

Pray Tell?

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Doctrine—a particular principle, position, or policy taught or advocated by a religion, especially when established by precedent.

Doctrines-schmocktrins. Religion is overflowing with them.

The doctrines of the Christian church vary from congregation to congregation, and from person to person. Every tribe or nation flavors the belief-stew a certain way. Some like it hot, while others prefer mild—even cold works for some—*or so they say*. The tremendous variations around the globe most likely don't promote the unity God desires. The differences, though variations on a theme, are not always healthy progressions. Nor does only one exhibit a spiritual splendor sliced and diced for different tastes. The spectrum of conflicting doctrines is like an unpleasant fouling of the air born out of isolating dividedness. These stands are compounded by a person or denominations adamant certainty of what to do.

Jesus taught one of the common perceptions of his day: keep knocking, asking and seeking. John 14:14 quotes a blanket promise. But honestly, I don't think he *guaranteed* timely or desirable answers for any and every situation. God is not a magical genie and we possess who is cozy inside our bottle. In my years, I've rarely seen prayer answered. Jesus did propose faith and prayer as a means of change, whether internal and private or external. Hope may fizzle out over the years; however, does weight of disappointment cancel out previous prayers when a matter hasn't been resolved.

Take this example of the doctrine concerning prayer. A churchgoing woman was married to an abusive alcoholic husband for 25 years. He never set foot in a church, read the Bible, or prayed. But, the wife prayed for him faithfully every day and diligently believed that one day he'll get religion. She also thought divorce was wrong. She trusted God to do what was right. Twenty-five years and one day later; the husband found God and was amazingly changed. His wife credits her 9,125 prayers as the reason. God was faithful, and finally, in His timing, answered her.

Take this other example. Another churchgoing woman was married to an abusive alcoholic husband for 25 years. He never set foot in a church, read the Bible, or prayed. The wife prayed for him, but not every day. She thought divorce was wrong and trusted God to do what was right. Twenty-five years and one day later; her husband found God and was amazingly changed. His wife somewhat credited her prayers as the reason and that in the end, God finally, in His timing, answered her.

Consider this final example. Yet another churchgoing woman was also married to an abusive alcoholic husband for 25 years. He never set foot in a church, read the Bible, or prayed. She thought divorce was wrong. The wife didn't pray much about anything, a little here, a little there. She simply hoped God would do the right thing, and sooner the better. Twenty-five years and one day later; her husband *also* found God and was amazingly changed. She didn't credit prayer as the reason, nor was she sure why the change took so long.

The three husbands found God and were amazingly changed—on the same day. Plus, let's add that all three couples have lived next door to the other for at least 25 years. Woefully, each wife, as each year passed, flipped twelve fresh calendar pages. But then the three women were finally relieved and their marriages bettered. However, their three perceptions equal three differing doctrinal approaches to prayer and

commitment to pray. The perceptions of the wives concerning prayer don't jive—for each woman the activity and necessity of prayer differed from the others. One was aggressive; one was part-time, the other, fairly passive. Which worked: consistent pressure, occasional reminding, or casual nudging of God?

Other questions: does the faith of a teensy-weensy mustard seed outweigh or weigh evenly with 25 years of daily prayer? In my first example, was every fresh request on 9,125 mornings *required*? I don't know. Or, was one seed, plus unknown wait time, the mere requirement for the amazing change? Is prayer akin to casino slot machines? Insert request—pull handle down—three factors line-up—collect—nothing further needed. Or, do we steadfastly pull for 25 years or more, or perhaps until we die? Mysterious.

What I do know is that the three approaches desiring the same answer will perpetually happen...and no one likes the wait time. We're left pondering what we should've, could've or would've done—if only we knew what God knows. Pray because God commands so. In our efforts we may discover the heart of God is willing to do more than listen. Sometimes prayer is all we've got.

My doctrine of prayer is this: I don't know.

Doctrinal-schmocktrins? God understands all of them.

These Things Make Me Grumpy