

When We Pray, God Works



I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. –John 14:12–14

I first heard the phrase “when we pray, God works” when I was visiting a “praying” church in Houston, Texas. I had spent the day learning everything I could about that church’s effective prayer ministry. I ended the day by interviewing the pastor and asking him what they were learning about prayer. I will never forget his answer. He said, what we learned is that “when we work, we work; when we pray, God works!”

“When we pray, God works!” What a simple way to describe intercessory prayer and to explain its purpose. Augustine wrote, “Prayer is to intercede for the well-being of others before God.” Prayer is God’s plan. God initiated intercession so He could work on earth in the way He wanted to, in response to prayer. By means of intercessory prayer He invites us to labor with him for the well-being of others. Prayer did not happen because people wanted things from God and decided to plead with Him for them. Prayer is not a human strategy for acquiring things. Nobody thought it up. Intercessory prayer is God’s way of giving us a stake in His kingdom building work. He takes the initiative but involves us through prayer and our ministry activities. As we do our part—asking in His name and

stepping out in ministry—He does His part.

Jesus reinforced this co-laboring concept of prayer for His disciples in the last week of His life on earth. It happened shortly after He told His disciples that He was going to leave them. They, understandably, were disconcerted by the thought of His leaving and by having to carry on without Him. Jesus calmed their troubled hearts by telling them how they would be able to carry on. He said, “Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these.” In other words, Jesus was saying, “You will be able to minister effectively after I leave.” And here’s why! “I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name.” In other words, they would ask, and He would act. That’s co-laboring, co-laboring by prayer.

Co-laboring with God—we pray, He acts—is the only really effective way that we can do the works of God. It’s an effective way to work because the enthroned Son of God is the major player in this partnership. He is at the right hand of the Father and is in charge of all earthly operations. He is almighty, all wise, and pure love. Because He is almighty there is nothing He cannot do in answer to prayer. Because He is all wise He never makes a mistake in answering our prayers. Because He is pure love His answers will always reflect that love. He wants us to ask so that He can act in His might, in accord with His wisdom, and out of love in response to our asking. Our intercessory prayers trigger His powerful, wise, and loving way of working to build His church.

In Jesus’ words to His disciples we see how and why intercessory prayer is so critically important. To His disciples, feeling inadequate to carry on without him, Jesus did not say, “You can do it. I have trained you. Just hang in there and work hard.” Hard work is not the key to effective ministry. Neither did Jesus say, “Don’t worry. I will be on the throne of the universe. I know what needs to happen. I will see that what needs to get done will get done, because I

am God." Jesus didn't promise that He would make things happen while they, prayerlessly, sat around and waited for Him to act. Instead Jesus committed Himself to action in response to their prayers so that they could minister effectively. He brought their working and His working together, and He connected them by prayer. He made prayer the key to effective ministry. Without prayer they would be helpless. With prayer they would be effective, because He would be working with them.

Jesus also made it clear that their prayers would be combined with ministry. He promised that they would be able to do what He had been doing and "even greater things" than He had done. Think of what that means! During His days on earth Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, multiplied bread and fish to feed thousands, stilled storms, and raised the dead. He drew large crowds, spoke with unparalleled brilliance, boldly tackled corruption in the temple, and stood up against the most powerful leaders of the day. Would they be able to do all those kinds of things? The answer is yes, they could, and they did. Those first disciples took Jesus' words to heart. They really prayed! And they really worked! They did the "greater things" that Jesus talked about. They spoke to great crowds. They stood up to the leaders who challenged them. They planted a church that lived by prayer and ministered with power. They prayed for signs and wonders, and Christ responded in power. They saw thousands come to faith. In the years that followed they were accused of turning the world upside down. They really turned it right side up. Praying disciples are working disciples. When they pray and work, Jesus works in and through them, and great things happen.

The disciples' prayers, to be effective, had to be prayers in Jesus' name. "In Jesus' name" is not a pass code to get us into heaven's throne room. A prayer in Jesus' name is a prayer that is in accord with His will. It's what Jesus would have prayed were He physically present. They were able to pray in

His name because they had His mind and His heart. When we truly want what God wants and turn such desires into prayer, those prayers will be prayers in Jesus' name. When the Spirit of truth lives in us and makes God's will known to us, we will pray in Jesus' name. Praying in Jesus' name makes intercession work. Both our asking and the Father's giving depend on it. Such prayers will not be prayers for special favors related to worldly comforts or personal pleasures. They will be prayers by which God's grace is released in the lives of those we pray for.

Finally, it needs to be said that Jesus didn't make this promise just to His twelve disciples. When He said, "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing," He was including you, if you are a believer, and me and about two billion other believers in the world today. What a great and far-reaching plan. Imagine what would happen in the world today if all two billion of us stepped out into works of service and, at the same time, asked Him to work in and through us. Would that be world-changing or what? That is what Jesus had in mind when He spoke these words. That is how He intends to "bring glory to the Father." In Jesus' way of thinking we are not just believers; we are His praying servants doing great works as He works His works in us. We are intercessors accomplishing His will and releasing His power and love in the world.

If you are one of the anyone-who-has-faith-in-me persons of whom Jesus spoke, then you need to be on the lookout for places where Christ wants and needs to work. Is there a child who needs to be spiritually formed, a friend who needs encouragement, or a neighbor who needs Christ? If you pray, Christ will work! Are there spiritual leaders who need to be uplifted, fellow believers who need empowerment, or a church that needs to be revived? If you pray, Christ will work! Do you know of an anxious person who needs peace, a lonely person who needs befriending, a stranger who needs to be invited in,

or a hungry person who needs to be fed? If you intercede, Christ will work; He will work in you and through you. You will be doing the kinds of things that Christ did. You will be doing them in His power. You will be co-laboring with God. With this promise Christ is placing the powers of heaven at your disposal. What a huge and important responsibility! What an awesome privilege!

Something to Think About

- How do you react to the idea that, if you are an intercessor, Christ places the powers of the heavenly world at your disposal?
- Why must disciples who pray work? Why must disciples who work pray?
- Why does Jesus not answer prayers that are not in His name?

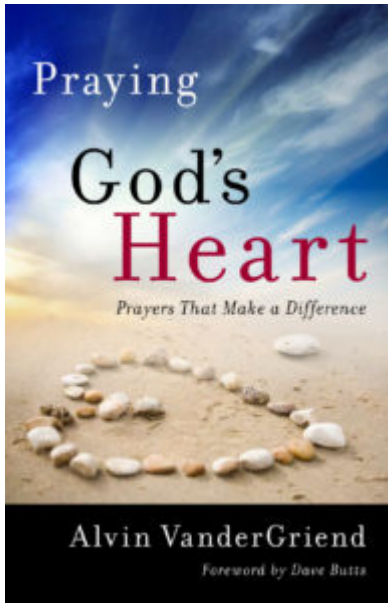
Something to Pray About

- Praise God for the wisdom, power, and love with which He answers our prayers.
- Thank God for including you in His design for governing the world.
- Ask God to help you pray in His name.
- If prayer has been primarily a way for you to try to get special favors from God, confess that and seek God's forgiveness.
- Commit yourself to prayers that lead to work, and work that flows from prayer

Something to Act On

Ask Jesus to reveal to you what He would pray were He in your place. Then turn what you know or think to be His will into a prayer in His name. Trust that Jesus has heard your prayer,

and envision His mighty, wise, and loving response.



—Alvin VanderGriend is a best-selling author, teacher, and denominational prayer leader. This is taken from his book *Praying God's Heart: Prayers That Make a Difference* (PrayerShop Publishing).