

LEARNING TO PRAY

Why Pray?

INTRODUCTION: As we begin another adventurous journey through the Word of God, we are on the track of one of the most abundant subjects which lives and moves in the pages of Holy Scripture: prayer. To be sure, the material on the subject is so plentiful that we can only consider a minority of the references. Our selection of both texts and topics will be governed by our purpose.

The purpose of our study is not to develop a rigid theology of prayer, although we will certainly examine what the Bible teaches us that prayer is and how it works. Our purpose is not to answer every conceivable question we might raise about prayer, although many of our most common questions will be addressed. The purpose of my writing and I trust of your study and our teaching is for us to learn to pray. Series Title There are 2 styles of learning: 1) Greek – idea, and 2) Hebrew – apply. (Ex. Jeremy – prayer of faith – “Thank you for my dog. I don’t have a dog.”)

Perhaps such a purpose seems a bit elementary. Many of us have been praying for years, some of us for decades. But some of Jesus’ disciples had no doubt been men of prayer for a long time when they said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” (Luke 11:1) The problem was not that they knew nothing about prayer, but that they did not know enough. It was not that they never prayed, but they did not pray enough. And it is the same with us. Will you pray this prayer with me?

My Father, I acknowledge to You today that what I know about prayer in comparison with what You can teach me about prayer is like a thimble of water compared to the sea. I confess that my prayer life falls far short of what you want it to be. So Father, I join my voice with the voice of the disciples of old and cry out, “Lord, teach me to pray.”

PRIMARY TEXTS: Jeremiah 33:3, Exodus 33:1-17, Ezekiel 22:30-31

We are not likely to invest much time or energy learning to do something that we are not convinced is worthwhile. Therefore, we need to ask at the outset the question that will motivate our study and practice of prayer: Why pray?

It would not be wrong to say, “**Because the Bible says we should pray.**” It does.

2 Chronicles 7:14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Prayer is one-fourth of the formula for revival

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

Prayer is the substitute for worry

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray without ceasing,

Prayer is the continuous expression of a godly life.

We could add to that reason, "**Because Jesus says we should pray.**" He does.

Matthew 6:6b ... pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*...

Matthew 6:9 In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Luke 18:1 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

Jesus said, pray, pray, always pray!

These commands should be sufficient to move us to prayer out of sheer obedience. But by themselves the commands do not answer our heart's question, "Why pray?" They only rephrase it to say, "**Why does the Bible say we should pray?**" Let us examine several passages of Scripture to attempt to search out the answer to the question, "Why pray?"

I. BECAUSE OF PRAYER'S EFFECT ON US.

- A. Jeremiah 33:3 'Call to Me (God), and I (God) will answer you (man), and show you (man) great and mighty things, which you (man) do not know.'

Identify to whom each of the pronouns refer. Man calls to God. God answers man. God tells man great and hidden things. **One reason to pray is because God enlightens our minds when we pray. Sometimes it means changing our mind or will.**

- B. Philippians 4:7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

After the instruction to pray given in Philippians 4:6 above, Paul tells these believers that one result of prayer is that they will have the peace of God which passes (surpasses) all understanding.

- C. Psalm 51:1-2 ¹ Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.

Prayer brings personal revival. It did for David. Note the renewal of his heart in Psalm 101. (Because of the Prayer of Confession, we go from Psalm 51:1-2 to Psalm 101:1-3)

Psalm 101:1-3 ¹ I will sing of mercy and justice; To You, O LORD, I will sing praises. ² I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. ³ I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me.

Great revival has always been preceded by great praying.

“Charles G. Finney was called of God to the field of evangelism. He preached with tremendous power from God, and a dormant church was roused to spiritual power. The power behind the throne of Finney was a praying man who was an invalid, who was carried from place to place. This man never appeared in public, but his room at the hotel became a very Bethel, a house of God, from which the voice of petition continually ascended.” ¹

II. BECAUSE OF PRAYER’S EFFECT ON GOD.

Some might desire to restrict prayer’s effect to the one who does the praying. But the Biblical testimony shows us that such is not the case. Many are the passages that demonstrate that the pleas of man have an effect upon God.

- A. Genesis 18:20-32 ²⁰ And the LORD said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know.” ²² Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. ²³ And Abraham came near and said, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare *it* for the fifty righteous that were in it? ²⁵ Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” ²⁶ So the LORD said, “If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.” ²⁷ Then Abraham answered and said, “Indeed now, I who *am but* dust and ashes have taken it

upon myself to speak to the Lord: ²⁸ Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for *lack of five*?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy *it*." ²⁹ And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do *it* for the sake of forty." ³⁰ Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do *it* if I find thirty there." ³¹ And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy *it* for the sake of twenty." ³² Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy *it* for the sake of ten."

We cannot read this passage without observing that Abraham's pleading with God visibly affected the Lord Almighty. **God began with the determination to destroy Sodom. He concluded with the decision to spare the city if ten righteous people were found in it.**

B. Exodus 33:1-3, 12-17 ¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Depart *and* go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' ² And I will send *My* Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. ³ *Go up* to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you *are* a stiff-necked people."

¹² Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people.' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.' ¹³ Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation *is* Your people." ¹⁴ And He said, "My Presence will go *with you*, and I will give you rest." ¹⁵ Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go *with us*, do not bring us up from here. ¹⁶ For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who *are* upon the face of the earth." ¹⁷ So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

Israel had proved to be a stubborn, sin-bent people. Therefore **God said that He would send an angel before them but that He would not personally accompany them as they journeyed to the Promise Land. But Moses prayed and asked God to go.**

Exodus 33:17 ¹⁷ So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

It is not hard to believe that prayer affects man. It is more difficult to understand how prayer likewise affects God. Perhaps we can more fully comprehend both of these marvelous truths by putting them together to see a third and most marvelous reason for why we should pray.

III. BECAUSE PRAYER IS AN ACT OF PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND MAN.

- A. Ezekiel 22:30-31 ³⁰ So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. ³¹ Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord GOD.

The context of these verses is the judgment of God upon the nation of Israel. The sins of the nation are described and no one can doubt that judgment is well deserved. But Ezekiel 22:30 is shocking. It says that God looked for a man to serve as a bridge between Him and Israel, someone to intercede, to stand in the gap. If He could have found such a person, just one, He would not have destroyed the land. But because the Lord could not find a man who would pray, God poured out His wrath on Israel.

This is an astounding truth that when understood will drive us to our knees in prayer. **God imposed a limit upon His own action.** He did not do what He desired because there was no man to cooperate, no man to enter into a partnership with God. While this principle may be startling, it is fully consistent with the whole of Scripture.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

God is sovereign. He can do anything that He desires to do without man's help. God is self-sufficient. Man cannot supply something God is lacking because God has no lack.

But in the beginning God gave dominion to man and woman over all the earth.

The word dominion means "rule" and is used to refer to a king's authority over his kingdom.

Nehemiah 9:28 "But after they had rest, They again did evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, So that they had dominion over them; Yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; And many times You delivered them according to Your mercies,

This delegated dominion in no way usurps the sovereign authority of Almighty God. But it allows man the privilege of sharing that authority.

Consider an illustration. A man owns many businesses and possesses a fortune. By signing his name to one of the company checks he can draw upon his funds kept by a bank. One day he voluntarily signs a card at the bank which authorizes the bank to require two signatures on the checks of one of his companies, his own and the business manager's. Now what is done within the company requires the activity of both the owner and the manager. The manager cannot spend on his own because he does not own the funds. But neither does the owner spend on his own for he has delegated the authority to cosign the checks to his manager. For the company to spend money, both signatures are required.

Do you know an equivalent term for business manager? Steward!

1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

**God is the owner. People are His delegated managers.
Prayer is the check requiring both signatures.**

John 14:13-14 ¹³ And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

John 16:23-24 ²³ “And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

The reason Israel was not spared in Ezekiel 22 was that God could not find a man to cosign.

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

This says that our prayers are sometimes not answered because God will not cosign some of our requests.

Effective prayer requires 2 things.

1) In God’s Will – He cosigns.

2) Our Prayer – Our signature. That means there could be nations unrevived, churches that don’t develop, lives that don’t grow, people not saved, problems not solved, which God is willing to do, but does not do because we don’t pray.

Prayer is a partnership with God.

Conclusion: If prayer is primarily useful because of its beneficial effect upon us then we might wait until we feel a pressing need for a blessing before we pray. If prayer is primarily a tool for getting God to do a certain thing we judge important, then we might pray only when such a need arises. But if indeed prayer is our means of exercising our partnership with God, then it becomes a very important part of our daily business of managing this world. Andrew Murray said, “God’s will needs prayer as its indispensable condition.”

¹ W.B. Walker, The Power of Prayer, p. 38.