

If You Don't Ask, Then the Answer Is, "No!"

Joe Slater

"You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2). That sounds perfectly reasonable and quite simple! In the interest of full disclosure, James pointed out other issues that complicated the matter. Church fights, greed, pride, and worldliness prevented favorable answers to their prayers. But the fact remains that in some cases they simply didn't ask. Jesus Himself said, *"Ask, and it will be given to you"* (Matthew 7:7).

Jesus also taught that we should ask more than once. His parable of the unjust judge pictured a widow asking for justice from a crooked judge. She finally prevailed, not because the judge cared about justice, but because she kept on asking! If that happens with an ungodly judge, how much more will our righteous God do right by us when we ask Him? (See Luke 18:1-8.)

Some think they should pray only for others, that it's selfish to pray for yourself. Praying for others certainly is commendable, but Jesus didn't agree that praying for yourself is selfish! In fact, the very first part of His prayer in John 17 was for Himself (vv. 1-5). Who would accuse Jesus of being selfish? We don't have to choose between praying for others and praying for ourselves. It isn't either/or, it's both/and!

James instructs us to ask God for wisdom with the faith that He will hear and answer us (1:5-6). The sick and suffering should pray, and the elders should pray for them (5:13-15). Pray for those who confess sins (5:16).

You can extend the prayer list indefinitely! Just remember, *"You do not have because you do not ask!"* If you don't ask, then the answer is, "No!"

Pray For Me

"First of all, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people" (1 Timothy 2:1, ESV).

"Please pray for me." Why would a Christian ask others to pray for him? Why risk his reputation by abasing himself and confessing his sin? What does he gain by admitting his weakness and pleading for help? If one is ill, why not go to the doctor, get some medicine, and hope for the best?

The Christian asks for prayers because he understands how weak he is by himself. When he has sinned, when he is tempted, and when he is ill, his faith may be fragile. A suffering Christian may not feel up to praying. But he knows that God listens to those who are righteous, and the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (Jam. 5:16).

And he knows Jesus. Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail when Satan demanded to sift him as wheat (Luke 22:31). Jesus prayed for his disciples in John 17. Jesus prayed for Himself (Luke 22:42). When He hung on the cross, He prayed for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34).

When a Christian goes to God in prayer, Jesus is at the right hand of God, interceding for him (Rom. 8:34). Christ is able to save him who draws near to God through Him (Heb. 7:25). The Christian who knows that others are bringing his name and his problem before God does not feel alone. He has strength to overcome Satan and his hope is renewed.

We all have weak moments and need help. May we never hesitate to ask a brother or sister to pray for us and with us. Likewise, may we always remember to pray for others and build up their faith.

--Donna Wittlif (Ft. Worth, TX)

WHAT NOW?

"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him'" (John 9:1-3, NIV).

On March 11, Paul Anderson died. Paul Anderson was remarkable. He graduated from the University of Texas with both his Bachelor's and Juris Doctor degrees, all while confined to an iron lung for over 70 years. He contracted polio in 1952 at the age of six. Paul could only move his head, neck and mouth, yet in significant ways, he overcame!

I have some understanding of Paul. Although never in an iron lung, I contracted Polio at eleven months old in 1949, spending my first two birthdays in the hospital.

A man born blind prompted a question from Jesus' disciples: *"Who sinned?"* For believers in a good and loving God, the question of innocent suffering has always been hard. For some, such as the disciples and Job's "friends," the answer has been "as punishment for sin." If that's the answer, six-year-old Paul Anderson must have really been a mean little kid!

Jesus rejected the premise. In Luke 13, Jesus tells us that in a fallen world, things, sometimes terrible things, happen and God doesn't step in and stop them. The point is not why, but what now. For the man born blind and Jesus, his tragic blindness was an opportunity to display God's gracious works. I don't know about Paul Anderson's faith, but for me, as with the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, it has been an opportunity to show God's power through weakness.

The Why of suffering is beyond me, but I can, in faith, ask, "what now?" My answer is, "Live for His glory."

--Tim Kelley (Littleton, CO)