaps, then, we must begin not with the question, "How much do I believe?" but with the far greater question, "What is it that I believe about God?"

For Christian faith is not an exercise in spiritual certainty by which the human mind creates its desired reality. Faith is not confidence in the intensity of our own believing. Indeed, one may believe very strongly and still be wrong. The object of faith is everything. Saving and sustaining faith rests not upon the strength of the believer, but upon the faithfulness of God. Rather than depending on the depth of our own belief, we should look to God's unfailing faithfulness. This brings us to one of the deepest truths about prayer: God invites us to ask for what He has already determined, according to His perfect wisdom and the economy of His Kingdom.

Here the natural mind hesitates. If God is sovereign, why pray? If His purposes are given, why ask? Yet Scripture never presents divine sovereignty and human prayer as opposing precepts. The God who ordains the end also ordains the means. The God who has numbered our days has nevertheless commanded us to pray. The God whose counsel shall stand has chosen, in the mystery of His grace, to involve the prayers of His people in the unfolding of His purposes. Prayer, therefore, is not an attempt to interrupt the government of God. It is, in some mysterious manner, an invitation to participate in it.

That takes us back to Genesis and the 'disconnect.' From that point until Jesus hung on the cross, breathing His last breath in His human nature, He desired to re-establish the broken communion with His most compelling creation, humanity. The tool that He placed in our hands for communication with Him is prayer.

Yet participation in such communion with Him is not control.

A great difference exists between approaching God with faith and approaching Him with a demand. Faith kneels. Presumption stands. Faith asks. Presumption insists. Faith trusts the hand of God even when it cannot trace its movement. Presumption believes that God must explain Himself.

This may be why the deepest prayers are not always the loudest prayers. Some prayers begin with many words and end in silence. The soul comes before God with a carefully formed request, a clear expectation, perhaps even a deep conviction about what ought to happen. But somewhere in the presence of God, the argument begins to dissolve. Not because the need has disappeared, but because the soul has encountered Someone greater than the need.

At first, we pray because we want God to change something — our circumstances.

Then, as we walk further with Him, we discover that God is also using prayer to change us.

This is not to suggest that God is indifferent to our circumstances. Scripture gives us no such cold theology. He is the God who hears the cry of the afflicted, who sees the tears which others do not see, who knows the secret burden carried behind the composed face. We are invited to bring everything before Him. Nothing is too small for His attention, and nothing is too great for His power.

But the answer to prayer must finally be understood in the light of the nature of the One who answers. He is a God who knows you, inside out. David understood it well enough to write in Psalm 139:13-17, thus: "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My

substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!" The confirmation of this precept is found in Isaiah 49:1, which reads, "The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name."

And there is the play of God's providence. The story of Esther is a powerful testimony to God's providence. Though His name is never mentioned, His sovereign hand is evident throughout, quietly arranging circumstances, positioning people, frustrating evil, and preserving His people. Esther reminds us that God may sometimes appear silent and hidden, yet He is never absent; behind the events of our lives, He is still working out His purposes with perfect wisdom and sovereign care.

Therefore, we cannot take God as a heavenly configuration which produces a result when the correct combination of prayer and faith has been applied. He is Father. He is Lord. He is God. He is infinitely wise, perfectly holy and eternally sovereign, and knows you by your name. His knowledge is greater than ours; it is of an altogether different order. We see a moment. He sees the end from the beginning. We see one thread. He sees in totality. We see what we desire. He sees what that desire may produce, what its fulfilment may require, and what mercy may sometimes be concealed within its denial. He plans both ways: going forward and returning to the past. In that process, your circumstance is known to Him even before your present state.

This is where faith becomes costly.

It is comparatively easy to trust God when the answer comes in the form we expected. Faith deepens when the answer is delayed. It becomes more costly when the door remains closed. And perhaps its most mature expression is found when the soul can still worship God in the presence of an unanswered prayer.

The greatest act of faith is to continue praying.

Sometimes it is to stop demanding.

Sometimes it is simply to remain before God when there is nothing left to say.

And this is where Matthew 21:22 finally brings us. To ask in prayer, believing, is not to believe that I shall receive the exact thing for which I have asked. It is to place my request into the hands of God with the confidence that those hands are wiser than mine.

I may not understand the answer; I may not welcome it; I may even weep beneath it. But faith says I will not judge God's character by the disappointment of a single moment.

The cross itself should have taught us this. On that dark afternoon, it appeared that Heaven had permitted the unthinkable. Yet what seemed to human eyes to be defeat was, in the eternal counsel of God, the very means of redemption. The hope that appeared to have died became the place from which eternal hope emerged. We do not, therefore, always know what God is doing while He is doing it.

AMEN

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