

Selah: Supplication

Psalms 8:4-8, 17:1-15, 31:14-16, 143:5-9; Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:5-7

In this series we are exploring the different kinds of prayer that we find in the Bible. This week, we're covering supplication which is asking for stuff. It's now one of my favorite subjects because it used to be one of my least favorite subjects. Let's discuss why I had difficulty with it.

Hard to Ask/What's the point?:

Once upon a time I really did not like asking God for anything. First of all, asking gets a bad rap. It tends to be frowned upon because it's easy to see it as treating God like a vending machine.

It also carries a bad connotation when you consider how you asking God for something implies as if you have a better idea than him. It's like you know better than God, so you start asking for specifics.

Read Psalms 8:4-8. Even Psalms 8 accentuates how God really already knows what you're dealing with. God already positions everyone precisely where he judges they should go. So this moves us past feeling guilty for asking and moves us into a question of...What's the point?

If God already has a handle on it, what good does it do for me to ask? This is the same conclusion I drew. There was a time in my life where I decided that I wouldn't ask God for things. Rather I would just assume He knew. So my prayers were more of gratitude, thankfulness, and kind of working things out but I simply wouldn't ask for anything. It became at odds with my own theology to make requests. But I was corrected by a CS Lewis essay. More on that later...

Why Ask?/For Relationship:

So let's make a case for why we should bring requests to God. For starters, how many of us in this room are able to have a relationship with somebody where they request nothing ever? None of us. Our relationships have to be something more than, "hey, glad you're alive." There has to be more to it.

Read Psalms 143:5-9 and 31:14-16. In these two excerpts from Psalms, there are requests being made. But if you pay attention, these requests are clearly asking for God's proximity. "Let me hear your Faithfulness. Teach me." It's a relationship building request. So if you do something foolish like I did and teach yourself not to ask anything of God, you are closing the door to requests of endearment.

Why Ask?/Comparison:

There is a classic formula for sitcoms involving families. Every season there is always an episode involving a child wishing to bring a request to their parents. This request normally involves asking for a hysterically priced item that the child does not need at all and usually

something that they would lose interest in relatively quickly. When you bring a request to the powers that be, you are forced to compare your motives to theirs. You're also forced to face the reality of how practical your request is.

The same is true of our requests of God. A classic example is that you wouldn't ask God for a race-car or a private jet. That's silly. You don't need it. Your resources would be better spent on feeding the hungry etc. When we bring something to God we are forced to compare our plan to His plan and our motives to His motives. It sobers us up to the realities of why we're asking very quickly. This teaches us volumes as to the current state of our character.

Bringing your requests to God can teach you a lot about yourself and where you need to improve as a person in order to approach His ideal.

Let's look at a good example of a justified ask. Read Psalm 17. In this passage, David is asking for deliverance. But he's not asking for deliverance from his enemies so that he can take their stuff, store up treasures on Earth, have big palaces, or prove to everyone the might of his God or his kingdom.

David is asking for the sake of God's righteousness. David lists God Himself as the reward. "I shall be satisfied with your likeness when I awake." And David actually scoffs at the wicked for valuing things from this Earth and resorting to violence to get them.

So David's ask here was a justified ask. He's asking for deliverance from the wicked and that the wicked not prosper. In bringing this request to God, we see David scoff at violence and material wealth. His value is righteousness and relationship. David actually invites God to examine his motives. "Let your eyes look with integrity, put my heart to the test."

Bringing your requests to God is a really handy way to determine whether your request is justified and righteous or not.

Why Ask?/It Factors in:

The last reason that I will toss out to make the case that you should bring requests to God is that your requests actually do matter to God. You actually do factor into his decisions, even though he views time unilaterally and knows your future.

Here's the quote that corrected my entire line of thinking. It is from Miracles by C.S. Lewis (App. B 'On Special Providences,' Corollary 2). *"When we are praying about the result, say of a battle or a medical consultation, the thought will often cross our minds that the event is already decided one way or the other. I believe this to be no good reason for ceasing our prayers. The event certainly has been decided. (by God) In a sense, it was decided before all worlds. But one of the things taken into account in deciding it, and therefore one of the things that really cause it to happen, may be this very prayer that we are now offering. Thus, shocking as it may sound, I conclude that we can, at noon, become part[ial] causes of an event occurring at 10:00 a.m. [prior]."*

If you catch Lewis's drift, it is true that God sees all time at once. It is true that God has made a note of all events and planned accordingly, such that all things work to His goodwill.

However, God has also made note of what you would ask for. Just as He knows your future, He also knows what you will ask.

In this passage, Lewis makes the case that your prayers are factored into God's decision making process because He does have a real relationship with you; a relationship which He has worked toward at great expense.

The thought experiment that Lewis uses here brings up one more interesting angle. Your requests factor into God's decision making because of His relationship with you, not only for this present moment, but for all moments.

The fact that you ask actually factors into His decisions...past, present, and future. How events would affect you are being taken into account.

Read Romans 8:28.

How to Ask:

Now that we've covered why we should bring requests to God, let's talk about how to request it. We can't all be battle poets like David.

Read Philippians 4:5-7. The Greek words in this verse for *pleading*, *Thanksgiving*, and *peace* are a good translation. However, the word for *anxious* warrants an explanation. It is a Greek word combination of *Meridzo* and *Nous*. Which mean "*Mind*" and "*Tear*." This is not referring to the brainy mind but more of the mind of thought.

Rather than tear your mind apart with worry, plead with thankfulness and surrender.

Why plead? Ask like it really counts, like you really mean it. No half-hearted requests. It's something that you have pondered on and are requesting in righteousness to be in line with God's motives and purposes.

Why ask with Thanksgiving? Because it rightly recognizes God is generous. Keep in mind He didn't have to make a universe at all. It's a privilege to exist.

Conclusion:

So beyond everything, keep in mind God's intentions mentioned at the end of this verse (Philippians 4:5-7). The Shalom of the Most High, that is beyond your comprehension, will guard your hearts and guard your minds in Jesus.

This first implores you to make your requests of God and promises that the seat of your emotion, the seat of your intellect, the seat of your soul itself will be guarded by what Jesus did. Jesus was the ultimate demonstration of God's intentions. He was lifted up on a cross such that the smallest step of faith in assuming that God has good intentions for you would trigger God to close the gap between He and us faster than we can comprehend...surpassing our comprehension.

What you ask matters, and if you ask Him to save you from your current broken ways, He will accommodate.

Reflection Questions:

- Why is it important to talk to God about your needs, fears, and dreams?
- According to James 4:3, why do we not receive what we ask from God?
- Instead of treating God as a 'vending machine,' what should we be asking from Him?
- How can you align yourself with God so your desires are His desires?