

How Does Prayer Work?

1. Warm-up question: Jeff told a story about a woman who had a weakness for betting on horses at the racetrack. What's one of your guilty pleasures?
2. Billy Graham's book "Angels: God's Secret Agents," tells about two pioneering missionaries, John and Mary Ann Patton, whose home was surrounded by hostile locals intent on burning them out. Throughout a terror-filled night, John and Mary Ann prayed fervently. When the sun rose, they realized their attackers had disbursed. Later they learned that the attackers fled when they saw soldiers in shining garments with swords drawn coming to John and Mary Ann's defense.
 - a. Every now and then, we experience a moment where the veil seems to be pulled back and we catch a glimpse of supernatural reality impinging on our physical world. Have you ever witnessed one of those moments? What happened?
 - b. What do you make of stories like that of John and Mary Ann? Do you believe spiritual reality sometimes breaks into our reality? If so, why sometimes and not others?
3. According to Jesus, prayer is how we bring spiritual reality into our physical reality. Jesus began his ministry with prayer (in the wilderness for 40 days) and ended his ministry in prayer (in the Garden of Gethsemane). In between those two end-points, we're told how Jesus regularly devoted himself to prayer.
 - a. If Jesus was the Son of God, why did he need prayer? Suppose he hadn't made time for prayer, how might that have affected him and his ministry?
 - b. If you were to pick a single word to describe your current relationship with prayer, what word would you choose? Explain your word choice.
 - c. Many of us find it difficult to pray. Why is that?
4. Everybody tells us we should pray, but nobody ever tells us how. So on Sunday we explored three powerful ways to pray, beginning with something Jeff called "Venting Prayers." A Venting Prayer is when we process our feelings in the presence of God. In Venting Prayer, we simply tell God, stream of consciousness, about something happening to us and how we feel about it. Jeff called this "prayer as stress relief."
 - a. Jesus said, "People ought always to pray and not to faint." Luke 18:1. What insights can we draw from those words?
 - b. Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Then, the very next thing it says is, "and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." The point,

Jeff said, is that telling our worries to God relieves stress and brings inexplicable peace. Do you buy that? Why or why not?

- c. A wise old saying says, “A problem shared is halved.” What do you think that means? Can you think of a time when sharing a problem with someone else brought you great relief?
 - d. How often do you practice Venting Prayer? How does it affect you?
 - e. What’s something affecting you right now that would be a great candidate for processing in the presence of God in a Venting Prayer? Will you give it a try?
5. On Sunday, we also explored Listening Prayer. After venting a problem to God, listening prayer is often the perfect follow up. A Listening Prayer is where we take a moment to center ourselves in God, then try to sense what God wants to say to us about our problem. As we sense God saying something, we either write it down or say it aloud. Then we step back and quietly consider, “Does this really feel like what God wants to say to me?” If the answer is yes, we go with it.
- a. The Bible says, “Be still and know. . . .” Psalm 46:10. What does that mean?
 - b. Mother Teresa said, “I always [make time in] prayer [for] silence, for it is in the silence of the heart that God speaks. God is the friend of silence. We need to listen to God because it’s not what we say, but what Gods says to us and through us that matters.” What does it mean to say “God is the friend of silence?”
 - c. Jeff told the story of a woman who felt led to share a particular Bible verse with a friend. The verse turned out to be exactly what her friend needed to hear. Tell us about a time when you’ve experienced God speaking to (or through) you in a powerful way.
 - d. Why is it so hard for us to be still and listen? What are some things we can do to become better listeners in prayer?
6. On Sunday, we also explored Persevering Prayer. After we’ve vented, then listened to God, we’re called to ask and act in accordance with what God says. However long it takes, we are called to persevere in prayer and action. Read Luke 18:1-8.
- a. What is the primary point Jesus is trying to make through this parable?
 - b. Why is it important that we persevere in prayer? If God wants something to happen (or not happen), isn’t it going to happen (or not happen) no matter what we say or do? Does our perseverance actually affect outcomes?
 - c. Tell us about a time in your life when perseverance has proven critical.
 - d. What is it in your life that you’ve been praying about and you’re about ready to give up, but you feel God calling you to renew your determination and persevere?