



Week Six: Expectant

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to You I pray. In the morning, O LORD, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You and wait in expectation.

Psalm 5:1-3

Day 36: Introduction to Week 6

As we come to the last few days in our *Only by Prayer* series, let's take a quick look back. Over the past thirty-five days we've seen:

1. Prayers that break through are RELIANT
2. Prayers that break through are REPENTANT
3. Prayers that break through are DESPERATE
4. Prayers that break through are FERVENT
5. Prayers that break through are PERSISTENT

Now as we bring our series to a close, we will focus on this final essential matter:

6. Prayers that break through are EXPECTANT

Jesus prayed with expectant belief. He knew God heard His prayers and He expected God to act in accordance with His divine plan and will. That was evident when Jesus, before calling Lazarus out of the tomb, looked up to Heaven and prayed:

Father, I thank You that You have heard me. I know that You always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent me
John 11:41

Like Jesus prayed with expectant belief, He wants the same from His followers. He wants us to come to Him with the same attitude Mary and her sister Martha had when they sent word to Jesus that their brother Lazarus was sick.

Lazarus' sisters believed that Jesus wanted His followers to come to Him in their times of need. And that's exactly what they did. They sent word to Jesus that their brother was sick, because they believed that Jesus, who loved them and their brother, would come to his side and heal him.

You might think that when Jesus got the message that Lazarus was gravely ill, He would have rushed to him like a paramedic unit with lights flashing and siren blaring. But he didn't. "*Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days*" (John 11:5-6).

From our perspective, that seems like an odd way to show someone love in a time of desperate need. Jesus seemingly did nothing for two days and then made the trip to Bethany and arrived *after* Lazarus had already been dead and buried in a tomb for four days (John 11:39).

Put yourself in Martha and Mary's shoes. They believed their brother would not have died if Jesus had been there before he died. Each of them was so certain of that fact, that they –independent of the other – told Jesus, "*If You had been here, my brother would not have died*" (John 11:22,32).

They knew Jesus could have prevented their brother's death, so they were confused. Their grief-filled words said it all. "Lord, why didn't You come?"

Jesus could have come *before* Lazarus died. But he didn't. For a good reason. He wanted His followers to learn a life-lesson about expectant belief. The kind of belief that Jesus lived with, and prayed with. The kind of expectant prayer that can even bring life after death.

Group Video Discussion

Watch Video 6 Expectant

Expectant prayer:

1. Knows God _____

John 11:41-42 – Then Jesus looked up and said, "*Father, I thank You that You have heard me. I knew that You always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent me.*"

2. Believes God _____

John 11:42b – "*that they may believe that You sent me.*"

3. Seeks God's _____

John 11:40 – Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Prior to today, what different things have you heard people say about expectant belief as it relates to prayer?
2. Can you think of a time in your life when you came to the Lord and it seemed like He ignored your prayers? How did you deal with how you felt?
3. Have you come to believe God actually hears your prayers? If so, when? In what ways has that belief changed your prayer life?
4. When Martha objected to Jesus' "*take away the stone*" command (John 11:38), Jesus countered with the question, "*Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?*" Why is belief connected to seeing God's glory?
5. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, God's glory was in full display. When God answers prayer today, are His answers still for His glory? How should knowing this change the focus of how and why we pray?
6. Expectant belief is willing to wait on God's timing and trust God's plan, for God's glory. In what ways can the Lazarus story help you pray and live with both in full focus?

Personal Daily Devotions

Day 37

Expectant prayer asks for God's help

You do not have, because you do not ask God.
James 4:2b

God is ready to answer your prayers, if you ask. In the words of John Piper, "God ordains to fulfill His plans by being asked to do so by us."

Really? God wants me to ask for His help and even waits for me to ask before He helps? Yes, that's exactly what the Bible teaches.

Matthew 7:7-8,11 – "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!

John 14:13 – "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father."

John 16:24 – "Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."

James 1:5 – If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

God wants us to ask for His help. He wants us to want His help. He wants us to acknowledge our need for His help. He wants us to readily seek His help, like a child seeks a parent's help.

Do you remember asking your parents for help? "Dad, can you help me tie my shoes?" "Mom, can you help me with my homework?" Why did you ask for help? Because you needed it and you knew they could help. The fact is, you still need help. And your heavenly Father is ready to give it, if you will just ask.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Do you believe that God is able and willing to help you in your times of need?

Are you a person who seeks God's help readily or reluctantly? What does your answer tell you about yourself?

Where do you need God's help today? Have you asked Him for His help? Taking into account our *Only by Prayer* focus to date, in what ways have you asked for help?

Billy Graham used to say, "Heaven is full of answers to prayer for which no one ever bothered to ask." How does this possibility impact you?

Day 38

Expectant prayer asks with faith

But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea... That man should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

James 1:6-7

There is a right and a wrong way to ask for help. That's an important learning for a kid. If you need your parents' help, don't ask for it in a demanding, whining, disrespectful way. Your attitude when asking matters. As does the timing. If you just brought home a bad grade on your report card, the moment your parents see the grade is not the best time to ask for a raise in your allowance or a later curfew.

There is also a right and wrong way to ask for God's help. How you ask will impact the outcome.

The right way to ask God for help is with belief – with expectant faith. You must come to God believing that He wants you to ask; that He hears you when you ask; that He is capable of doing what is humanly impossible due to His omnipotent power; that He delights in giving good things to those who ask.

Expectant prayer believes that God's will is best. Like Jesus, it prays, "*Father, all things are possible for You.... Yet not what I will, but what You will*" (Mark 14:36). When you pray in this way, with godly motives (James 4:3) and according to God's will (1 John 5:14), you can be sure God will answer your prayers. You can believe that you will receive an answer according to God's riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

Yes, there is a right way to ask for God's help. Come to God with belief in His goodness and power and perfect will. Not demanding your will be done, but trusting in God to do what is best.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Recall a time in your life when you asked for something from someone and your request was not granted.

When you ask for God's help, do you seek to relinquish your will for God's? Do you want God to do what He deems best or what you think is best?

Can you think of times when you've asked for God's help and things did not go as you thought they should? In looking back, why do you think He didn't answer the way you wanted Him to?

Expectant prayer trusts in God – in who He is and what He chooses to do or not do. Why is this perspective vital to praying with belief?

Expectant prayer asks without doubt

But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord.

James 1:6-7

If your relationship with God is on and off, like an unstable dating relationship, don't expect God to overlook your doubts and give you the help you need.

Doubt is like a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed back and forth. It's up and down, unsettled and unpredictable. When it comes to ocean waters, that's expected and even enchanting. But when it comes to our relationship with God, an in and out, He loves me, He loves me not, relationship is unacceptable.

Expectant prayer that leads to God-sized breakthroughs doesn't doubt God's unending love. It knows God can be trusted. It believes the Lord's plan is perfect and His power is unlimited. That means we can KNOW beyond a shadow of doubt:

- *God loves us more than we can even understand*
- *God can be trusted*
- *God hears us when we call out to Him*
- *God will answer us*

It's this kind of undoubting, expectant faith that was behind the writer of Hebrews saying, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Lay aside your doubts. Pray with expectant belief, knowing that God not only hears you, He is also able and ready to help you.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Do you live with doubts when it comes to God answering your prayers? List them below. Can you see any common reasons for why doubts come your way?

Why are doubts not in line with God's plan in our lives? Why might doubts stand in the way of God answering our prayers?

What can you do to alleviate any doubts that might stand in the way of God answering your prayers?

Write out a simple prayer confessing any doubts that you have about God and asking for His divine help in trusting Him more.

Day 40

Expectant prayer willingly waits

*In the morning, O LORD, You hear my voice; in the morning
I lay my requests before You and wait in expectation.*

Psalm 5:3

Most of us hate to wait...for anything. Even in something as mundane and insignificant as ordering at a fast food restaurant. We get frustrated when we have to wait too long because, after all, it's a *fast* food place! We want what we want when we want it. Which is usually right now.

It's no wonder Starbucks' "order ahead" and "grab and go" option continues to grow in popularity. The convenience of getting exactly what you want, without waiting, is a big hit in our impatient, no time to wait, world.

But a world that caters to our desire to "get what we want when we want it" could stand in the way of the valuable lessons that the Lord may want us to learn by waiting. Learning to wait patiently is one of the ways God builds character in us and teaches us to trust in His plan and His timing.

When we pray and God says "wait," He always has a good reason. Even if it's only to build trust in His plan and His will. After all, God is God and we are not. He knows best. And when we by faith don't lose heart, but continue to stay strong with expectant faith, He is glorified.

Waiting patiently also changes us. It builds character. It helps us become the people that we want to be, and that God wants us to be.

Waiting is an opportunity to grow in expectant faith as we keep praying and trusting and believing, knowing that God will answer in His perfect way when the time is perfectly right.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

In what areas of your life are you waiting on God right now? How has this time of waiting impacted you?

On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being best), do your prayers and perspective reflect growing or declining expectant belief?

How consistent are you in praying like David did in his time of hardship and need (read Psalm 5)? Are you faithfully taking your requests to God every day?

What might the Lord be saying to you right now as you expectantly wait on Him? In what ways does He want you to respond right now as you pray for a breakthrough?

Final Application: A Half Day in Prayer

*"When You said, "Seek My face," my heart said
to You, "Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."*

Psalm 27:8

Often when we think about prayer, we think of it as one-dimensional – when we pray, we talk to God. That definitely has its place. God wants us to come before His throne and honestly share what is on our hearts. But prayer is more than just us talking and God listening. Prayer is meant to be two-dimensional. It's meant to be a conversation. It's a time for us to speak while God listens, and for us to listen as God speaks.

The Bible talks about seeking God's presence. Consciously coming before God in prayer. King David spoke of this when he said, "Now set your mind and heart to seek the LORD your God..." (1 Chronicles 22:19). A conscious choice is called for.

Every one of us can benefit from an extended time in God's presence to seek His face. A time to open our hearts, minds, and souls to Him, as we speak and listen. More often than not our times with God are short, often hurried, conversations. And though there is benefit in any time we spend with God, some of the most beneficial times of prayer come when we set aside time to simply be in His presence for an extended time.

So now, before you move on from this *Only by Prayer* study, we want to encourage you to plan a half day for prayer. A time when you and God can have an extended conversation alone together for at least four or five hours. Now that may sound like a long time to devote to prayer... until you try it. Most people who do this find that the time flies by and when it's over they are refreshed and amazed at how God has connected with them in powerful ways, simply because they took the time to consciously meet with Him and listen to Him.

Here are a few suggestions to help you make it happen:

Set a time and location on your calendar that will allow you to leave your regular routine behind. And plan it now before it becomes just a nice idea! Schedule a day when you can go somewhere away from your normal life and responsibilities. Away from your spouse or kids or roommates.

Come into your half day of prayer as rested as possible. Do you remember the time when Jesus invited His disciples to join Him for prayer and they spent most of the time sleeping? Don't let that happen to you. Make sure you can be fully alert to what the Lord has for you in the extended time you've planned.

Come prepared. Bring your Bible, a pen, and a notebook or journal. Wear comfortable clothes. You may also want to bring along some water and snacks.

Plan to include two key things in your day – time to speak to God and time to listen to God.

Begin with prayer. Ask for God's help and leading. Express your love to God. Confess any known sins. Give the Lord thanks for this focused time to spend in His presence. Ask Him for guidance. Express your

longing for His promptings and leadings, and your willingness to follow where He leads you in your time of prayer and in the days that follow.

Read God's Word. Let the Scriptures speak into your heart and even direct your prayers. You may find much benefit in personalizing the Bible passages you read and praying them back to God. Consider reading Psalms 1,8,15,103,141. You might also read a few of your favorite Bible passages or some of the following: Joshua 1:6-9; Proverbs 3:5-6; Philippians 4:6-7; Romans 8:18-21,28,31-39; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a; Hebrews 11:1-6.

As you speak to God, it may be helpful to write out the burdens that are on your heart. Then as you present these concerns to God, ask Him to help you divide that list into two categories: things you can do something about, and things that you need to simply trust God with because they are out of your control.

If you're not sure what else to pray about, consider writing out and praying over areas of your life where you need God's clear leading. Here are a few questions that you may find helpful.

- *Lord, what next step do you want me to take in our relationship?*
- *Lord, what next step do you want me to take in my relationships?*
- *Lord, what next step do you want me to take in my family?*
- *Lord, what next step in education do you want me to take?*
- *Lord, what next step do you want me to take in my ministry?*
- *Lord, what next step do you want me to take in my career?*
- *Lord, what next step do you want me to take in my finances?*
- *Lord, what next step do you want me to take in my health?*

As you listen, write down whatever thoughts God puts on your heart. It may be things you can do related to the requests you presented to God that you could actually do something about. It may be simply reminders of His power and love related to the things on the list that you can't do anything about. It may be conviction of sin. It may be a prompting for a next step He wants you to take in some area of your life.

Be flexible and let God lead. You may find that God leads your half-day of prayer in ways that you didn't plan. That's not only okay, but that could be the best thing that could happen. It is a time for you to connect with God in intimate ways and to listen for whatever He wants you to hear. What comes could lead to an unexpected breakthrough. Perhaps the very breakthrough you've been praying for over the last 40 days.

