

What do you want from God?

When you hit your knees at the end of a long day, or close your eyes, taking a deep breath before you start another what are the things you always find yourself asking God for in prayer?

If Jesus were to show up right here, right now, and give you a genie in a bottle moment – ask for anything you want from me and I'll give it to you – what would ask for?

I would guess that most of our responses would fit into one of two categories.

Some of you ask for signs – one of the Biblical words for miracles.

Some of you ask for knees that don't need replacing, bills that are suddenly paid-in-full, cancer that goes into recession, kids the grow up to be healthy, wealthy, wise and married to a good Christian spouses – some sort of winning at life lottery ticket, not necessarily because you are overly greedy but because it would give you one less thing to worry about if God just took care of some of life's problems for you.

Some of you ask for signs, a miracle of some sort. Some of you ask for wisdom.

Some of you ask for wisdom to raise you kids well, wisdom to sort out a messy family situation, wisdom to know what you should do with your life, wisdom to navigate the work place and be successful in your career – some sort of behind the scenes knowledge and clarity that would make your life a little less confusing and scary – again, not because you are overly greedy but because you realize how complicated life is and want God to help you sort through some of those complexities.

I'm guessing that most of you, if you think about what you bring to God in your regular prayers, what you'd ask of Jesus if he promised to grant you one wish, ask for either a sign or wisdom.

How many of you would ask for nothing?

Jesus shows up right here, right now, gives you that genie in a bottle moment and you say, "No thanks Jesus. I don't need anything. You've done enough already."

It's not the natural reaction. But Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 would at least have the thought cross through our minds. Paul wants us to look at what Jesus has already done, at his cross, and find all the power and wisdom we could ever need from God. Paul wants us to find in the cross of Jesus such a deep contentment and intense level of satisfaction that we come to the realization that we don't actually *need* anything else from our God – if he never did anything else for us for the rest of our lives, he would already have done enough.

Now, to be clear, there is nothing inherently wrong with asking God to help you handle the situations you face – either by solving them for you in some miraculous way, or by giving you the wisdom to deal with them.

God is clear that he wants us to come and lay our requests before him. He describes himself like a Father who wants his kids to ask him for stuff and loves to satisfy our desires.

There is nothing inherently wrong with asking God for help – for signs or wisdom.

The problem can come when God does not answer our prayers the way we would answer them if we were god. The problem can come when God's answer is a "no" or "not yet" to our requests.

That was the problem a lot of people were having in Paul's day.

The people of Paul's day were just like us. They wanted a God who would give them one of two things – signs or wisdom.

Speaking in generalities, Paul says that in his day Jews were looking to God for signs and Greeks were looking for wisdom.

The Jews wanted a God who did powerful and miraculous things.

The Jews of Paul's day had been raised steeped in the miracle-working God of the Old Testament. Read the first two thirds of a Bible and you will read about a God who has a long history of doing epic things to save his people. You've got Moses and the Plagues in Egypt. You've got Joshua and the walls of Jericho. You've got Sampson and his crazy strength. You've got David and Goliath.

On page after page the Jews learned of a God who was capable of doing really big and impressive things for his people. And mixed right in with all that real and miraculous history were promises – promises from God that he would do even greater things for his people through the work of one special Savior called the Messiah.

The Jews wanted a God and a Messiah who would do big things for them – like he'd done for Moses, Joshua, Sampson, and David.

There was nothing inherently wrong with asking God for that. The problem came when God's answer wasn't the answer the Jews would have given if they were god.

They wanted a God and Messiah who did big things for them, but all they got was Jesus.

Sure, Jesus did some pretty impressive signs. He had a good bag of tricks to pull from – but they weren't like Moses leading the people out of Egypt miracles. The Jews expected bigger things than just a few blind eyes opened. They expected the next David who would usher in the next Jewish golden-age. But instead of driving out the Romans and bringing on a glorious Messianic age, Jesus had died on a Roman cross.

The Jews wanted signs from God. God's answer through Jesus was a "not yet." There *will be* a big golden Messianic age when all of Israel's problems go away, but they would have to wait for heaven to find it. But for many Jews that answer wasn't what they wanted. So, they wanted nothing to do with the God who gave that answer. Jesus' cross and the promise of heaven wasn't enough for them.

Paul says the Greeks of his day were looking to God for wisdom. They wanted a God who would help them wrap their heads around the world we live in.

The Greeks of Paul's day had been raised steeped in the great Greek Philosopher's golden age. We are *still* taking about the works of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates. They were figuring out the world and how to live in the world and how to tackle the problems of the world, and they wanted a God who would help them along in their search for wisdom.

And there was nothing inherently wrong with asking for a God who brings wisdom (remember Solomon, who actually had that genie in a bottle moment? He asked for wisdom and God praised him for asking for wisdom instead of asking for a winning lottery ticket). There is nothing wrong in asking God for wisdom, the problem for many Greeks was when God didn't come with the specific kind of wisdom they wanted.

They wanted a God who would help them wrap their minds around solving the world's problems, but all Paul was offering them was Jesus.

Sure, Jesus said some pretty wise things, but what kind of a God dies a criminal's death in weakness and shame? If Jesus was so wise, why did he die on a Roman cross?

The Greeks wanted a wisdom-bringing God – but when God said "no" to their specific blue-print for what that wisdom would look like, many of the Greeks wanted nothing to do with that God. The cross of Jesus as the wise work of God was not for them.

So, what about us?

There is nothing wrong with asking God for signs and wisdom – in fact they are very good things to ask for. And sometimes God gives us the very things we ask for. But how do we respond when we ask God for a miracle and the miracle doesn't come – at least not the way we wanted? How do we respond when we ask God to give us some clarity in the messiness of this world but things just stay messy?

You know what happens then, don't you? Being satisfied when God doesn't answer our prayers the way we would answer them if we were God is not a skill I've mastered. Being content (perfectly ok) when God says "no" or "not yet" to my specific requests is a skill that I haven't mastered. Have you?

I can only thank God that in my dissatisfaction with his answers I haven't rejected him like so many other people in Paul's day and ours.

Do you know what else I thank God for?

I thank God for teaching me a different way to respond when his answer to my prayers is a "no" or "not yet".

Do you know what that other response is? Don't get me wrong, I still wrestle with contentment and satisfaction, but do you know what God has taught me to do when he doesn't seem to be doing things the way I would do them?

My wife and I found this little sign and we fell in love with it – in fact, my wife reminded me that when we first saw it she started tearing up right in the middle of Northwestern Publishing House where we found it. It is a sign that sits in our kitchen – the place we often sit and wrestle with the complexities of life. It's a constant reminder of a lesson God won't let us forget.

The cross was enough.

Paul says it this way: **The message of the cross is foolishness for those who are perishing** (for those who demand that God operate in a certain way, they will only see foolishness when God doesn't live up to their standards), **but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

In other words, I thank God that he has shown me that the cross of Jesus is all the power and wisdom of God I will ever need. The cross is enough.

If I want to know if God loves me even when he doesn't do things the way I want him to, all I have to do is look at the cross. He died for me. He loves me.

If I want to know if God really will do what is best for me even when he seems to be saying "no" or "not yet" to most of my prayers, all I have to do is look at the cross. He didn't withhold his own Son from me. He won't fail to give me everything I need.

If I want to know that everything is going to be ok even if I don't have the wisdom to understand *how* it will be ok, all I have to do is look at the cross. My sins are forgiven. The doors of heaven are open to me. It's all going to be ok.

The cross is enough. The more you realize what God did for you at the cross the more you will realize that you don't *need* anything else from him.

Most of you know my family situation because you lived it with us.

You know that right after we moved to Franklin our boy Ezra ended up in the hospital for 19 days with some crazy, unknown problem. You were right there with us praying for miraculous healing for our little boy.

You can see God's answer to those prayers in that smiley little boy shoving his walker around this place. He's gotten a lot better, but as far as a miraculous healing – so far God's answer to our prayers for miracles has been “not yet” – maybe not until heaven.

You know that for the next two years we took him to more doctors' appointments than we can count looking for an answer. You were right there with us praying for wisdom – for answers and understanding.

You know that God gave us an answer to those prayers for wisdom too. Last year we got an answer – our super rare genetic mitochondrial genetic disorder FARS2. We have a name for the problem, but that's the only wisdom we got – no prognosis, no treatment – so far God's answer for our request for wisdom has been “not yet” – maybe not until heaven.

And that is why my wife cried when she saw this in the store... Through every single unanswered prayer God has been drawing our eyes back to the cross.

God's answer to prayers for miraculous healing: maybe not until heaven... but because of the cross we know there will be a heaven.

God's answer to prayers for wisdom: maybe not until heaven... but because of the cross we know there will be a heaven.

Every single thing you bring before your God in prayer, every single request for a miracle or wisdom, you already know:

God is listening to you... because of the cross.

God is listening not as a cosmic higher power, but as your Father who loves you... because of the cross.

God promises he will answer your prayers with whatever is best for you, and you know he will... because of the cross.

God give us the wisdom to know that the cross is enough. It is the power and wisdom of God on display for us who are being saved. Amen