

Before You Ask, Abide

Why our relationship with Jesus matters more than the answer we seek

“You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

— James 4:2–3 (NIV)

There are things in my life that I have prayed about for years, and there are other things I have worried about, talked about, and tried to handle without ever plainly asking God. James gives us a direct truth: sometimes we do not have because we have not asked. God invites His children to come to Him. We do not have to pretend that we have no needs or desires. We can tell Him exactly what is on our hearts.

But James also gives us the other side. Sometimes we ask and do not receive because our motives are wrong. We may be asking for a good thing, but wanting it for a selfish reason. We may want God to give us comfort, control, recognition, or pleasure while giving little thought to His purpose. The problem is not that God is against joy or blessing. The problem comes when we want the gift more than we want the Giver.

The Promise Has a Condition

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

— John 15:7 (NIV)

That is an incredible promise, but we must not pull it away from the words that come before it: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you.” Jesus was not giving us a blank check for every appetite. He was describing the prayer life of a person who is living in close fellowship with Him.

Jesus said that He is the vine and we are the branches. A branch has no life in itself. It does not strain to manufacture fruit; it stays connected to the vine and receives what it needs. In the same way, we cannot produce spiritual life through willpower, religious activity, or good intentions. Jesus said plainly, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

When we abide in Jesus, His Word begins to reshape us. His desires become our desires. His purposes become more important than our plans. His love corrects our motives. Then “ask whatever you wish” takes on its proper meaning: we are becoming so connected to Christ that we increasingly want what He wants.

The closer we walk with Jesus, the more our prayers begin to sound like His heart.

THE ONE THING THAT MATTERS MOST

Luke 10:38–42 gives us a picture of two sisters, Mary and Martha. Martha welcomed Jesus into her home and began preparing the meal. There was nothing sinful about serving or preparing food. The trouble was that Martha became distracted, worried, irritated, and resentful. She was serving Jesus, but she had become frustrated with Jesus. She finally asked Him whether He even cared that Mary had left her to do the work alone.

Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to Him. Martha saw Mary as unhelpful, but Jesus said, “Few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42). Jesus was not saying that responsibilities do not matter. He was putting them in the right order. Presence must come before performance. We must sit before we serve, receive before we give, and abide before we attempt to bear fruit.

This is where the three passages come together. James shows us that our desires can become disordered and our motives can become selfish. Mary shows us the priority of sitting at Jesus’ feet. John shows us that as we remain in Christ and His Word remains in us, our desires and prayers are changed. The answer is not to stop asking. The answer is to ask from a heart that is abiding.

Do We Want Jesus—or Only What He Can Give?

It is possible to want God’s hand without seeking God’s face. We may want Him to fix the problem, heal the body, restore the relationship, provide the money, open the door, or change another person. Those may be honest and legitimate requests. But there is a deeper question: If God delays the answer, will we still remain close to Him? If His answer is different from ours, will we still trust Him?

Faith does not mean pretending that we do not care about the outcome. Jesus Himself prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.” Then He added, “Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). Mature prayer is honest enough to ask boldly and surrendered enough to trust God completely.

Before You Ask

Bring the real request to God, but also bring Him your heart. Ask Him to show you why you want what you want. Let His Word examine your motives. Ask whether the answer would help you honor Christ, serve others, and fulfill your responsibilities—or merely satisfy an appetite. Then place the outcome and timing in His hands.

There is no possession, position, relationship, comfort, or answered prayer more important than our relationship with Jesus. If we gain everything else and drift away from Him, we have lost what matters most. So ask. Ask boldly. Ask specifically. But before you ask—and while you wait—abide.



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