

Reasons for Prayer

Why do we pray?

Luther wrote,

To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.

Prayer is more to be experienced than defined. It is a conversation with God. Prayer is our entrance into God's presence; and we find Him to be the answer to our deepest longings. Sometimes need or circumstances bring us to our knees, where we plead with Him to remove the bitter cup we are given to drink. Other times it is our own deep hunger, having tasted the world's emptiness and the longing for Jesus only that remains. Prayer is meeting with God, who alone satisfies.

Phillip Melanchthon

 Trouble and perplexity drive us to prayer,
 and prayer driveth away trouble and perplexity.

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer.

Maybe the simplest answer to why we must pray is that Jesus prayed, He taught us to pray, and He explained prayer.

1. Jesus Prayed

It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. (Luke 6:12)

Summed up in the concept of communication between friends.

Jesus had been carrying on His ministry and had already stirred up some opposition by healing on the Sabbath and insulting the religious leaders.

They were "filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus." (v 11)

Afterwards Jesus selected His 12 disciples.

This was at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry and he was already meeting up with those who rejected Him. His answer was to pray. (as was His custom).

- Jesus went to a place of silence and solitude (to the mountain).
- He "spent the whole night" is a rare Gk. word which describes an all-night vigil of a physician caring for a patient. This was a crucial time in Jesus' ministry – few appreciate the gravity of this moment.

Swindoll writes,

By this time, the disciples of Jesus numbered in the thousands, from which He had to select a few to become His closest companions. They would assist in His miracles, share His meals, travel with Him everywhere to witness every moment, hear His sermons repeated a hundred times, learn to replicate His ministry, and ultimately carry on without His physical presence. This up-close-and-personal training would transform a select group of disciples into apostles. Disciples follow and learn. Apostles exercise delegated authority.¹

2. Jesus taught us how to pray - The Disciples' Prayer.

When His disciples saw Jesus pray, they asked Him to teach them to pray.

He gave them The Lord's Prayer; which was really a pattern for prayer, even though it is often quoted as a prayer. Don't be like the Hypocrites,

Jesus said,

"But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you...pray, then, in this way... (Matt.6:6-9)

"Pray like this..." This is the pattern for prayer.

Addressing God as Father, as holy, as King

Asking God's kingdom rule to come

Asking God's will to be done

Asking for our needs to be met

Asking for help in forgiving others

Asking for help in resisting the evil one's temptations.

The opposite is Pagan Prayer: always involve bargaining, bribing, begging; reducing the deity to the level of a vending machine: insert enough money, perform the correct button-pushing ritual, and out pops the prize. The deity might require some additional shaking, but that's just part of the process.

Prayer for the Christian is based on a personal relationship with a Father God who is absolutely sovereign, infinitely wise, and perfectly loving.

3. Jesus explained prayer

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's New Testament Insights: Luke*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), p. 149.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus included other teachings on prayer.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” (Matt. 7:7)

Charles Stanley writes,

Every time we pray to God, seeking His will, there are two things He wants to show us. He wants to show us Himself, and He wants to show us what He is able to do. Is there anything greater than seeking God and knowing His power?

Jesus described prayer as asking and receiving, seeking and finding, knocking and having the door opened.

The Open Bible says,²

- **Prayer is first of all, asking and receiving.** When you know the will of God regarding a need, whether it be material or spiritual, you can ask and receive. This is prayer according to the revealed will of God.

Asking:

James declares this simple thought:

“...You do not have because you do not ask.” (James 4:2)

The Will of God:

John wrote,

“This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to this will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14).

- **Prayer is also seeking and finding.** When you do not know the will of God regarding a need, whether it be material or spiritual, then you are to seek His will in prayer concerning this need until you find it. This is prayer for knowledge of the unrevealed will of God.

James wrote specifically addressing our need for wisdom when we face trials,

² The Open Bible, *New American Standard Bible*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1979), p. 919.

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5)

In every situation we must begin our quest for truth and the will of God.

Prayer is the ideal place to start.

Paul writes,

“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes 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.” (Rom. 8:26-27).

When the Children of Israel had begun their exile to Babylon for their disobedience they were very discouraged and disheartened.

Jeremiah wrote them a letter explaining God’s will to them,

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, “and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,” declares the Lord, “and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.”

Sometimes the will of God involves consequences – disciplines for sin. God used Babylon to bring Israel back to Him. We can choose our sin, but we do not choose our consequences. Some of the trials we face are from God. How we respond to them will sometimes determine their duration. In other instances, they will remain until God’s purposes are fulfilled. Paul is such an example of discovering God’s will through prayer during times of trials.

“Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me - to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (1 Cor. 12:7-10)

Prayer is asking according to the will of God and receiving answers.

Prayer is seeking for God's will and finding it.

Prayer is also knocking and having the door open.

- “When you know the will of God and yet you find a closed door, you are to knock, and keep knocking until God opens the door. This is tenacious prayer – prayer for mountain-moving faith. Knocking prayer perseveres until the impossible becomes the possible. This is miracle-working prayer.”

Jesus gave us a primary example of prayer that does not give up.

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’ For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’”

And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:1-8)

- Pray continually – at all times.
- Never give up – lose heart

‘Knocking prayer’ is a tenacious pestering prayer. It is a prayer of faith that does not quit, it continues to believe and keeps asking. The major verbs of asking, seeking and knocking are in the continuous tense, meaning, “keep on...asking...” Jesus said we ought to “pray and not lose heart” – never give up.

The widow in the parable was relentlessly hard on the unjust judge until he gave in to her demands. Luke used the term “wear me out,” which literally means “hit me under the eye; *to black the eyes*”. The implication is that she tormented him day and night.

The widow got justice in a society where widows often taken advantage of because of her persistence. Because our **just** God hears and answers prayers of faith, we are encouraged by Jesus to never give up praying.

The sheer volume of Scripture dedicated to prayer should have a flaming effect in our lives as it is said of Johnathan Edwards, when truth “catches fire.”

Tim Keller writes, **Edwards became so richly saturated with Scripture that, if you poked him with a fork, he would immediately begin to bleed Bible.** And when we *bleed* Bible, that is, when our demeanors show that we are *into* the truth because the truth has gotten so *in-to* us, it becomes infectious and contagious. **For us and for the people that we lead, the virtues of the Kingdom—of love and the fruit of the Spirit—are caught and not achieved.**³

Johnathan Edwards' Personal Narrative: *When truth catches fire.*

*Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. **This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception ...**which continued as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity. I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects.*

³ Scott Sauls, *Why Doctrine Still Matters*, Oct. 19, 2018, Newsletter