

Every once in a while CJ will start to ask me something, then before he gets the question out will stop and say, “You’ll probably just say ‘no’ anyway.” I usually reply, “Ask anyway and see what happens.” Sometimes his instincts are correct and the answer is no. Frequently, however, the answer is either yes or maybe later. The truth is, I love to be able to say yes to my children. I enjoy giving them things that will make them happy, and having them involved in activities they will enjoy.

As Jesus was going throughout Galilee teaching, healing the sick, and casting out demons, a leper came to him and said, “If you choose, you can make me clean.” When I imagine this scene, I hear it almost as if the leper was saying, “You’ll probably say no, but I know you can take my leprosy away if you want to.” I can’t be sure this was what he was thinking, but I know I’m not the only one who imagines it this way because others told me that they hear it the same way.

The leper knew that Jesus was the one who could make him clean. He had heard that Jesus had been healing people who were incurable. The one thing he was not sure about was whether Jesus would choose to heal him. That was the question, did Jesus want to heal him?

How often have we failed to pray for something because we think that God might not want to help us? Certainly there are times when we know that God would not give us what we might feel like asking of him. Those of you who are students should not expect that God will grant you straight A’s without the need to study. As you are filling out your tax returns, a prayer that the IRS will not look too closely at the deductions you are claiming is probably one of those times when God says, “No.” I’m not talking about those kinds of prayers.

What about praying that God will heal a loved one, or praying that God will provide a good job, or if you’re the student I mentioned earlier, praying that God will bring to your memory the things that you did study? We know that God is the one who can help us, but are we afraid to ask because we think God will say, “No?”

The leper could have thought, “Jesus will probably not choose to heal me, so I’m not going to bother Him.” If he had, he would not have been healed. We do not need to be afraid to pray boldly. Even if we are not sure if we are praying for something that God will choose to give us, we can take this leper as a model. We can pray, “Jesus, I know you can heal my friend if you choose. I know you can provide the job I need if you choose. I know you can bring me through this challenge if you choose.” When we do that, we shift our focus away from the difficulties we are facing to the power of God to overcome those difficulties.

For me, Jesus’ response to the leper is one of the most comforting passages in the gospel. Jesus touched him and said, “I do choose. Be made clean!” In that culture, you weren’t supposed to touch a leper. The various conditions described as leprosy were often contagious. People who were clean weren’t supposed to touch lepers, but Jesus did. Jesus’ desire was to heal this man. It wasn’t a sense of obligation that made Jesus heal the leper. It wasn’t “Just his job.” Jesus looked at the man with compassion and wanted to heal him. Jesus wanted to give the leper what he asked of him.

When we pray, Jesus looks at us with compassion. He wants to help us. His choice is always for us. This does not mean that we will always get what we ask of him. Sometimes, even when what we ask seems like a good thing, there may be something more Jesus understands that we cannot understand. But we can be assured of one thing, Jesus is more ready to give than we are to ask. He wants to give us the things that will bring joy to our lives. Jesus wants us to ask.

When Jesus touched the leper and said, “I do choose. Be made clean!” the man was instantly healed. Then Jesus gave him the instructions to show himself to the priests and offer the sacrifice commanded by the law. The reason Jesus gave these instructions is that the priests were the ones who were qualified to make the pronouncement that someone had been healed of leprosy. Their certification that he was free of leprosy would serve as a testimony that Jesus had actually healed the man.

If someone came in today and said, “I’ve been healed of cancer,” we

might ask how they know. If they came in and said, “The doctors told me I had incurable cancer. I asked Jesus to heal me, and now the doctors cannot find any trace of cancer,” it would be a bit more convincing. It would be a testimony to what Jesus had done for that person.

If the man went to the priests and was declared clean, it would be a testimony to the healing power of Jesus. One of the great things about answered prayers is that they serve as a testimony to the Gospel of Christ. When Jesus chose to heal this man, He was not only choosing to take the leprosy away. He was also choosing to make this man a part of His ministry. Jesus was choosing to use the leper’s healing as a revelation of His power. Lepers were cut off from their communities. Jesus not only gave him a physical healing, but He also made the leper part of the community of disciples.

This is one of the reasons God wants us to ask Him to help us. He could choose to act without our ever asking, and sometimes He does do that. Normally God waits for us to ask Him first. If we don’t ask Him, how will we be incorporated as a part of His ministry to the world? How will we bring glory to Jesus if we are unaware that it was He who helped us? Jesus’ choice for us is not only to bless us by giving us the good things that we need or want. His choice for us is also to include us in the revelation of His glory to the world, to include us in His community of disciples.

The man ignored Jesus’ instructions to go to the priests first. Instead, he went out and told everyone what Jesus had done for him. As people heard what Jesus had done for this man, the crowds became so large that Jesus had to leave the towns with their crowded streets and begin to minister in the countryside.

One of the challenges that most of us have when we want to share our Christian faith is that we aren’t quite sure where to start. Many people feel unqualified. They feel like they don’t know the Bible well enough. They don’t feel like they would know what to say. Again, this man is a good example for us. All he did to spread the gospel was to tell people what Jesus had done for him.

Has Jesus ever answered one of your prayers? That is a good place to begin sharing the gospel with others. Has Jesus ever brought you peace when you should have been in full panic mode? That's another good place to begin sharing the gospel. You don't need to know the Four Spiritual Laws set out in the tract created by Bill Bright of Campus Crusade. You don't need to know the order that the Minor Prophets appear in the Old Testament. All you need in order to start sharing the gospel is how you have experienced Jesus in your own life.

The good news we read from the Gospel today is that Jesus has compassion for us. He chooses to give us good gifts when we pray. So we can pray boldly. He wants us to pray. He wants us to ask Him for what we need. The good news is also that He chooses to incorporate us in what He is doing in the world. He chooses to use our lives as a testimony to His saving power. We don't have to be great theologians, or charismatic speakers to share the Gospel. All we have to do is be willing to tell people what Jesus has done for us.