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## Why Do We Pray?

### 1 Thessalonians 5:17: (NKJV) "pray without ceasing"

Prayer. It is a central activity of most any religion. For people who are very religious, prayer is one of the very basics of their lives. For many who are not normally religious, prayer comes into play when tragedy enters their life and they are suddenly faced with the mortality of themselves or their loved ones. Often, it seems as though the subject of our prayers is, well, ourselves. It seems that we pray when we need something or when we want something, for ourselves or our loved ones. So, is this the purpose for prayer - for our own desires to be noticed, or is there more to it than that? Stay with us as we look into the purpose, passion and power of prayer!

#### Questions for consideration:

1. What is prayer?
2. Who should pray?
3. What should we pray about?

#### 1. What is prayer?

**Merriam-Webster's Dictionary:** Prayer: *noun*



- 1a: an address (as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought; a set order of words used in praying;
- 1b: an earnest request or wish
- 2: the act or practice of praying to God or a god <kneeling in *prayer*>
- 3: a religious service consisting chiefly of prayers — often used in plural
- 4: something prayed for
- 5: a slight chance <haven't got a *prayer*>

#### **Prayer in the Old Testament:**



- Strong's #7881 siychah (see-khaw'); reflection; be extension, devotion:
- Strong's #7879 siyach (see'-akh); a contemplation; by implication, an utterance:
- Strong's #1156 be` a' (Aramaic) (beh-aw'); or be` ah (Aramaic) (beh-aw'); to seek or ask:
- Strong's #6419 palal (paw-lal'); to judge (officially or mentally); to intercede, pray:
- Strong's #8605 tephillah (tef-il-law'); intercession, supplication; by implication, a hymn:
- (Supplication in the Old Testament: Essentially describing a manner in which we are to pray.)
- Strong's #8467 techinnah (tekh-in-naw'); graciousness; causatively, entreaty:
- Strong's #2603 chanan (khaw-nan'); properly, to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to favor, bestow; causatively to implore (i.e. move to favor by petition):

#### **Prayer in the New Testament:**

- Strong's #4335 proseuche (pros-yoo-khay'); prayer (worship); by implication, an oratory (chapel):
- Strong's #1189 deomai (deh'-om-ah-ee); to beg (as binding oneself), i.e. petition:
- Strong's #1162 deesis (deh'-ay-sis); a petition:

#### **Summation of Prayer, based upon Biblical words:**

- ⌘ Reflection
- ⌘ Devotion
- ⌘ A contemplation; by implication, an utterance
- ⌘ To intercede
- ⌘ To seek or ask
- ⌘ By implication, a hymn
- ⌘ Entreaty
- ⌘ To bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior
- ⌘ An oratory
- ⌘ Petition



We can say that prayer is method of communion and communication on the part of human beings directed towards a higher power - a god or goddess, an entity or a being, generally considered to be in the spirit realm. For many, their prayers are directed towards what they believe to be the mighty and all powerful Ruler of the Universe, while for others their prayers are directed towards one of many mighty ones. Again, names and interpretations will vary, but the basic concept remains the same. For the purposes of our discussion here, we will focus on the Almighty God of the Bible, as He is the Divine Being to which we direct our prayers.

## 2. Who should pray?



**Thought Question: Is prayer an entitlement or a privilege?**

There are many religious and cultural implements (tools) of prayer - we will list a few:

*Prayer Shawl:* a shawl with fringed corners worn over the head or shoulders by Jewish men especially during morning prayers

*Prayer Wheel:* a cylinder of wood or metal that revolves on an axis and contains written prayers and that is used in praying by Tibetan Buddhists

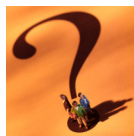
*Prayer Rug:* a small Oriental rug used by Muslims to kneel on when praying

*Prayer Book:* a book containing prayers and often other forms and directions for worship

*Prayer Beads:* a string of beads by which prayers are counted; rosary

What does this tell us? It tells us that we, as frail human beings, do many things to try and focus our minds on spiritual things.

**This next text is a good example of another tool of prayer:** Acts 16:13-14: What was this river side? ("Wont" means habitual or conducive to the act of praying.) Christianity originally used synagogues as places of worship. Not having the facilities of a synagogue they probably did not have Scripture parchments, and hence no reading of the Law, but merely prayer and worship.



**Thought Question: Is prayer an entitlement or a privilege?**

If prayer were an entitlement, then everyone would have an equal opportunity and privilege to pray; however, the Bible seems to tell us otherwise.

**The correct perspective of approaching prayer, God, and ourselves: (He is big, we are little)** Isaiah 57:15

**Building upon our perspective, we need to be living in a manner (seeking after righteousness) that would be pleasing to God:** Proverbs 15:6-9

**Living in such a way does not exempt us from mistakes and bad judgments, but it does enable us to properly deal with them:** Psalms 32:1-8:

**Having opened the door of blessing from above, we now need to keep it opened:** James 4:7-10: We have to live in a way that is worthy of communication with God.

**Does all of this mean that everyone who prays is NOT on equal footing before God?**

Proverbs 15:28-29: Why is the Lord "far from the wicked?" Because they are far from Him! We want to understand just how to position ourselves so that we can pray effectively. There is a placement of where you are with respects God and prayer. The good news is, you can change your placement any time you want to by the way that you live. Constant interaction with God is good. We can learn to have gratitude even when things don't go our way - gratitude is always appropriate.

Psalms 102:1-8: This is a prayer of heartfelt grief and anguish. God wants us to be genuine with Him and not hold things back. If we are seeking God, He should be the centerpiece of our lives. A caller reminded us that it is essential we don't barge into God's throne in a casual, irreverent



manner, forgetting that "Hallowed by Thy Name." However, sometimes in the difficulties of our lives, formality won't be the first thing on our minds.

Prayer acknowledges our need and that there is a greater Being who is our Creator. This runs contradictory to the theory of evolution of man.

The texts to follow certainly show that there is no authority on the part of those praying - rather there is a humble petitioning: Psalms 86:1-6 Daniel 9:17-19 Nehemiah 1:4-7: There is a placement of where you are with respects God and prayer. The good news is, you can change your placement anytime you want to by the way that you live.

So are we saying that the Bible is excluding anyone who does NOT have God's favor? Where do those prayers go? We have to move towards Godliness and righteousness, drawing near to God. Acts 10:1-6: Cornelius was a prayerful man, but he was out of favor. It had not yet been time for Gentiles to gain favor with God. But yet his prayers and alms reached God. This speaks volumes to what happens if we are on the wrong side of God's favor - the prayers didn't just disappear. God recognized them and "held" them until the appropriate time when He could directly provide an answer. Cornelius is shown as having a wonderful character and a man of integrity, and God blessed him. If our hearts are seeking Godliness, those prayers have the same ability to come before God.

King David committed egregious sins and was personally out of favor with God. Upon being told of his condition, this Psalm reflects his finding his way back to God: Psalms 51:14-17: David sums up what God is looking for. Can we do these wonderful sacrifices to God to show how worthy and spiritual we are? God instead looks for a contrite heart, an attitude of prayer.

**Observations: What do we know about prayer so far?**

- Perspective is the first order of business regarding prayer - God is lofty and we are little;
- Live in a manner that is worthy of this perspective;
- Bad judgments and mistakes do not of themselves remove us from prayer;
- We must continually work to keep this door of prayer to God opened;
- All do not have the door of prayer opened, although all CAN should they desire it.

### 3. What should we pray about?

Let's begin discussing this question with a look at a remarkable Old Testament prayer:

This is the account where King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and wants his wise men to not only interpret it for him, he wants them to tell him what the dream was! He is so angry that no one can accomplish this task that he orders all of the wise men to be executed. Daniel and his three companions, although not present at the King's command, are wise men and subject to execution. Daniel 2:16-23

**Observations: What can we learn about prayer from this account?**

- In a matter of immediate life or death, prayer is first on Daniel's mind;
- Daniel not only prays, he immediately seeks the prayers of his closest companions (this indicates his own humility);
- "Prayer fellowship" in trouble is a most powerful tool;
- Daniel "answers" God's answer (vs. 20) in prayer, with the right attitude;
- He begins with perspective - God is lofty and we are little (vs. 20);
- He acknowledges God's providence over the world of mankind (vs. 21);
- He acknowledges God's providence over the details of mankind (vs. 22);
- He acknowledges God's providence over Daniel's own needs (vs. 23).

No wonder Daniel was so beloved of God! Daniel 9:23 Daniel 10:11 Daniel 10:19

### The Lord's Prayer:

Here is perhaps the best known prayer amongst Christians. It is a prayer given as a model of how to pray. It is simple, focused and eloquent. Here we learn how to pray: Matthew 6:9-13

Matthew 6:9: (NRSV) *"Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."*



**First order of business - Glorify God our father:** (Notice Jesus didn't say: "Pray using these words." Instead, he told us to "pray in this way." He showed us what makes a prayer and wants us to speak from our own hearts. ) Romans 8:15 Isaiah 64:8:

Matthew 6:10: (NRSV) *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

- **Second order of business - Pray for the plan of God to unfold:** God has a plan and it is in process. We have the opportunity to see it and ought to acknowledge that opportunity by praying for his Kingdom to come on earth. Daniel 2:44

Matthew 6:11: (NIV) *"Give us today our daily bread."*

- **Third order of business - Petitioning for basic needs:** 1 Timothy 6:8

Matthew 6:12: (NRSV) *"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."*

- **Fourth order of business - Being forgiven and forgiving:** If we are not forgiving to another, should we be expecting to be forgiven? Isaiah 1:18 Ephesians 1:7

Matthew 6:13: (NRSV) *"And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one."*

- **Fifth order of business - Seeking God's overruling and protection:** 2 Peter 2:9

Now, having perspective and a template how should we pray? With GREAT ENERGY!!

James 5:16: The implication is to pray with the passion that is within you! It is seeking God's hand in your life and His overruling. It's praising Him and thanking Him - not just repeating a bunch of words. It wasn't meant to be repetitious but instead to come from your heart.

The James 5:16 scripture reminds us that we need to share our experiences with others so that we can pray for each other. Prayer may not change the outward circumstances you are dealing with, but it changes your ability to cope with, to deal with, to overcome the outward circumstances. Prayer changes things.

**Here is the context of our theme text, the context in which prayer must live:** 1 Thessalonians 5:14-25: There is an energy required to not only live a life of Godliness, but to prayer while we live in that life of Godliness. And remember, *"In everything give thanks."* We acknowledge the fact that God knows the beginning from the end. We only know our "now," this tiny little point in time. Therefore, thanksgiving is always appropriate. That is a perspective from which prayer can grow.

**Prayer - Affords us the opportunity to give praise:** Daniel 4:34 Psalms 105:1-5

**Prayer - Brings us encouragement and strength:** Psalms 34:17-19 Hebrews 5:5-9

**Prayer - Brings us guidance:** Luke 6:12-13 Matthew 7:7-11: Prayer gives us guidance when we don't know what is in the future. We can walk confidently knowing God's will is being done.

**Prayer - Brings us forgiveness:** Psalms 32:1-8

**Prayer - Brings us deliverance:** Psalms 91:1-7 Hebrews 4:14-16

**Prayer - Gives us the ability to participate in the lives of others:** John 17:4-9 Colossians 1:9-12 Luke 6:28 Hebrews 13:18 Philippians 1:2-6

Prayer will change things in your life if approached with reverence.



**Prayer: The ultimate GPS!**

*So why do we pray?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*