

The Work of Prayer
Matthew 18:19 * Mark 11:22-26: August 1, 2010
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A man owned a little, black dog who had the habit of going to the back door of his house and bark until someone would finally get the message and let him out.

One day, the man wasn't home, but he forget to tell his dog! The poor dog, as usual, went to the back door and barked and barked and barked ... all day long. The poor dog never figured out that his barking was useless because no one was home to hear him.

Have you ever felt like that dog? You pray and you pray for something, but there doesn't seem to be anyone at home!

We like to blame God for not hearing, but I don't think the problem rests with God. I think it has to do with you and I. Do you pray? Do you believe in prayer? Do you believe in the power of prayer? Maybe, that's the real problem.

A survey of 269 doctors in the late 1990s revealed that 99 percent of them said they believed in the power of prayer to help their patients heal.

A psychologist once said, **“Prayer is the greatest power available to the individual in solving his or her personal problems. It's power astonishes me!”**

It was Norman Vincent Peale, in his book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, who said, **“Prayer freshens us up every evening and sends us out renewed every morning.”**

Prayer! It's the power of God at our finger tips. Prayer is bringing God into our daily lives and inviting God to participate in everything we do.

Two business men were meeting one day. They were discussing a mutual problem that concerned them both. They talked and talked about this problem, but they weren't getting anywhere. Finally, one of the business men remembered our passage from Matthew 18: **“If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”**

The two men prayed about their problem and soon found a common and workable solution. They gave credit to God. God heard their prayers.

A man opened a small business in New York City. He called it his **“Little hole in the wall.”** He had one employee. Today, he’s moved into a bigger building with many employees.

When asked about the secret of his success, he simply said it was, **“hard work and prayer.”**

I’m sure many of you have your own prayer stories where prayers have been answered, miracles performed, solutions given.

I think the problem with too many of us today, is our lack of faith when it comes to prayer. We try everything else first. We try our own solutions. We ask people to help. We bring our problems and concerns to the experts and pay good money for their advice. Rarely, is prayer one of the first things we do.

Children are better at praying than many of us adults. A little boy was going to bed. As he was walking upstairs to his bedroom he yelled out, **“I’m going to say my prayers now. Does anyone need anything!”** Can you sense the faith in that little boy?

We tell our children from the very beginning to say their prayers. We want them to get into the habit of talking and listening to God and believing in God. They do, but something happens to us as we grow older. We seem to outgrow our need for prayer and instead choose to rely our own resources. What a pity!

Jesus said in Matthew 9:29, **“According to you faith let it be done to you.”** Did you hear that? According to our faith God answers prayer.

In Mark 11:24, Jesus said the same thing, but with different words. He said, **“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”** Believe and it will be yours. The power of God at work!

“To pray,” someone once said, **“is to open ourselves up to all the possibilities of God.”** So, how many possibilities is that? Only God knows, but I’m sure it’s more than we know.

We have a *Health Team* at McCabe. Did you know that? I like the idea of having a *Health Team* for our church. For the past two years, this *Health Team* has surveyed church members and discovered that the number one challenge facing our church is a lack of *‘passionate spirituality.’* We don’t know God very

well. Our personal relationship with God isn't strong. We don't pray enough.

Can you imagine what would happen if we all prayed? If we all invoked the power of God and prayed for this church? Our community? Our families? Our nation? Can you imagine the mountains God would move for us if we all prayed?

The Bible tells us to **“pray without ceasing.”** Too many people today pray as if God were some far-off mysterious being who may or may not hear us ... like the barking dog. This isn't God. God hears our prayers whether we're at work or home or school or in the car or in church or wherever.

Ruth Graham, Billy's wife, had a cat who had kittens in one of her downstairs bedrooms. Mrs. Graham didn't think her cat had made a good choice when she picked the downstairs bedroom to raise her kittens. And so Mrs. Graham carefully collected the kittens, put them in a cardboard box, brought them upstairs and placed them near the kitchen fire place. She was sure her cat would appreciate her new home.

The cat had other ideas. Cats do that! One by one, the mother cat picked up her kittens from the box near the fire place and moved them back to the guest bedroom downstairs. She did this until there was only one kitten left ... the runt of the litter.

For some reason, the mother took her time in coming back for this last kitten. This poor little guy or gal started to squeak. Mrs. Graham said, **“You could barely hear the kitten.”**

Instantly, the mother cat appeared out-of-nowhere, jumped in the box, gently put the little kitten in her mouth and carried it back to the guest room downstairs.

We have power ... God's power at our finger tips and all we need to do is squeak or sigh or cry or talk and God will answers us.

Again, it's a matter of faith. If you believe God can, God does. If you don't believe God can, then you lose what God has to offer. It's just that simple and just that hard.

Through prayer, God can open our hearts and minds to new possibilities and new ideas. Through prayer, God can transform us by taking away our worries, concerns and fears. Through prayer, the power of Almighty God becomes available to all of us. Can you use some *‘God Power’* in your life? Pray.

I've gotten into the habit of praying for others when I see them on the street or in the mall or in a car. The other day, I saw a young family standing next to a policeman. The mom and dad looked like they were having some trouble getting along. I prayed for them.

Whenever I see a homeless person or a person who looks sad or someone who seems to be in a hurry, I'll offer a prayer asking God to help.

Praying brings us closer to God whether we're praying for ourselves or others.

Which brings us back to the questions I asked in the beginning. Do you pray? Do you believe in prayer? Do you believe in the power of prayer? If you don't or if you have doubts, pray and ask God to help you overcome those doubts.

With thanks to Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, author and pastor, he made the following suggestions for people wanting to develop an effective prayer life. I offer them to you.

1. Set aside a few minutes every day. Don't say anything. Just listen to God.
2. Pray. Use simply, everyday language.
3. Pray at work, at play, at home ... know that God is always near
4. Don't always ask for help, praise God and thank God for what you already have. Show your gratitude.
5. Avoid anything negative in your prayers
6. Be willing to accept God's will and way
7. Pray for people you like and don't like, people you know and don't know
8. Finally, believe that God hears.

May the power of God be a daily part of your life.