

When Faith Doesn't Work: Targets Versus Outcomes

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If you're like me, you want a magic formula to guarantee that God will answer your prayers every time. When God doesn't come through, you think that maybe you did something wrong. I didn't have enough faith. My intention wasn't pure enough. My heart wasn't right. I should've prayed more or prayed differently.

No magic formula exists. God isn't manipulated, no matter how hard we try to coerce him to give us what we want. We beg. We plead. We make bargains. God doesn't play those games. God responds to our heart, but His response is according to His will, not ours.

If God is going to do His own thing, then why even pray at all? What good is faith? Because God does respond to us mere humans. As I said before, He sees our heart and responds to our heart. God is compassionate and merciful, and it's our faith in those attributes that causes us to pray in the first place.

Outcomes Will Trip You

You prayed and believed, but God let you down. You feel disappointed, hurt or betrayed. Why? Because you didn't get the outcome you expected from God. And that, my friend, is the problem. Faith is about targets, not outcomes.

As long as we focus on outcomes, we set ourselves up for disappointment because outcomes are never guaranteed. Faith requires a target, something to believe in. Our ultimate target is God. We place our trust in Him, not in outcomes. We trust in a person, not in what He can do for us. Our faith in God is based on our relationship with Him, a heart-to-heart relationship in which our confidence derives from our belief in His goodness toward us.

When your prayer failed to have any effect, ask yourself, "Did I trust God?" That's better than asking, "What did I do wrong?" It's possible you did nothing wrong at all. I believe God cares more about your trust in Him than how effective your prayers are.

Aim Toward A Target

When you ask God for something, that something is your target. It's what you aim for, the direction in which you point your intention. To the best that

you're able, you shoot your arrow of faith toward that target. Sometimes, you miss.

An outcome is a pre-defined result, like hitting a bulls-eye. It's okay to target the bulls-eye, but we can't rely on that specific result. We can only aim and shoot. The same holds true with faith. We can aim at a target, but we shouldn't rely on a specific outcome. Rather, we rely on God, whether we hit our target or not.

In my last article, I wrote about intention. Intention has power, but intention only goes so far. When our intention aligns with God's intention, then I believe that nothing is impossible, as the Bible says. Oftentimes, we don't know God's intention or our intention is at cross-purposes with His. Nevertheless, we exercise our imperfect intention, our feeble faith, trusting that God sees our heart and delights in the quality of its tenderness toward Him.

What Matters Most

When we want something badly, it's easy to focus on the thing we want. We become more focused on the bulls-eye than on God. We focus on the thing instead of the one who gives it. Let us not focus on things. Instead, let us trust in God who tells us not to worry about things. God has promised to take care of us.

Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you--you of little faith." - Luke 12:22-28

We live in a goal-oriented society, so it's natural for us to focus on outcomes. We are pressured to succeed in all areas of life, so we can't help but judge the success of our prayers. The goal of life is transformation. Success is measured by the breadth of our hearts. God cares more about our transformation than our successes or failures. Are we trusting in Him? Are we growing and learning? Have we learned to love ourselves and others? Is our relationship with God deepening in intimacy?

Faith needs a target, so always aim for the highest good. Trust in God, not in outcomes. And allow God work in your heart and life, no matter what outcomes take place.

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