

## Going Deeper with the Sermon

Simon—James 4:2 “You have not, because you ask not”  
“highlighting prayer”

James 4:2 says “**you do not have because you do not ask.**”

Consider the simplicity of these words. The words are so simple even a child could understand them. Yet if we really take the time to let the implication of these words sink in, we will feel not only their simplicity but also their spiritual force and their implication for our lives.

**Do you ever think about the quality of your spiritual life** and wonder in frustration at how poor it really is.? Could the answer be as simple as that which is offered by these simple little words? **you do not have because you do not ask?** Or perhaps you look at the church as a whole both in this community and beyond and wonder to yourself or even complain out loud – where is the life and the vitality? Could the answer be so obvious, so elementary. Could the answer be so simple even a child could figure it out. Could it be that **WE do not have because WE do not ask.**

The normal Christian life involves **asking God for things regularly and often.** A healthy Christian with a good awareness of themselves and eyes open to the world around them, is going to see needs both in their own life and in the lives of others every day. The lives of men and women of God who have accomplished great things for God demonstrate this reality.

**One man who certainly believed in the power of prayer was George Muller.** Both a missionary and a pastor in the 1800’s, Muller was known primarily as the man who established, housed and fed countless orphans in England. What is inspiring about Muller is **not only WHAT he achieved** in his lifetime for his generation, **but HOW he achieved** what he achieved. George Muller was a man of prayer. When he felt led by God to establish the first orphan house Muller believed that it could be done through the power of prayer. Muller never advertised his needs or went door knocking for sponsors. He decided to make all his requests known to God; and God answered them often at the very last minute. At the end of his life, , Muller was able to look back at the many orphanages that had been built and say that every need had been supplied.

**Muller knew that prayer made a difference.** The same applies to the church as a whole. How much does a church forfeit when, apart from Sunday services, the majority of its people do not take the time to meet together with other Christians to ask God to do things on our behalf.

**What does normal church look like when it comes to prayer?** The early church. was a praying church. From apostle to new believer the whole church gave themselves to prayer together. Acts says they prayed continually not merely occasionally. And not merely a small group of faithful ones but each member. Let’s remind ourselves what it was like in the early church and what happened when they prayed. Read **Acts 2:47** – and the Lord added to their number daily. **Acts 4:4** – many of them which heard the word believed. **Acts 5:14** – and believers were the more added to the lord.

## So why don’t we ask?

Some believe that prayer doesn’t really make a difference. What sits behind this? Some have fallen into thinking that prayer means God satisfying my every request. Yet we forget in our prayers that it is not us who are in charge. It is **God who is in charge.** We ask God, we do not order God.

But having tried this way and not having our prayers answered how we want them we falsely assume that prayer doesn’t work. We may believe in prayer theoretically but have become disillusioned experientially, and the end result is that that we stop praying. While there are some Christians who fall into this error, there are others who have become confused about prayer theoretically.

Some say “If God is in control and he will make his purposes happen then what’s the point of praying. Pray won’t make a difference” Looking at this idea. Yes God is sovereign. Yes He will bring all his purposes to pass. But, if you’re reasoning from there, leads you to the conclusion that - therefore prayers do not make any difference. Then your reasoning has taken you away from the clear and unambiguous teaching of scripture.

God is sovereign. He runs this world with infinite wisdom. We don’t inform him of anything he doesn’t already know. He doesn’t need our prayers to know what he should do. He is God. **Nevertheless, in the mystery of his sovereignty God has ordained to make our prayers real causes of real events.** The words of James 4:2, “You do *not have* because you do not ask,” do not mean, “You would have *had* anyway, even if you didn’t pray, since God had a plan and your prayers don’t matter.”

“You do *not have* because you do not ask” means prayer causes things to happen that wouldn’t happen if you didn’t pray. Now think about that - what a privilege and what a responsibility! It would be as foolish as a man being given a debit card and a pin number to access a bank account full of unimaginable wealth, yet walking past ATM machines day after day and never taking that card out of his wallet.

**There is another reason we don’t bring our needs and hopes to God in prayer both individually and corporately.** It has been well said that the devil stands and looks at the church today and laughs to himself when he sees churches relying on their sophisticated programs and well-run organization. That he is not in the least worried by beautiful music, audio-visual technology, witty speakers, endless activities and well-timed services. But when the devil sees a church of men and women who really believe in the power of prayer, who knows how to pray and really do pray, when he sees a whole church on its face before God in prayer, he’s no longer laughing, he’s trembling, for he knows that his days of influence in that church or community are over. He knows, better than we do, that prayer makes a difference.

## Questions for reflection

1. How do you respond to the reality of God’s sovereignty but also the reality that we are encouraged to ask in prayer of Him?
2. How would you pray differently if you really believed in the power of prayer?
3. What encourages you about the early church in Acts and prayer?
4. What changes do you want to make in your life in response to this?