

# OpenTheo

## STR Ruined the Experience of Corporate Prayer for Me

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### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to handle being aware of people misusing Scripture or misunderstanding how God works during corporate prayer, whether Jesus' followers would have understood his references to the cross and being crucified, and whether it's sinful to debate extra-biblical speculations.

- \* When praying corporately, how do I handle being aware of people misusing Scripture or misunderstanding how God works now that I've learned where they're going wrong?
- \* Would Jesus' followers have understood his references to the cross and being crucified before it happened?
- \* Is it sinful to think about or debate extra-biblical speculations about things like whether or not life exists on other planets?

### Transcript

(upbeat music) (bell dings) This is Stanford Reasons, #straskpodcast. And this is the podcast where you send us your question on Twitter or through our website. And then Greg Cockel and I, Amy Hall, we'll see if we can answer your question for you.

- See if you can. (laughs) - All right, Greg, this first question comes from Timothy and I think it's a really good question because it's something I had to do with kind of in general. Well, you'll see.

- Okay. - You'll see. When I was first getting my degree at Biola, and I think it's a question a lot of people have as they're learning a lot of things.

- Okay. - This seems to come up. - All right.

- Your apologetics degree, your master's, your NA, okay. - As a longtime student of STR, I've come to realize something recently. In one sense, STR has ruined the experience of corporate prayer for me.

Too many people pray, misusing scripture, misunderstanding how God works or just say silly things. How do we navigate this, staying useful to the church body? And I think this applies to more than just prayer. - Yeah.

- So when I say this comes up, I think it comes up in a lot of different ways. - Yeah, I agree, but I'm just gonna take exception with the wording. What has happened is people who pray inappropriately ruin the experience of corporate prayer.

What standard reason is done is give an insight into things that help others see when prayer is done inappropriately, okay? And that's not a vice, that's a virtue. So maybe that sounds defensive, but I'm just saying. I understand exactly what Timothy is talking about.

Okay, I understand entirely. And it's not just prayer, it's also preaching. It's also conversations with other people who take off on tangents and make biblical application that just totally unsound.

And what we have to learn to do is eat the meat and throw away the bones. The prayer may be a genuine prayer, but if they quote, "As long as two or three are gathered in your name, there you are in their midst." So therefore we're praying here. That makes me wonder, now I know why you don't get my prayers answered, 'cause Jesus isn't right here with me.

There's only one of me. He's over there with those two or three people. Can't hear me by myself.

That would be kind of a ridiculous application of that way of viewing the verse. That's a total misunderstanding of the passage. It's not talking about corporate prayer at all in that passage in Matthew, in any event.

So somebody says that. I had somebody say that recently when I was, a mature Christian, I just ignored it and then paid attention to the prayer. So it didn't ruin corporate prayer for me.

It just means I gotta eat the meat and throw away the bones. So I've just got, oh yeah, that's, didn't apply. No, that wasn't an issue.

But, and if the prayer is an unsound prayer because of the unsound use of scripture, I don't give an amen to it. I just let them pray it. But yeah, that's a problem.

It's kind of like when you're really good at some particular thing, some discipline, and then they have a movie that features details about your discipline and you say, oh, look at all these things that are wrong. They did all this dumb stuff that you'd never do in real life. Being in my discipline is ruined movies for me now.

Well, you know, okay. I can understand the objection, but this is where, what's the alternative? Just to stay believing false things or is it better to believe two things and apply those truths in our own life and then just tolerate when less knowledgeable, more naive Christians on these issues manifest the wrong things in their prayers or in their preaching. Now, sometimes it's critical.

In other words, there are big deals with people misrepresent, but most of the time, especially in group prayer, it's just innocence, naivety, and we just overlook that as an older brother or sister in Christ and we just kind of flow with it. And that builds a virtue in our life just to overlook those things. I don't know, with regards to that particular thing, that would be my response.

I don't know if you have any further thoughts on that, Amy, even. So like I said, this was something, whenever you start learning something, that was a great illustration when you see a movie and it's your own profession and you think that's not how it is. So this is a definite danger of character going on here that I think we need to deal with when we are learning things.

And in fact, I even remember asking Craig Hazen when I was in the program, I remember asking him about this, like I don't know how to deal with this because I don't wanna get irritated with people, I don't wanna be arrogant, I don't want any of those things, but I seriously did not know how to deal with this. And so I've-- Craig Hazen, who ran the MA in apologize if I will write. - Right, exactly.

So I've had to think about this and I think part of the issue here is we have to change the way we're looking at the other people who are in our church who don't know the things that we know. And I think the first thing to remember is the passage in Ephesians 4 that talks about how Jesus gave all these different gifts to the church so that we could all work together to build up the body of Christ so that we become mature. And so we each have our part, and you know, Paul talks about how there's an eye and there's a hand and there's all these different parts of the body and God brings them together so that we can give our gifts and create a mature man, a mature body of believers.

So what I realized ultimately is that you have this gift of this knowledge and this understanding that you have been given because of your studying, because of your natural gifts, whatever it is. And the people around you who don't have that gift, it's not-- This is a result of God's design, not of their failure. It's actually God bringing people together who have different gifts.

So their weakness is an opportunity for you to serve them just as your weakness is an opportunity for them to serve you. So you're playing your part in the body and it's not a surprise that other people need what you have. That's by design, that's what we're there to do.

So it doesn't make sense to look down on them for lacking the thing that we were put in that body to give to them. - I got it. And so what I do is I try, and this is kind of the image I eventually came to, when you have a gift, and this can be with any gift, maybe somebody is really good at music and worship, or maybe somebody's really good at serving, and they look down on people who aren't as good at serving.

- Can't hold a tune. - So what I try and visualize here is, my job is to get down in the trenches below the people around me in order to lift them up, not to look down on them in the trenches, I'm to get below them, and I'm to lift them up with what I have. So when you see someone who is misunderstanding something, that's your opportunity to help them, not in an arrogant way, but in a way that can help them to know God better and know his word better.

And the key thing to remember here is that your gift makes you a servant, not a master, a servant. That's what our gifts are for, and that's what we should be expecting to use them for. It's a whole, hopefully that'll help people look at this a little bit differently.

- Right, right. - 'Cause I think everybody struggles with this. I get this question all the time, and it is hard, but we just have to remember, the reason why the people around us don't have what things we have is so that we can serve them.

- Right, well said. Okay, Greg, let's go to a question from H.J. Miller. Jesus refers to the cross in being crucified quite a few times before his own crucifixion.

How would his remarks be conceived by his followers? Were they familiar enough with the concept of the cross in crucifixion to understand the deeper meaning at that particular moment? - Oh no, I don't think they understood it all. And they certainly understood what it meant to be crucified as a means of death, and also to rise from the dead. But when Jesus spoke frankly about his crucifixion and his resurrection to come, they didn't know what to make of it.

And the text says as much. They didn't know what that meant. And this is why when Jesus died on the cross, it was a stunner to them, and they were like for a couple of days, what's up with that? They were completely discouraged 'cause they saw everything that Jesus had done, all the miraculous things.

John had told him this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Now I don't think they were thinking so much in terms of that aspect of Jesus, but certainly the other part that John said when he's going to thoroughly clean the threshing floor and gather the wheat and then burn up the chaff. And so yeah, they're on for that.

And then Jesus dies, and then he rose from the dead. It was like, we don't even know what to make of this. Remember the road to Emmaus? And there's Jesus then saying, oh, stupid.

You slow to understand this. And then he's got to explain it all to them. Now then their eyes are open a little bit, but it still takes them all to figure a lot of these details out.

And so they were culturally expecting something entirely different. There was no expectation that the Messiah would die and rise again from the dead. And NT Wright goes to Great Pains in his massive book on the resurrection to document this.

They had no expectation of this kind of thing. And even though during the ministry, his ministry is training of his disciples, he mentioned this a number of times. But even the Texas, I just don't, wait, they didn't know what he was talking about.

They couldn't figure it out. Because it was so foreign to what they expected of the Messiah. - So they, but they did know what the cross and they did know what crucifixion was.

- Of course, crucifixions were a normal thing that happened. - So they were familiar with that concept. It's just they didn't know exactly what Jesus was telling them.

Now when he said things like, you have to take up your cross and follow me. And those who gain their life will lose it. And those who lose their life for my sake will gain it.

I think there's a certain sense in which they would understand a little bit of that, right? - Oh, certainly. And taking up your cross, I mean, the idea of shouldering the cross, apparently it was the custom of people who were to be crucified to shoulder their cross on the way to the execution site, just as Jesus did. But so that would make sense.

It's a metaphor in the culture that would make sense. Take up your cross and then be crucified. We use the term crucified.

Yeah, I can crucify it man. Well, we don't mean literally, we mean it figuratively and they might have understood some of these reference to be figurative, but you know, what they, what actually happened, they did not anticipate that. They wouldn't have understood the idea of dying for someone else.

Like that concept, when he said dying on the cross, they wouldn't have understood that meant serving others in some way because that hadn't happened yet. So they didn't fully understand what Jesus was gonna do. But I think at the kind of a basic level, they at least understood it had something to do with death.

Right? - Well, I'm thinking of John three. So just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, of course that's a reference to numbers and how the people had a plague of serpents, poisonous serpents 'cause they were bad and this is their punishment, but they could look at the serpent on the pole that was lifted up by Moses. And if they looked upon that, that act of trust would initiate a healing by God in them if they got bit by the serpent.

And what John writes is just, well, this is Jesus speaking, just as Moses lifted up the serpent on the pole, so shall the son of man be lifted up. Hmm, wonder what that means. That could be ambiguous at that point.

And then the famous verse, for God's love the world that he gave is only we've gotten some that whoever should believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life. Okay, so there's a hint at salvation there and this reference to the pole and then in John 12, Jesus says, "If I be lifted up from the earth, "I will call all men to myself." And the next line says this, he said to indicate the manner of his death. So he's making another somewhat veiled reference to his own crucifixion, but John has got to editorialize about the comment towards the end of the first century that Jesus was hinting at all these things and sometimes expressing it directly, but they just didn't have a mindset.

And so even in the upper room discourse, I think Jesus says, "You don't understand things now, "but you're going to understand them." Okay, and a lot of the stuff has been laid in place for their future understanding, which is why the Holy Spirit would be given to them so that they would recall everything that Jesus had said and he would guide them into all truth. Okay, that's not a passage, obviously, that is meant to apply to all Christians because Jesus was referring to the disciples in their earthly tutelage with Christ during that time. And so all these things that happened, they didn't understand them all, but it all kind of came together after the resurrection.

- It's kind of like when you're watching a movie like the Sixth Sense or something that has a twist at the end where you're watching all the way through and you're taking in all of these little bits here and there and then right when you find out the whole point of the movie, suddenly all those things fall into place and they make sense. So they made some sort of sense as you're going along. - Yeah, yeah.

- But they don't click into place until you see the piece that was missing in the period. - In that movie, the Sixth Sense, which is a great illustration of this, it's a very fun movie too, where the kids as I see dead people. And who's the main actor there? - Bruce Willis.

- Bruce Willis. Sorry, I'm not gonna recall it really quickly, but Bruce Willis, you see these scenes that you interpret in one sense in light of the context of what's going on, but then at the end with the twist, you see all of those scenes in a very different light, no spoilers here, but it is a fun movie to watch and very interesting. - Okay, let's go to a question from Todd from Burbank.

Some speculate about extra-biblical realities, such as if life exists on other planets, not mentioned in the Bible. Myself, I'm satisfied with what God reveals in scripture, but curious about your perspective on such speculation. Is it sinful to think about or debate such things? - I don't think it's sinful to think about it.

Yeah, I think you have to be careful about debate because there are warnings against

straining at nats, so to speak, inconsequential, and fussing about them. What Paul refers to is genealogies and things like that. And I think there are a couple of places where he makes references to that.

And so if things don't really matter on a whole host of things, not just theological things, why are we getting in a fuss in a way that creates negative attitudes or negative energy or gets people pitted one against the other? And when I was younger, I was much more willing to do that. That is to pit myself against others that I thought were mistaken. And there's a whole lot of things I just let slide, which I think is healthier.

And if they have no consequence, why I was listening to my daughters the other day, well, I've had that at a restaurant before. No, you haven't. Well, I know that my first daughter said she'd had it at the restaurant, had had it at the restaurant, 'cause I'd been there with her when she had it.

I don't know why my other daughter had it. I said, no, you haven't. That contributes nothing to the conversation.

So that's just kids, teenagers, right? So, but that's, you get all the equipment doing that. And so when it comes to aliens and stuff like that, I think there are interesting, there's a discussion that can be had here. And in fact, ironically, in the next couple of weeks, I'll be filming for a documentary.

I'm on that issue. Okay, but God can do it every once. There could be aliens all over the planet.

I mean, all over this universe, we don't know. And we probably never will know because the Bible doesn't speak to it. And there is no practical way that we will ever be able to have any communication with anybody else, even in our galaxy.

Probably not even in our solar system, 'cause we have no reason to believe anybody exists there. The qualifications for a habitable planet are unique to Earth in the Goldilocks zone and not the others. And then, our closest star is so far away.

And even if there are other planets, the possibility of habitability are astronomically slim. And I'm using my words carefully. People say, "Hey, just do the math." Drake's equation, this came up a number of years ago, and they had these qualifications for life.

And they thought, "Well, there's these billions of millions "of planets that probably have life on it, "kind of like ours." But of course, Drake's equation was working with a very, very few factors. And now we know a lot more, and forget about it, it's not gonna happen. That's why the secular scientists wrote this book called Rare Earth because Earth is rare.

So we have, scientifically, we have no reason to believe that there's anyone on other

planets. Theologically, we have no reason to believe that there's anyone on other planets. And if there were, there's no way we'd be able to find out.

Okay, so if you wanna do science fiction, and speculate and say, "This, that, it, it, it, fine." But it's not worth getting in a fit about. - Yeah, I agree with you, Greg. There's nothing wrong with being curious about these things.

And in fact, as you're thinking about these things in terms of theology, sometimes it can help you think through your theology. What would be the implications of this? What would that mean for this or that doctrine? And you can actually come to know those things better. As long as you understand that you really don't know, and it is speculation, and I do think debate probably, because of that verse you mentioned, is probably not a good idea.

- No, Hugh Ross, who is an astronomer, astrophysicist, and has a Christian organization for many years called Reasons to Believe, we're friends of his who we've had him on the show before and work with that enterprise. His view is that there's no reason to believe it, theologically, there's certainly not any opportunity to connect with them. And if there were, they'd either be unfallen or unredeemable.

And the reason they would be unredeemable is because, this is his rationale, but is that Jesus became incarnate as a human, to rescue humans, okay? So he's not gonna be incarnate as a, you know, ET of some sort, because he's already a human, and he will always be a human, always making intercession for us. I guess someone could argue, well, maybe the Holy Spirit could become an ET in an incarnation or whatever, but this is where I think there's gonna be theological problems, and this is why sometimes talking about the possibilities here end up helping us refine theological categories. - All right, that's all the time we have.

Thank you for your questions. We look forward to hearing from you on Twitter or through our website. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

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