

What Do I Expect from God?

-Jim Hyst-

You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures (Jas. 4:3).

What do you expect when you pray to God? Is it that His will be done or that your will be done? Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, "Ask, and it will be given to you," but do we interpret this as a platinum card by which God will grant my request simply by making one? Do we think that God is something like a glorious sugar-daddy who will dote on His whining children, granting them their every wish simply to get them off His back or buy their attention? I suspect that I, like many Christians, perhaps all, have fallen into the trap of trying in the words of John Eldredge "to make life work," or, more pointedly, work for me. When I was in business I thought that things ought to go right each day. Things should not break down. Product should always come out as expected. Deliveries should always be on time. Experience taught that not only would we have days in which things would not work right, but that most days would not work right. Yet, if I planted a garden I thought that the stuff ought to grow. I thought that it ought to rain enough for growth, disease ought not to afflict the produce, and varmints ought not to eat it. When I repaired something I always thought that my repairs should work well, and the first time. Frequently my repairs did not work well, and less frequently the first time. Experience showed me that prayer seemed to have little effect on making any given day go right. Eldredge suggests that it might have been God that was unravelling my success even when I was praying for it. He writes, "He thwarts us in our attempts to make life work so that our efforts fail, and we must face the fact that we don't really look to God for life." Maybe my prayers were too much of give me this or give me that and too little of help me to know You and Your will for my life. Perhaps we all have erred because as Eldredge says, "We see God as a means to an end rather than an end itself." Perhaps truly "we do not receive because we ask amiss (Jas. 4:3)."