

ENJOYING GOD // On Earth as it is in Heaven

Monica was a single mother with one child. A son. And during his childhood, nearly every night, Monica would pray over him and sing hymns over him.

But her son grew up to despise her beliefs and God and, in his adolescence, gained a reputation as a town drunk and a womanizer.

The focus of his life eventually became to disprove and destroy his mother's faith, but Monica never stopped praying. She never gave up. She prayed every night for her son's salvation. One night she had a dream that she believed was a promise from God about her son's salvation. So, she began to pray even more fervently.

But years passed, and nothing changed. No glimmer of hope. No change of heart. Nothing.

Nine years after her dream, her son, hearing of the debauchery and revelry of Rome, made plans to travel there. Monica heard of his plans, and stayed up all night praying that God would prevent his travels. Instead, her son left early for his trip and was traveling the whole time she stayed up to pray.

One day, on that trip, alone in a Roman Garden, Monica's son hears a child calling out to him repeating the phrase, "pick it up, read it...." There, in the garden, he found a bible and opened up the very scriptures he sought to disprove, and right then and there, he surrendered his life to Jesus.

Monica's son's name was Augustine. St. Augustine. He became one of the greatest and most influential theologians in history and a father to the early church.

There are so many stories of the miraculous power of prayer.

We say, "well that's great for all those people who received answers to their prayers, but where was God when I needed Him? Why didn't God intervene when I needed Him? How could a God that is truly good, and all powerful, intervene for some and not from others? And why does he wait so long intervene? Do you have to catch Him in a good mood, say the right phrase, or be really holy in order to get Him to care?"

Because for many of us, our problem with prayer, is that there is some part of us that believes that our prayers don't actually matter.

I've wrestled with this question at different times in my life when I've been disappointed with God's silence or apparent absence. Do my prayers even matter? If God is going to do, whatever He's going to do, whether I pray or not, why pray? Do my prayers have power or not? Does it make any difference at all?

CS Lewis articulated this argument so well.

“Even if I grant your point and admit that answers to prayer are theoretically possible, I still think they are infinitely improbable. I don’t think it at all likely that God requires the ill-informed (and contradictory) advice of us humans as to how to run the world. If He is all-wise, as you say He is, doesn’t He know already what is best? And if He is all-good, won’t He do it whether we pray or not?”

- C.S. Lewis, God in the Dock

And it’s for this reason that we freeze up when it comes to prayer. Because on one hand, many of us would say, “Prayer matters. It changes things.” And on the other hand, many of us, if not all of us, have experienced the disappointment and discouragement of unanswered prayers. And we get stuck. It’s like we’re caught in the mud and can’t seem to climb our way out, and so we just sort of give up.

This is where we get to one of the most profound invitations of Jesus in the Lord’s prayer.

Matthew 6:10, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Now remember, this is Jesus’ response to His disciple’s request to teach them how to pray, and Jesus extends an invitation for us to pray prayers that change earthly realities. Redemptive prayer. Prayer that pushes back the evil in the world. Prayer that war against the darkness. Prayer that brings about tangible, practical change into our world, into the lives of people around us. Prayers that bring heaven to earth.

And again, some of us hear that and go “YES! AMEN!” and others of us go... “Eh... I don’t know about that.”

But look at what Jesus tells us about prayer...

Luke 11:9-10, “And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

Mark 11:24, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

John 14:13, “Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”

John 15:7, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

Matthew 7:11, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"

I absolutely love the way Tyler Staton responds to these verses. He writes,

"If we really took Jesus' invitation seriously, if we really believed in the sort of prayer that Jesus talked about, the modern church would have a hard time getting it's people to do anything but pray."

- Tyler Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools*

Now, the problem is, there are all kinds of wrong theological viewpoints that splinter off of these verses... like, *"if I really believe that God is going to give me a Lamborghini, it's going to happen. Or if I really pray that this person falls in love with me, God will make it happen! Because Jesus said so!"*

This is the slippery slope of the prosperity gospel nonsense. And it is so wrong on so many levels. It carries with it such a self-serving arrogance, a desperately over-inflated view of your own importance, and a spiritualized and twisted excuse to indulge your fleshly and sinful desires. This is the antithesis of what Jesus is inviting us into.

Jesus is NOT saying to treat God like some magic genie that will grant your three wishes. Because if you'll remember Jacob's story from last week, Jacob triumphed when he was no longer after what God could give Him, but He just wanted God.

And look at what James, the half-brother of Jesus, tells us about prayer.

James 4:3, "You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

He's saying that if you pray with self-serving motives and fleshly desires so you can elevate yourself, remain independent from God and increase in sinful living, of course you won't receive from God.

See, the invitation of Jesus in, *"Your kingdom come, not mine. Your will be done, not mine. On earth as it is in heaven."* It's a laying down of the self-will. It's an invitation to step out of the endless spiral into the self. My wants, my desires, my circumstances, my comfort, my pleasure. It's a turning away from the deadly consumerism of a "me-first" culture, and intentionally inviting Heaven into the brokenness of the world around us.

Another word for this is intercession. To intercede, to plea on behalf of.

See, the most loving thing you can do for someone else is pray for them. The most powerful thing you can do for someone else is pray for them. **WHY?** Because human beings are so

unbelievably limited in what we can and cannot control or influence. We're finite, flawed, and incredibly fickle.

But God is infinitely powerful. He's the only one that can change the human heart and align circumstances to His will and good purpose. So, when you go to Him on behalf of a particular circumstance or person, you are loving them with something pure and infinitely more powerful than you.

John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

When you intercede, when you pray, "On earth as it is in heaven," this is exactly what you're doing.

Many of us, especially in the American church, we've lost our boldness when it comes to prayer. So many of us pray vague, general prayers. Either because we don't know specifically what we want, and so we don't pray into those specific details, or, we pray vague prayers because we don't want to be disappointed by God again. If we pray specific prayers, we will know if God answers that prayer or not. And so what we end up doing is we pray safe prayers. Prayers that we'll never know if He answers or not.

And for that reason, we're not motivated to pray at all! No wonder we don't pray. Because we're praying in ways that we will never be disappointed by God, but we'll never be surprised by God either. We'll never see the power of God as long as we pray vague prayers.

See, the phrase, "On earth, as it is in heaven" is so profound because it teaches us what to pray for!

ON EARTH: We all know the world is not as it should be. We know that something is wrong. We can't go 10 minutes without hearing a heartbreaking story of pain, or division, or hatred, violence, disease, and disorder. It's everywhere, and we're bombarded with it every day. And with it comes this ache, this sadness, this grief that this is the way the world is, and we know, if we're honest, it shouldn't be this way!!!

And yet the biblical storyline tells us that you're right. The world shouldn't be this way! God did not design it to be this way!

IN HEAVEN: In the Garden of Eden, everything was as it should be. No sin. No pain. No sorrow. No sickness. No death. No disease. And our relationship with God and one another was unhindered. We lived in perfect harmony with God and the created order. This is the original design of God for Creation.

And the invitation to pray on earth as it is in heaven, is an invitation to pray according to God's original design.

“Prayer is in essence rebellion — rebellion against the world and its fallenness, the absolute and undying refusal to accept as normal what is pervasively abnormal. Prayer is the refusal of every agenda, every scheme, every interpretation that is at odds with the norm as originally established by God.”

- David Wells

See, from God’s point of view, the things that are out of alignment with His kingdom, and His will, are all of the things that we tend to just accept as ordinary parts of life on earth. We live with this apathetic resignation to sickness, disease, disorder, brokenness, division, violence, cycles of retribution, and all kinds of injustice.

But to intercede, to pray heaven to earth, means to find the broken things of this world and put a bullseye on them, and pray Heaven into those situations. Because God did not design the world to be this way!

God healing someone of cancer, or delivering someone from addiction, or casting a demon from someone., God healing a disease, bringing justice, or mending what’s broken, it’s not so much an extraordinary event as it is a return to God’s original design.

It’s pushing back the darkness of a fallen world, as we invite the beauty of heaven into every situation and relationship. It’s walking in the authority of Christ as God’s children, coming boldly to the throne of Grace, and calling heaven to earth through our intercession and petition! That’s prayer!

“To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.”

- Karl Barth

“[It is] particularly striking that all of Jesus’ miracles (with the exception of the cursing of the fig tree) are miracles of restoration-restoration to health, restoration to life, restoration to freedom from demonic possession. Jesus miracles provide us with a sample of the meaning of redemption: a freeing of creation from the shackles of sin and evil and a reinstatement of creaturely living as intended by God.”

- Albert Wolters

See, we’re all waiting for heaven. We’re just biding our time until we die or until He returns and we’ve resigned ourselves to just accept the world as broken, divided, and utterly lost.

And God is looking at us going, “what are you waiting for!?” 2,000 years ago Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, NOW! Your will be done, NOW! On earth as it is in heaven, NOW!” God’s going, “I’m ready now, the resources of heaven are at your disposal right now, what are

you waiting for!?” Start asking, seeking, knocking! Start praying BOLD SPECIFIC PRAYERS, that have power to MOVE MOUNTAINS.

James 5:16, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

Luke 10:19, “Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy...”

And if that’s the case, if we really believed that, we wouldn’t be able to STOP praying. We would be interceding and praying all the time! God’s people wouldn’t be able to do anything else BUT pray! And not vague, general prayers! Specific prayers!

The reality, church, is that Jesus wouldn’t have instructed us to pray, “*On earth as it is in heaven*” if it weren’t possible. If it weren’t something He wanted to do.

Q: If God answered every prayer you’ve prayed this week, what would happen?

General prayers don’t result in specific actions.

Q: If you could ask God for one thing, one very specific thing, no matter how impossible or improbably it might seem to you... what would you ask God for today?

Here’s what I want you to do. I want you to write down your prayer, be specific. What do you want God to do? What specific brokenness do you want God to heal? Where do you want heaven to invade the fallenness of earth? What do you want to see God do? It might be someone’s salvation. It might be healing of cancer. It might be reconciliation of a relationship. Healing of a marriage. Deliverance from depression or anxiety. For God to bring justice where there is harm or injustice... What do you want to see heaven invade?

As you gain clarity, about what to pray for, I want you to write it down all the details... write it down, on a piece of paper, in your journal, in a bible, on your phone, and put a date next to it, and put it somewhere where you can return to it and continue praying into that situation.

Because here’s what I believe is going to happen: I believe God is going to move. I believe He’s going to start answering these prayers like crazy. You know why?

Ephesians 3:20-21, “Now to Him who is able to do **immeasurably more** [you can’t even measure how much he is able to do!] **than all we ask or imagine**, [the greatest thing you can imagine! God can do MORE! The greatest thing you can dream up! God can do MORE!] according to **His power** that is at work **within us**, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

Imagine! What's going to happen in your own life when God begins to show up and show off in ways that you can't even imagine!? What will change in you when you begin to see God answer prayers in situations that you've believed were hopeless!?

Think about the faith that will grow exponentially in you, in your family, in our community when God begins to show up in ways that just totally blow your requests out of the water!? What would happen in our church, in our community, in our city?

I don't know about you, but I want to pray prayers that bring heaven to earth. What would happen if we really took Jesus' invitation seriously? Don't you think it's worth finding out!?

Matthew 18:19 “ ...if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.”

Let's intercede together. And see an uprising against the brokenness of this world.