

Why do we need to pray?

by Denver Cheddie

The Bible makes it clear that God already knows what you need before you even ask Him (Matt 6:8). The Bible also teaches that God only answers prayer that is in accordance with His will (1 John 5:14,15). So that raises a very valid question: why do we even need to pray? If God will do what God will do, do our prayers even matter?

I have heard testimonies of people who said that God woke them up in the middle of the night to pray for someone else. At the same time, that person was going through a tough time and needed someone to pray for them. But why couldn't God just bless them without having to wake up anyone else? Are our prayers even relevant? If you think prayer is a means of getting stuff from God, then the answer to that question is no, your prayers don't really matter much. However, if you see prayer as a means of communicating with God, then prayer is crucial.

Matthew 5-7 (the sermon on the Mount) teaches us more about prayer than any book by any of those TV preachers. I urge you to read it. It doesn't matter how popular they are, most of these prayer books come across as formulas for blessings. But that's not the primary purpose of prayer.

Matthew 6:7 tells us not to use vain repetitions like the heathens do, for they think they will be heard for using many words. That's a very interesting scripture. You could look up a Manners and Customs handbook to find out what vain repetitions mean. But in a nutshell, it is a strategy that misguided people use to try to get God to answer them. This

was their 1st century version of decree and declare or bind and loose. These are all strategies to get God to answer, without regard for what His will is. Jesus is telling us to not use any such strategy. Forget the man-made strategies. God already knows what you need before you ask (Matt 6:8). There is no strategy that will make God answer you. Do not be like those heathens.

Instead Jesus gave us a model prayer. He did not intend for us to repeat this prayer liturgically. It is more of a pattern or a guide. Yes we can change the words to make it more personal and relevant to our individual lives. Let's look at the main points in this prayer (Matt 6:9-13):

- Our Father in heaven (God is our personal God and Father)
- Hallowed be thy name (Praise to God for who He is)
- Thy kingdom come (Pray for God's church and kingdom)
- Thy will be done (Surrender to His will)
- Give us our daily bread (Pray for our needs)
- Forgive us our debts (Our relationship with God)
- as we forgive our debtors (Our relationship with others)
- Lead us not into temptation (Deal with our sinful tendencies)
- Deliver us from the evil one (Protection)
- Thine is the kingdom, power and glory (More praise)

It should be clear that getting our needs met is not the primary purpose of prayer. Our daily bread accounts for 1 out of 10 lines in the Lord's prayer. Now don't get the wrong impression, God cares about our needs (1 Peter 5:7). He wants to bless us with good things (Luke 12:32). But He resists selfish prayers (James 4:3). We may not think of ourselves as selfish, but when our needs dominate our prayers, the evidence suggests otherwise.

Prayer is primarily about strengthening our relationship with God, praising him, surrendering to his will, getting help to do God's work, encouragement during difficult times, etc. Many of Paul's prayers are

recorded in the Bible, and most of the times he prayed for others and for grace to preach the gospel. (See Romans 1:9; 10:1; 15:30-32; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9; 2 Corinthians 13:9; Ephesians 1:16; 3:14-19; 6:18-20; Philippians 1:3-4, 9; Colossians 1:3; 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 3:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 3:1-2; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4.)

This is how we should pray. And of course, by all means make your requests known to God (Phil 4:6). But don't focus on your needs more than you ought to. Let God surprise you with good things. You might say that is more easily said than done. True. Then pray about that. The Holy Spirit is there to help you pray when you don't even know how to pray (Romans 8:26-27). And please don't think I am preaching down to anyone. I need this message just as much as anyone. I pray that what I have written here will help us to pray more scripturally, and not just move the hand of God, but move the heart of God.

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