

# Why We Pray

At its core, Christianity is a *relationship*, a relationship between God and a person such as you or me. But because God is spirit in nature, we can't relate to Him as we would a friend whom we can see and hear and meet for coffee on a typical Tuesday afternoon. No, the way we commune with God – the vehicle for fellowship with Him – is *prayer*, and prayer alone.

We learn of God's character by prayer. We learn of His preferences by prayer. We learn of His activity in the world by prayer. And it is by prayer that we learn how we can play a role in His ushering heaven down to earth.

Years ago I was shown a very simple diagram, illustrating the purpose of prayer. At the top was pictured the throne of God, and at the bottom were followers of Christ. On the right-hand side was a steady stream of plans that God wished to accomplish on earth, and on the left-hand side, a steady stream of prayers, prayed by faithful women and men of God.

The implication of the image was this: At the essence of prayer is a loop in which our heavenly Father, by His Spirit, places requests and petitions on our hearts, only for us to then offer them back to Him. What begins in heaven returns to heaven, via the mysterious power of prayer. In this way, prayer is not working to *change* our Father's mind; it's instead *finding* the mind of God

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There is a second reason we pray, which is to *have our deep-seated needs divinely met*. I've always loved the definition of prayer as "linking our nothingness to God's almightiness." Or in British preacher Charles Spurgeon's words, "Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the omnipotence of God." When we're wrestling our way through cancer treatments or wringing our hands over a

cupboard that is somehow bare, God says, "It is I who can supply what you need...just come to Me and ask."

"Without Me, you can do nothing," Jesus reminds us in John 15:5. "But with Me? All of your cares will be cared for. All that is Mine will be yours."

And so we pray. We invite the delightful nearness of God. We lean into the warm embrace of our Father. We accept with open arms the good gifts He desires to bestow. And oh, how good those gifts are! Let's not forget the last part of Jesus' parable that we looked at earlier:

*"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

- Luke 11:11-13

Our Father longs to give us the desires of our heart, when those desires align with His will. "No good thing will he withhold from them who walk uprightly," Psalm 84 promises. In the same way that an earthly father wishes to bless his children, not curse them, our heavenly Father says we can rest assured that there are no serpents or scorpions headed our way.

Think about it this way: Let's say my grandson, Ian, scurries up a tree and is hanging from a limb positioned very high from the ground. Just when he starts to wonder how on earth he's going to get down, he sees me happen by, "Daddy Jack!" he hollers. "Daddy Jack! Help me!"

I crane my neck skyward to find Ian swinging precariously from a tall branch and know that if I don't do something to intervene, the little guy is probably going to suffer a terrible fall. Now, do you think I'm going to take stock of Ian's behavior before I offer him a helping hand? "Ian, hold on just a second," I could say, "Let me check your

latest report card first. Let me have a talk with your mom and dad to be sure you're deserving of my assistance here..."

Of course not!

Even in my imperfect, sinful state, if a member of my family is in need of my help, I will move heaven and earth to provide it.

And the same is true for our God. He is able to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," Ephesians 3:20 promises. And not only is He able to do it; He does do it. "Open your mouth wide," Psalm 81:10 says, "and I will fill it." A loving promise from a loving God. When we are sick, He loves to heal us. When we are hungry, He loves to provide food. When we are hanging from a too-tall tree limb, there is nothing He loves to do more than to carry us safely back to the ground. This is the God we serve, my friend, the God who abundantly exceeds even our wildest dreams.

Granted, for some believers today, it is challenging to see God as loving, caring, and available because they have grown up in homes where their father was the opposite of all these things. "If my heavenly Father is anything like my earthly father," they think, "then I want nothing to do with Him."

If that is true for you, please be encouraged: Your heavenly Father will never let you down. He is at all times loving and tender; He is compassionate and kind. And He longs with deep-seated affection to relate with you as the best father would relate with his son.

But the reasons we pray roll on. In addition to prayer being a vehicle for connecting with God and for having our deepest needs met, prayer also is the means by which we help point others to faith in Christ. You and I both know people who have yet to receive God's gift of grace, and the first step we ought to take is to commit the matter to prayer. Only God, by His Spirit, can reach a neighbor, rescue a prodigal child, turn a wayward heart toward Him. By devoting ourselves to persistent prayer, we join Him in that noble work.

And then, finally, we pray because *Jesus commanded us to pray*. In Luke 11:2, just as Jesus was about to instruct the disciples in what to pray, He led with "When you pray." Notice He said, "when," not "if." There is both a human responsibility and a divine reassurance that work in tandem to accomplish answered prayer. We humbly come before the throne of grace with our passions and petitions and requests, and God then answers us by faithfully directing our steps.

When you and I arrive at heaven's gate someday, no doubt we will be amazed by our lack of faithfulness as it relates to prayer. We will see firsthand the vast storehouse of blessing God had reserved for us, if only we had asked for His intervention in our lives. "You have not because you ask not," James 4:2 says. What a fitting reminder to persistently pray while we still have life left to live! Indeed, nothing good, nothing great, nothing lasting, nothing holy ever can happen apart from prayer.

Rather than treating prayer as a last resort – imagine a friend telling you of a steep hill he is climbing in life and saying, "Well, I guess the only thing left to do is pray," to which you think to yourself, "Oh, my goodness...has it come down to that?" - begin to consider prayer as the high, holy privilege that it is. It has been said that we can do more than pray *after* we pray, but we cannot do more than pray *until* we pray. No person comes to faith in Jesus Christ apart from believing prayer. No person transforms the culture in which we live apart from prayer. No person serves as a committed disciple, a compelling witness, an effective parent, or a consistently loving spouse apart from the power of persistent prayer. It is *prayer* alone that yields fruitfulness in life, because it is prayer that connects us to God.

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