



# 3 Decisions We Need to Make to Pray Powerfully



## Introduction

Prayer can change our attitude, our mindset, and even change the situation itself

What are the areas of your life in which you feel powerless? It may be a family dynamic, broken friendships, your future, or even something in your character that feels unchangeable. It can feel like we have done everything humanly possible to change these things, but nothing seems to work. That's where prayer comes in.

Then Jesus told them, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don’t doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. You can pray for



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anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it.”

- Matthew 21:21-22 NLT

In this Scripture, Jesus understands that we all have mountains we feel are impossible to overcome. When I feel powerless in overcoming or achieving something, I often quit or settle into complacency, convinced that nothing will work because I've already tried everything. But what seems hopeless for us is possible for God (Matthew 19:26), and we miss out on what he is capable of accomplishing in our lives when we don't pray.

- What are the “mountains” in your life?
- Do you believe that you can overcome them, or have you given up trying?
- How often do you pray about your mountains?
- Prayer unlocks the power it takes to do the impossible.

## How Do You Pray?

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be



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exalted."

- Luke 18:9-14 NIV

Have you ever felt like you do pray but nothing comes from it? This happens when we refuse to acknowledge and deal with the truth about ourselves. The Pharisee prayed and knew all the right words to say - he knew what was right and wrong; he knew all the rules he was supposed to follow. But nothing came out of his prayer but empty arrogance.

The tax collector, on the other hand, didn't necessarily say all the right words or follow all the right rules, but had the humility to admit and deal with the guilt and truth that was holding him back. He was right with God not because he didn't have guilt or weaknesses, but because he was willing to pray about and work through them with God.

- Who are you most like?
- The truths that the Pharisee was unwilling to pray about were the very truths that the tax collector admitted and so had the power to change.

## **What Don't We Want to Pray About?**

There are a few areas that we can be reluctant to explore in prayer:

1. **Guilt of sin** - don't want to face it
2. **Emotions/desires** - don't want to feel it (or only want to feel it)
3. **Weakness** - don't want to admit it

Though our emotions and weaknesses can be difficult to admit or deal with, they are actually not the reason we stop or avoid praying. It is the sin we are unwilling to face

makes it difficult to deal with our emotions and weaknesses in the first place. We must first address these sins - especially the pride, selfishness, and deceit - if we are going to unlock the power prayer can give us to change.

## Pride Ignores Prayer

In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.

-Psalm 10:4 NIV

What consumes your thoughts and heart? When we lose focus or motivation in our times with God, it is because we are proud. We think that we know better and that God is not worth making room for. We treat the things our mind is focused on as better and more powerful than God.

- What do you let yourself get distracted by? (emails, social media, getting work done, etc.)
- What do you need to clear out to make room for God?

## Selfishness Blocks Prayer

What is the cause of your conflicts and quarrels with each other? Doesn't the battle begin inside of you as you fight to have your own way and fulfill your own desires? You jealously want what others have so you begin to see yourself as better than others. You scheme with envy and harm others to selfishly obtain what you crave—that's why you quarrel and fight. And all the time you don't obtain what you want because you won't ask God for it! And if you ask, you won't receive it for you're asking with corrupt motives, seeking only to fulfill your own selfish desires.

- James 4:1-3 TPT

When we get jealous and envious, it can be easy to focus on and blame other people. How often have you had thoughts like these?

- *If she didn't flaunt her new job so much I wouldn't be envious!*
- *Well he's just really arrogant and that's why he has a better car than me*
- *I'm not jealous, they just talk about their boyfriend/girlfriend too much*

Even though we like blaming other people for why we get jealous, James 4 has a much simpler reason why we get so jealous and consumed with how we compare to other people: **selfishness!**

In all our comparing and competing, we are so consumed with ourselves that we don't think about what other people are feeling or going through. And when we don't pray about what we really want and ask God for it, we will turn to the world and people to satisfy our cravings, which (spoiler alert) always falls short.

- What do you crave? (better job, sensuality/feeling good, attention, praise)
- How has your jealousy and selfishness stopped you from loving people?
- How often do you pray for other people? How much of your thoughts and prayers consumed with yourself versus others?

## Deceit Distance Us

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

- Psalm 32:1-5 NIV

Our feelings of powerlessness starts with refusing to admit our guilt. We feel weak and helpless, and it can even feel like God is against us. But if we really want God's power on our side, we need to be honest about the guilt that has been weighing us down. Even when we are just a little deceitful, God knows and can't help us until we are completely free from guilt.

- What guilt has been weighing you down? (sensuality, pride, bitterness, criticalness/pride, jealousy, greed, etc. - Galatians 5:19-21)
- What half-truths have you told? Sins in which you've talked about but have not been honest about the extent to which you've done them
- Do you feel powerless? Start growing in this area by being honest today



## 3 Decisions We Need to Make to Pray Powerfully

### 1. Free your heart from sin – be honest AND decide to change

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.

-James 5:16-18 NLT

Our prayers become powerful when we not only tell God our guilt, but tell each other. We need each other to help each other produce lasting change.

- What three friends can you be honest with and have help hold you accountable today?

### 2. Hold Nothing Back

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

-Philippians 4:6-7 NLT

When was the last time you held nothing back? No guilt or sin, no emotion, weakness, doubt, or fear was hidden from God or people, and everything was out in the open? When



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we aren't willing to pray about *everything*, we miss out on the power and peace God can give us. With prayer, we have access to God moving in our lives in ways we couldn't even imagine. But we throw those opportunities away when we hold back.

- What have you been holding back?
- What powerful things could happen when you let go and let God move? What impossible prayers could be answered?

### **3. Discover God's Purpose**

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.""

-Mark 1:35-38 NIV

When we pray and don't hold back with God, he gives us clarity of purpose. Jesus had a lot going on around him - people wanted him to show them miracles, to be king, and even to be dead - but none of this distracted him from the purpose for which God called him. Jesus had to constantly go back in prayer to get him focused on that purpose. He was powerful and changed the world because he knew why he was here. Do you?

- Do you ask God what he wants you to do?
- What purpose has God called you toward?
- Who in your life needs you to pray powerful prayers and embrace your purpose?

Choose to fight in prayer for your friends everyday until you see your prayers answered.



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