

Conversation Starters

- What motivates you to do something?
- Does it tend to be internal or external motivation?

Discuss

Jesus gave us some motivation for praying during his Sermon on the Mount. It is (or should be) motivating because he tells us that God will absolutely answer us and that it will be a good answer. Our part in this is to persist in prayer because asking is the only way to get a response from God.

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8 NLT)

- How often do you pray, if at all?
- How does this make you re-think about the power of prayer?
- How does this motivate you to change your approach to, or discipline, of prayer?

This proclamation from Jesus can be hard for us to believe sometimes, because our particular situation may not change after we pray. But, it may just be that the way God answered our prayer wasn't what we wanted to hear. God could choose to say yes to a prayer, but he could also say “no” or “not now.”

It was about that time that the mother of the Zebedee brothers came with her two sons and knelt before Jesus with a request. “What do you want?” Jesus asked. She said, “Give your word that these two sons of mine will be awarded the highest places of honor in your kingdom, one at your right hand, one at your left hand.” Jesus responded, “You have no idea what you're asking.” (Matthew 20:20-22 The Message)

- Have you ever prayed and felt like God did not hear or answer you?
- Do you find it hard to trust God when a prayer is not answered how you want it to be?
- Are you ever impatient while waiting for a response?

Other times when we think we didn't get a response from God, it may actually be true. But, the issue is not necessarily on God's side of the equation. It could be a problem with the pray-er (us). We can stunt the power of prayer if there is something wrong in our lives, such as unconfessed sin, unresolved relational conflict, or selfishness.

It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore. (Isaiah 59:2 NLT)

“This is how I want you to conduct yourself in these matters. If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.” (Matthew 5:23-24 The Message)

And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure. (James 4:3 NLT)

- Did you ever stop to think if your issues with prayer could be you, instead of blaming God?
- Is there an area in your life that you deliberately refuse to obey God?
- Is there anyone in your life that you have conflict with, and you know you need to resolve?
- What is the content of your prayers? Does it tend to be selfish?

Next Steps

We do not have all the answers to why God chooses to answer prayer the way he does. Prayer is still a mystery. But we can take what we know about God and trust him when we just cannot seem to understand.

Read and reflect on the verses below. Evaluate your approach to prayer compared to these verses:

- Do I approach God with confidence?
- Am I listening for all possible responses to my prayer, not just a “yes”?
- Is there anything in my life that needs addressing before I pray?

Class to consider:

Learning to Pray

Date: December 3, 2018

Time: 6:30 – 8:00 PM

Location: North Charlotte Campus, 8335 Browne Road, Charlotte, NC 28269

Register: <https://mecklenburg.org/event/804009-2018-12-03-learning-to-pray/>

Further Reflection

See Matthew 7:7-11; Matthew 20:20-22; Luke 9:52-55; Psalms 42:1-3,5-7; Proverbs 28:9; Isaiah 1:15-17; Matthew 5:23-24; James 4:3

Pray

God, thank you for allowing us to approach you with all that is going on in our lives. Thank you for the simplicity of just being able to come and ask you for anything. Forgive us for messing this up and getting it all wrong sometimes. Help us to check our motivations for prayer and identify anything that could be hindering our communication with you. Help us to have patience as we wait for a reply and trust you with whatever your answer will be.