

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations."

:: Ephesians 3:20 ::

[**God is willing**]

"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much the more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

:: **Matthew 7:9-11** ::

"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

:: **Romans 8:32** ::

[**Compelled to pray?**]

We believe God to be both able and willing, both powerful and gracious. Nothing is impossible for Him and He is always favorably disposed to his people. These themes run all the way through the Bible - and we see them expressed most perfectly in Jesus' death and resurrection. What's more, when understood, they compel us to pray. We pray because we know God can do anything we ask for. The Bible witnesses from beginning to end that God is in control of everything. Nothing is beyond His power. We pray because this is true.

But secondly, we pray because we know God is eager to give. He's not like a parent who holds out on his child's request for McDonalds all day but finally concedes late in the afternoon. God doesn't need his arm twisted. Prayer is not about overcoming God's reluctance but taking hold of his overflowing willingness. He longs to be gracious to us. We pray because that is true. If God were powerful but lacking in generosity, His infinite ability would be no good to us. Likewise, if he were eager to give but lacking in sovereignty, that would be no good to us either. His impotence would render his willingness worthless. But the Bible's great reassurance is that both are true: God is both able and willing, powerful and gracious.

This is why our theology is so integral to our prayer. When we understand God well and are convinced of these things, the real question becomes not "Why pray?", but "Why wouldn't you pray?".

[**Praying the Right Size prayers**]

What might it look like, then, for us to be committed in practice to praying to this God? What are the implications of our theological understanding for the way we pray. Consider, in particular, the size of our prayers.

Nothing too small :: We ought to remind ourselves that no prayer is too small. The God who counts the hairs on our head is not going to find anything we ask for to be too trivial or unimportant. He is gracious. He is willing. What about the Christian parking space prayer - Can we pray for parking spaces? Of course we can. There are lots of other things we should pray for too, but God is not just concerned about the so called 'big things'. If God is really gracious then pretty much any question that starts with 'Can we pray for . . .', must be answered yes. Paul's words in Philippians 4:6-7 are for 'anything' and 'everything'. Anything and everything - that's what we can pray for. When we think we can't, it's probably because we don't really believe that God is as interested in us and as favorably disposed towards us as the Bible says he actually is. God delights in being generous towards us - so remember, no prayer is too small.

Nothing too big :: But then neither is anything too big to ask of God either. When we start thinking that some things are too impossible for God, then our vision of God is shrinking. In my opinion the size of our prayers is directly proportional to the size of God in our minds. If your God is basically impotent, you'll ask for small things at best. If your God is moderately powerful, you'll ask for moderate sized things. But if we really believe in the all-powerful, nothing-is-impossible God of the Bible then the sky will not even be the limit with our prayers. There will be no limit to what we will feel free to ask.

Remember, Jesus prayed big prayers but sought God's will, not his own (See the latest Dust Stirring). Prayer is not an exercise in a cosmic supermarket grab and run. No, this is God's universe, he knows what's best for us better than us. So we pray in humble submission to him, but in that context, we pray big prayers!

I was once in a church service where all the members of the congregation were invited to join in a time of open prayer. One girl started to pray. At the conclusion of her prayer she asked God for the salvation of her state's entire Health Service. As she did, quite a number of people laughed audibly. Would you laugh at that? Why is it laughable? Is God not capable? Is that not something God would love to see happen? Is it possible that the entire Health Service has not yet been converted because we've failed to ask for it? (James 4:2)

Will you pray crazy prayers because you know God is big enough to answer them? Think of the most hardened non-Christian you know, the person least likely to become a Christian. Do you pray for their salvation believing that God can and might? Or do you think God's not up to it? Remember, this is the God who made the universe, who holds the stars in place, who knows the hairs on your head, who raised Jesus from the dead. Do you not think he can? If God really is as powerful as the Bible says he is, then pretty much any question which begins with, "Can God..." must be answered yes.

So what will your big prayers be? That your church grows to 500? That God uses you to lead one non-Christian to faith every year for the rest of your life? That God would deliver a close friend from long-term illness? That you might overcome a particular sin? That God would bring your whole family to Jesus? Ephesians 3:20 reminds us that God is

able to do immeasurably more than all we could even ask or imagine. Do you really believe these words? If so, lets pray like we do!

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