

Why Should You Pray?

It was the mid-1970s and my husband, Floyd, and I were with a group of Christian leaders called to bring the love of God to Africa. The scorching heat from the penetrating sun was nothing in comparison to the outpouring of the Son's power on the vast crowd of ebony faces and hungry hearts that stood before us.

The lame began to walk; the blind received their sight. Healings of every kind were happening before our very eyes. Twenty-three thousand people were miraculously healed as God's power swept over the crowd. I remember thinking, Lord, this is the book of Acts in action. As I sat on the platform watching this miraculous wave of God's power, I began to cry out to God, "Lord, why are we not seeing miracles such as these in our western culture? Is it because we are bogged down in traditions and doctrines?" I will never forget His reply: "No, Daughter, these people are receiving because they have no fear of man."

The fear of man is our greatest detriment to knowing and serving God. Only as we lay down our worries about what people think of us and what to expect of others can God honestly and openly speak into our lives. Often we have preconceived ideas of how a person must change before he or she can come to Christ. And yet when Jesus called us to be fishers of men (and women), He told us to go out and bring them in; He did not tell us to clean up the fish before reeling them into our churches. I have never seen a fish yet who was cleaned up before it was caught.

So what is prayer and why should we pray? Do our prayers really make a difference?

The Purpose of Prayer

Christians are called to a lifestyle of prayer, but many have

come to see prayer as nothing more than calling upon their heavenly Butler for daily service, or crying out to their heavenly Lifeguard when they are drowning in their daily circumstances. Certainly God has more for us than that. Jesus said that because He was going to the Father, we would do even greater works than He did (see John 14:12). When He spoke those words, He was not talking to a crowd of world-renowned Christian evangelists. No, He was speaking to every person who names Jesus as Lord and Savior. He was speaking to you and to me. Prayer is the responsibility of every Christian.

God's Word tells us to pray. But we don't pray just because we have to; we pray because talking to God is a privilege. Prayer is entering into relationship with God so we can determine His will in the matter and call His will into existence upon the earth. As you read the following verse, notice that talking to God on behalf of others carries a promise: "Therefore I exhort first of all that you make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for everyone, 2 for kings and for all who are in authority, *that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty*" (1 Tim. 2:1,2, italics added).

Much of the discontent and worry we as believers suffer is the result of disobedience to God's Word, which exhorts us to pray: With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints (Eph. 6:18). Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matt. 26:41). Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).

The Priority of Prayer

Prayer was the priority in Jesus' life. He considered it more important than physical rest, and He was commonly pictured praying all night (see Luke 6:12). Talking with the Father took priority over His social activity. Scripture often refers

to Jesus going off alone to be with the Father (see Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12). And, finally, Jesus made prayer a priority over His physical appetite. He fasted for long periods of time, withdrawing from physical food to release spiritual power (see Luke 4:2; Matt. 6:18,25,31; Heb. 7:25). Prayer was the primary communication link between Himself and the Father. Every major event and every minor decision in Jesus' life was shrouded with prayer. If we are to be Christlike, or like Christ, we must follow His example. Jesus did not pray because He had to; Jesus prayed because He wanted to be obedient to, united with and empowered by the Father. Prayer is to be our priority for those same reasons.

Someone has said that seven days without prayer makes one Christian weak. Prayer is the way that we, His branches, draw the nutrients we need from God the Vine to produce the fruit of His Spirit in our lives. And we do this because, as believers, prayer is to be our primary ministry. {eo}

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