

DOES GOD LOVE SPORTS?

By Rev. Will Nelken

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Praying to Win

After winning the NBA championship, Miami Heat MVP, Dwyane Wade, said, "I just want to thank God for giving us the strength, the courage, the tenacity to fight through all the doubters all year and come out on top. I just want to give God all the praise for this."

Just a little earlier, when facing elimination from the championship after three straight losses, Jason Terry of the Dallas Mavericks declared, "I put my faith in God, and that's what we're doing tonight." However, they lost and were eliminated.

Is God a fan of the Miami Heat? Did He battle against the Dallas Mavericks?

Yesterday was Christian Fellowship Day at AT&T Park, yet the Giants lost 14 to 5.

What happens when competing teams pray to the same God for success? Do their prayers cancel each other out? Are they left to human devices?

Assuming they prayed in faith, it is fair to ask "What is faith for?"

What's happening when your prayers for success seem to be tossed aside or forgotten?

Does God care? Does He really answer our prayers? If not, why not?

Motive

Let's begin at the beginning: Why do people pray?

What is the objective of the one who prays? Is it self-centered or self-forgetful? Is it me-centered or God-centered? These are questions which *must* be answered.

Much of our disappointment and discouragement in prayer comes as the result of putting our hope in our own wishes instead of God's will. God did not promise to grant us our wishes; He is not a genie.

God has promised us a partnership in what He is doing in the earth, if we will ask Him for the things He wants to give.

¹ John 5:14 We are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him. (NLT)

Jesus "knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.'" (Luke 22:41-42; NLT)

Thus, He has taught us to pray:

Luke 11:2-3 Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (NKJV)

The Kingdom is not about you. The church is not simply about getting your needs met. Prayer is not your magic lantern.

Surrender your notions about what is best for you and begin to trust the One who created and formed you; the One who redeemed you by His love.

There is work to be done, and there is danger and opposition on every side. Yet God has promised us b and good success if we are working in His field and seeking to please Him.

Material

What gives prayer substance?

Not the words, the tone, the volume, or the speed. Those are superficial.

It is our faith in the power and authority of the One to whom we pray.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (NKJV)

When I can see nothing of what I am hoping to see, when as yet the things for which I hope have no form or substance, the faith that God has placed in my heart is my assurance. The confidence He has built in me through His words is my strength.

If I ask help from a man, I will get what help a man can give. If I ask help from a statue, I will get what help a statue can give. If I ask help from God, I will get what help God can give.

The Name of Jesus is our link to heavenly authority. He said, *"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth."* (Matthew 28:18; NLT)

John 14:13-14 You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it! (NLT)

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. (NKJV)

To ask "in His name" is to ask for what He would ask. It is to ask in His place, in His stead, on His behalf. In order to ask "in Jesus' name" I must learn what it is that Jesus wants. Do not tack His name onto a prayer if He did not authorize you to ask it. That is like forging someone's name on a blank check; it is taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Discover what is important to Jesus. Learn from what He did and said and prayed. Then, begin to do and say and pray the same. Then you will be praying under His authority. Then the Father will respond.

Muscle

Perhaps you have read in the Book of James: *"The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."* (KJV)

What makes a prayer "effectual" and "fervent"?

Modern translations render it “effective” or “earnest” but neither of these quite gets to the bottom of it. If it is merely a level of expressed emotion in prayer, then it is within the reach of everyone, especially actors. Some have learned to pray with a certain emotional sound to their prayers, imagining that such hype makes them more effective.

“Enthusiastic” is a better translation, but not the kind you might fake with your voice. “Enthuse” comes from a compound Greek word meaning “in” (*en*) and God (*theos*); it literally means “God within” or filled with God. Indeed, that is the key to powerful praying: it must be Spirit-filled and Spirit-led.

But the Holy Spirit does not operate in a vacuum, especially if that vacuum is in your heart or in your head!

The Holy Spirit operates according to and by means of the Word of God. “Effectual, fervent prayer” is Holy Spirit-led and Scripture-directed.

Jesus’ mother, Mary, gave a fine example of such prayer after receiving the announcement of her immaculate pregnancy; she prayed, *“I am the Lord’s servant. Let it be to me according to Your word.”* (Luke 1:38)

The same was a familiar phrase of the Psalmist, King David (NKJV):

Psalm 119:9 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

Psalm 119:25 Revive me according to Your word.

Psalm 119:28 Strengthen me according to Your word.

Psalm 119:58 Be merciful to me according to Your word.

Psalm 119:116 Uphold me according to Your word.

Psalm 119:169 Give me understanding according to Your word.

Psalm 119:170 Deliver me according to Your word.

The way to build spiritual muscle in your praying is to read and memorize appropriate sections of God’s Word. In fact, you may begin by praying aloud the written prayers of the apostles and the psalmists. Take their words into your mouth until you are comfortable with them and they become your own. Then, clearly, you will be praying “according to the will of God.”

Method

How do people pray? More importantly, how do people learn to pray well?

If you want to learn to pray, you have to spend time with others who pray well. That’s why we emphasize our Tuesday evening prayer meeting. It’s designed to give everyone an opportunity to pray along with others who pray as we all improve our skills.

Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.”

If you want to improve your praying, you have to pray with others. Your praying won't take off until you pray regularly with others.

Praying alone is more difficult than praying with others. If you try to learn to pray on your own, you're sure to become disappointed. The place for developing the habit of praying is in the midst of a group who prays, as you pray for one another.

It takes right motive, right material, strong muscle and good method.

Does God love sports? No. God loves people. Ordinary people. People who have sinned. People who stumble. People who are not yet full grown spiritually, but are pursuing holiness.

God loves people just like you. And God loves *you*.

And God communicates His love most to those who pray, to those who seek to know Him, to those who long to see Him, to those who reach out to Him.

It's time to check your motives when you pray.

Review whether you are using the right material as you pray.

It may be time to renew the method of your prayers.

It is surely time to be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit as you pray.