

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



Prayer That Moves God

KEY PASSAGE: Acts 12:1-19 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Jeremiah 33:3 | Matthew 7:7; 18:19; 21:22
Luke 22:44 | 2 Corinthians 5:8

► SUMMARY

Many people wonder why their prayers aren't answered, and some even give up praying because it hasn't worked.

There are a variety of reasons why God doesn't respond to our prayers. Perhaps something in our lives is preventing Him from answering, or maybe our request is not according to His will. However, another reason for unanswered prayer is that we may not be praying to the one true God, but to a god whom we've fashioned according to our own preferences and desires.

► SERMON POINTS

Acts 12:1-19 records an example of how the Lord answered the fervent prayers of His people and shows us how we too can pray effectively.

When King Herod mistreated the believers in Jerusalem and had James put to death, he saw that it pleased the Jews, many of whom hated the Christians and considered them a cult. Therefore, he decided to imprison Peter and assign four squads of soldiers to guard him. Each squad consisted of two soldiers who were chained to Peter on each side and two who were stationed outside. The squads were rotated every six hours to ensure that he could not escape. Herod's intention was to bring Peter before the Jews after Passover and put him to death.

In response to Peter's imprisonment, the Christians gathered together in Mary's house to pray. Their faith was probably wavering because James had already been killed, and now they were facing the loss of Peter. Verse 5 sums up the situation: "So Peter was kept in the prison,

but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God."

Prayer that moves God is offered "to God."

The first element of effective prayer is that it be directed to the one true God. The Jerusalem church and all of us who are believers in Christ can confidently bring our requests to the Lord because we know the One to whom we pray.

However, many people today say they believe in God and pray to Him, but in reality, their prayers are directed to a deity whom they have created in their own minds. He suits their lifestyle and is in agreement with whatever they request. Furthermore, this self-made god doesn't convict them of sin, righteousness, or a coming judgment. If anyone questions them about the nature of their god or what they ask of him, they often become defensive, declaring that their religion is a private affair and no one else's business.

The one true God is holy and righteous, hates sin, and will one day judge every person. He is the Creator of the world, and the one who condemned the earth by sending a flood. He has given us the Ten Commandments as His righteous standard, the encouraging psalms of David, and prophecies regarding the future through His prophets. And ultimately, He has given us His Son, Jesus Christ, as our Savior and Lord through whom we have the forgiveness of our sins. Our God loves us unconditionally but will not tolerate sin in our lives because He knows it's destructive. He alone has the power to answer our prayers and fulfill His promise to give us eternal life with Him forever in heaven.

In contrast, a man-made god has no power to answer prayer and can offer no assurance of heaven. Although

many people have discounted the reality of hell and have tried to find comfort in saying their god is one of love who welcomes everyone into heaven, they have no foundation for such a hope. All their prayers are useless and have no effect on their lives.

Prayer that moves God is offered fervently.

From a human perspective, there was no hope for Peter, who was going to be executed the next day, but God answered the prayers of the Christians who were interceding on his behalf. An angel appeared in the jail cell, awakened Peter, and told him to quickly follow him. Immediately his chains fell off, and as he followed the angel past the first and second guard, the iron gate opened by itself. Peter found himself on a street--then the angel suddenly disappeared. Then he realized this was not a vision but that he'd been rescued by God.

After making his way to Mary's house, Peter knocked on the gate, but the servant girl who answered was so surprised that she ran back to the group without letting Peter in. Yet the Christians who had been fervently praying for Peter had a hard time believing that the Lord had actually answered their prayer until they saw him with their own eyes.

Fervent prayer is motivated by love and deep concern and is offered with enthusiasm, feeling, and faith. This is not a casual listing of requests, but prayer that flows from the heart over a pressing need. For example, when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was in agony and "praying very fervently" (Luke 22:44). It's also persistent prayer that doesn't stop asking, seeking, and knocking until God answers (Matt. 7:7).

Praying fervently for others may involve requests for deliverance from a situation, but it could also include praying that the Lord would block or hinder someone from continuing down a dangerous or destructive path. Having a prayer list helps us remember the needs of others and

provides a written record of how the Lord has answered our requests and worked in our lives.

Prayer that moves God is made according to His will and in agreement with fellow believers.

When we have a burden on our heart, we should seek out someone who can pray with us. A prayer partner offers encouragement, support, guidance, and accountability. According to Matthew 18:19, God answers requests when two people agree in prayer about anything that is according to His will.

Prayer is the most powerful thing we can do, and God desires to answer our prayers when we come to Him with a clean heart. But sin in our lives hinders our requests. The Lord will not answer petitions that help us continue down a path of disobedience because that will not benefit us. Therefore, we should always seek to make requests according to God's desires and ask Him to block anything that interferes with His will for our lives. And as we faithfully pray, He will give us a discerning spirit to know the truth and insight we need for life.

► RESPONSE

- Are you certain that you are praying to the one true God, or have you redefined Him according to your desires? How does your perception of God compare with what He says about Himself in His Word?
- When was the last time you prayed fervently? What was the need, and how did God respond?
- Do your recent prayer requests align with God's will or your desires? How can you know the difference?

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