**WHY WE PRAY**

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There are many approaches to take in discussing the subject of prayer. For example:

* Learning how to pray by studying the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6 and Luke 11.
* Studying the prayers found in the Psalms and other books of the Bible (i.e. Psalm 3:1-7; John 17:1-23).
* Examining the great men and women of prayer throughout the Bible (i.e. Nehemiah, David, Mary, Paul, and especially Jesus).

I believe that prayer is the action in life that we need most to do, but do the least. Therefore, before we study how to pray, who to pray to, and what to say, I believe that we should first understand some of the important reasons why we ought to continually be in prayer.

**1.** **Prayer** is the way we unburden our hearts of the anxiety and guilt that plagues us because of sin. It is amazing that people will try everything under the sun to deal with their anxieties and fears (drugs, self-help methods, escapes, and devices) before finally coming to God in prayer.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.
- I Peter 5:6-7

Notice that Peter doesn't say that we have to work out our problems and give them to God for approval, nor does he suggest that we pray and ask God for the solutions so we can take care of the problems with His divine help (e.g. "God, give me the plan…!"). He simply says to take the burden off of your heart and give it to God — that's it! I'm not saying that this absolves us of the responsibility for our lives and problems, but through prayer we can detach ourselves from the anxiety, fear, and stress caused by these things.

Prayer serves us in the same way when we use it to deal with the problems we have due to the sin in our lives. As Christians, we often sin and fail in living as we ought. God knows this and has given us the avenue of prayer as the starting point in addressing these issues. Yes, we have to resist temptation and secure the help we need to do away with sinful behavior, but as John writes, the first action in combatting sinfulness is to acknowledge it as such and appeal to God for help and forgiveness in sincere prayer.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- I John 1:8-9

For the non-Christian, forgiveness is obtained through baptism (Acts 2:38). However, for the Christian, God has provided the spiritual exercise of prayer to accomplish spiritual healing. We need to pray because through this action we leave with God the worry caused by trials and the guilt due to our sins. No other method is more effective to these ends than prayer.

**2. We need to pray** because prayer initiates spiritual and physical blessings for ourselves and others (Matthew 6:31-32).

In Matthew 7:7, Jesus tells us that we should ask for the things we need and God (who knows what we need) will provide according to His will and purpose.

Our society prides itself on being independent. The self-made man/woman is admired, and we strive to be fully self-sufficient or at least the dominant partner in any type of cooperative enterprise we undertake. As Americans it goes against our training, history, and character to be dependent yet, in reality, this is what we are — totally dependent on God!

* He keeps the universe in order (Colossians 1:17).
* He gives life and rules over death (Job 14:5).

From Adam to the last person born, all depend on God.

Prayer is our expression of dependence on God. We cannot think of or enumerate all of the things needed to sustain our lives from day to day, but in prayer we express our dependence on God for supplying everything we need. In addition to the physical things required, prayer is also the way we access the "spiritual" blessings necessary for growth in the kingdom of God.

In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul describes certain blessings that are only obtainable through prayer. There are no physical ways to generate things like spiritual wisdom, a clearer knowledge of God, and an understanding of the eternal life we are called to through Jesus Christ other than through an active prayer life.

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention *of you* in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
- Ephesians 1:15-18

**3. Prayer** is necessary because it is through prayer that we sanctify (purify) everything that we have in order to consume or use it with a clear conscience and a joyful heart.

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.
- I Timothy 4:4-5

Is there anything in this world that is not imperfect because of sin? Are we not compromised in some way no matter what we do? For example:

* Our taxes are often used for ungodly things (i.e. to provide abortions), and this forces our cooperation with evil against our knowledge or will.
* The places we work may not do things in completely righteous ways. This indirectly causes us to participate in unrighteousness by association.
* What we consume as food, ideas, entertainment, etc., is tainted with worldliness, imperfection, and sinfulness.
* Our own motives in what we say and do are often mixed with pride, ignorance, or lust.

How can we, as disciples of Christ seeking to live righteously, survive in this world? How can we continue to live, breathe, and consume the things of this place without violating our consciences day, after day, after day? We could never have peace of mind in any area of life if we did not have God's grace, and we could not express our gratitude and relief for this grace if it wasn't for prayer. Everything created by God is good, however all good things have been spoiled because of sin. Thankfully, all of the flawed things become acceptable through prayer and thanksgiving. Without prayer we remain in the world, and of the world, and never rise above the world.

**Summary**

I believe that Jesus was a man of prayer because he understood the necessity of prayer within this context:

1. Jesus was without sin personally, but He prayed often to remove the emotional burdens caused by His ministry.

* Matthew 14:23 - He went off alone to pray after feeding the 5000.
* Matthew 26:36 - He prayed while in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane.
* Luke 22:31 - He prayed for Peter's ability to fight off Satan's temptation.

2. He understood the purpose of prayer in acknowledging the Father's will as the source of all blessings.

* He prayed before multiplying the loaves and fishes to feed the 5000 (Matthew 14:9).

3. Jesus clothed Himself with human flesh and became part of a sinful world (e.g. was part of the Jewish nation, observed the rules of the Jewish religion, lived with His human family and disciples, etc.) but he took ordinary bread and wine, and through His word and prayer established these emblems as a holy remembrance of His death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 26:25).

We often wonder why Jesus, a Divine being, needed to pray. One possible answer is that it was Jesus' human nature that was active in prayer.

* He dealt with the pressure and sin in this world through prayer.
* He secured the blessings needed to survive in this world through prayer.
* He instituted holy actions to remember Him by through the action of prayer.

**Exhortation**

I think we fail to have a satisfying, effective prayer life because we concentrate too much on the time, regularity, and method of our prayers. Focusing on these things does not move us to pray. Actually, it does the opposite. It makes prayer just another problem that we have to deal with because we quickly recognize how inconsistent and shallow we are in this area. Jesus did not have a regular "prayer time" or method. He used the avenue of prayer as the tool for communication with God when dealing with the burdens of His ministry, the sinfulness He faced in the world, His personal needs, and thanksgiving.

In the same way we should also pray when we need to unburden our hearts of anxiety and guilt, express our dependence on God, or call on Him to purify us in order to live in this fallen world. Prayer is the method that God has given to us to accomplish these things. It is only when prayer becomes a natural spiritual reflex that it will cease to be a forced habit sustained by will power, and become a natural function of our inner being powered and directed by the Holy Spirit.

But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
- Romans 8:25-27

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* Prayer
* Invitation