

## **PURPOSE OF PRAYER**

*Introduction:*

I want to invite you along on a great adventure:

Not an amusement park thrill ride or a theme park experience.

Not a hike into the wilderness or a climb of a great mountain.

Not a classic presentation of theater or a fine symphony.

Take a walk with me into one of the most important and exciting aspects of the Christian life—  
**enter the area of PRAYER.**

We may be able, by training, to talk in a Christian way.

We may be able, by family or church influence, to walk in a Christian way. We may be able, by sheer will power, to live in a Christian way.

***But the question should not be, "Am I religious, but do I have a personal relationship with the Christ?"***

Religion is, by definition, "the service and worship of God or the supernatural," but in reality it can better described as "man's attempt to get to God." What must we do, who must we follow, how must we live to work our way into the favor of, or the presence of, or oneness with God.

*Buddhism* teaches that escape from human cravings and from continual reincarnation, and entering into Nirvana is gained by ***following the Noble Eightfold Path***, including meditation and following Buddhist practice.

*Hinduism* teaches that one can enter into "a rest in the arms of a loving personal God" or at least "dissolve into a neutral abyss of Brahman ending the cycle of birth, death and rebirth" through ***following one or more of the four yogas*** (or ways).

*Islam* teaches that salvation depends on ***man's actions and attitudes***. He may call on Allah for guidance but not for salvation, which must be earned.

*Judaism* teaches that one's eternal existence is determined by his ***moral behavior and attitudes***.

*Eastern Mysticism* says, "Be still and know that you are God, and when you know that you are God you will enter into the Godhood . . . union with the divine." ***Salvation is by meditation and enlightenment.***

Even within groups that call themselves "Christian" there are problems:

*Christian Science* claims that only through "***harmony and Christ in Devine Science***" can one ***attain*** heaven.

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*Jehovah's Witness* states, "All who by reason of faith in Jehovah God and in Christ Jesus dedicate themselves to **do God's will** and then **faithfully carry out that dedication** will be rewarded with everlasting life."

*Mormonism* believes "that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, **by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.**"

Notice how each of these "religions" tells us how man can get to God. Only in Biblical Christianity does the God of the universe seek man.

Luke 19:10 put it,

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

In fact, man can do nothing to earn salvation. Titus 3:5-7 says,

*"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to {the} hope of eternal life.*

This makes True Christianity unique among religious systems. There is nothing we can do. **No way man can reach God on our own.** In fact people are "dead in trespasses and sins" and, since dead men can't do anything, we are unable to do one thing to help attain heaven.

**What does all this have to do with prayer?** Only this. Prayer is not one of a list of things we do in order to be righteous. It is not a "check off item" to make points with God. It is not a religious ritual.

**PRAYER IS COMMUNICATING WITH THE ONE WITH WHOM WE HAVE A LOVE RELATIONSHIP. We love Him, because He first loved us (1John 4:19) and gave Himself up for us (Eph. 5:2).**

In his book *How Should We Then Live*, Francis Schaeffer tells this story:

"Paul Tillich of Harvard Divinity School was one of the outstanding neo-orthodox theologians. When Tillich was asked just before his death in Santa Barbara, California, 'Sir, do you pray?' he answered, 'No, but I meditate.' He was left only with the word God with no certainty that there was anything more than just the word . . . The God-is-dead theology which followed Tillich concluded logically that if we are left only with the word God there is no reason not to cross out the word itself."

If your complete view of God is that of a transcendent religious figure we must appease or, like Tillich an abstract invention of man, then meditation is adequate. But if He is a **personal God** who desired a **personal relationship** with His creation so much that He gave His only begotten Son as a substitute sacrifice for our sin, then communication is called for.

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### **I. WHAT IS PRAYER?**

Prayer has often been defined as "a two way conversation with God."

I suggest that there are four personalities involved in this vital personal relational communication.

#### **A. The Child—Prayer**

##### **1. Family Breakdown**

Breakdowns in family usually begin with a lack of communication by the father. How much time do you think the average father spends with each of his children? Studies show less than 30 seconds a day.

##### **2. God has chosen to be our Heavenly father**

Jesus instructs us to address God as our father, *"Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who art in heaven,"* --Matthew 6:9.

But he is not an inattentive father but an active one. In Matthew 6:26 Jesus says, *"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and {yet} your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?"*

Matthew 7:11 reinforces this, *"If you then [a human father], being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"*

##### **3. Prayer destroys ignorance**

Did you go through the classic cycle in relationship to your father? When I was young I thought my dad was the smartest man on earth. As a teen I was convinced he was the dumbest. As a young adult I realized he was pretty smart after all. What brought the change in my thinking? Communication!

Job came to the point where he could testify in Job 13:15, *"Though He slay me, I will hope in Him"* when, during his intense verbal interaction with God he realized how wise and powerful God is.

#### **B. The Father—Prayer**

My dad is bigger than your dad! He's also stronger, and smarter.

##### **1. Omnipotent: All Powerful**

Answer the question in Job 11:7, *"Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?"*

Or respond to the mighty chorus in Revelation 19:6, ". . . *"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns."*

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### 2. Omniscient: All Knowing

In 1 John 3:20 John is discussing why we can't fool God, after all he can read our hearts and then he says, *"for God is greater than our heart, and **knows all things**."* Peter said it best in John 21:17 ". . . Lord, You **know all things**; You know that I love You."

### 3. Omnipresent: All Present

Psalm 139:7-10 says it so well, *"Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Thy hand will lead me, And Thy right hand will lay hold of me."*

## C. Jesus--Mediator

### 1. The only one

1Tim. 2:5 and 6--*"For there is one God, {and} **one mediator** also between God and men, {the} man **Christ Jesus**, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony {borne} at the proper time."*

### 2. Perfect Advocate

He is our official stand-in, our representative before God's throne. When God looks at us he sees the righteousness of Jesus placed to our account. Justified, just as if we are sinless.

1John 2:1 and 2 puts it, *"My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for {those of} the whole world."*

### 3. Perfect Priest

Hebrews 10:11 and 12 explains, *"And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, **SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD**,"* He was done.

Is He finished working then? No, He is interceding for us. Romans 8:34 tells us, "who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."

## D. Holy Spirit—Indweller

### 1. God in us

1John 3:24 *"And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."*

It is better now than when Jesus was on earth. He was **with** his disciples but He, through the Holy Spirit, is actually resident **in** us.

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### **2. Helps when we don't feel like praying**

In Romans seven Paul describes the battle between the new and old nature for control of his life style that disrupts his relationship with God. He cries out, "Who shall deliver me?" His answer is that the Holy Spirit makes it possible to do what he should.

### **3. Helps when we can't pray**

Romans 8:26 and 27 explain it this way, ". . . *the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for {us} with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to {the will of} God.*"

## **I. WHY PRAY?**

### **A. Because God said Do IT!**

#### **1. Jesus Commanded It**

In Luke 17 Jesus was telling his disciples that circumstances would get worse and worse and he starts chapter 18 with a suggestion, "Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, . ." Serious living requires persistent prayer.

In fact, the bottom line was an imperative command expressed clearly in Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you." **Keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking.**

#### **2. Jesus Practiced It**

Jesus' life was permeated with prayer. Mark 1:34 and 35 reports, "And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was. And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there. If Jesus felt the need for prayer, imagine our need.

#### **3. Jesus Taught It**

Matthew 6 is a pattern prayer that Jesus taught His disciples as proved in verse 9, "Pray, then, in this way: *Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.*"

The one thing He warns against in verse 7 is, "do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words." So, long repetitive prayers and use of mantras are forbidden. Why? For the very practical reason that they aren't necessary. See verse 8, "Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him."

So, if this is true, why pray at all? God doesn't need our prayer for the information but he demands it for the communication. And we certainly need it.

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### **B. Because We Need It**

#### **1. It is our source**

James 4:2 reads, *"You do not have because you do not ask."* Remember, we are commanded to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking not because God is sales resistant, but so that we realize we are dependent on Him for everything. We need God!

If we only realized what Job discovered. In Job 33:4 he makes this statement *"The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life."* We are dependant on Him for everything.

Paul supported that truth in his sermon at the Areopagus in Rome, *"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things--Acts 17:24-25*

The main benefit of persistent praying is that when the answers come we recognize that God did it and we give Him the credit.

#### **2. It is our resource**

There is a story of a little boy who was trying to move a large rock. He pushed and pushed and couldn't even budge it. Meanwhile his father stood close by and watched his effort

After observing for a while, the dad said to his son, "Son, you aren't using all your available power to move the rock." His son went back to work on the rock pushing even harder until he was tired and frustrated.

Again his dad said, "Son, you're not using all the power available to you to move that rock." This time the boy was livid and returned to the job with all his energy and strength, and still the rock did not budge.

Once more his father said, "Son, you are not taking advantage of all the power available to you." This time the answer dawned on the boy. He turned to his dad and asked, "Dad, will you help me move the rock?" And together they moved it easily.

Part of praying is asking God's help to move the boulders.

### **C. Because It Works**

#### **1. God Hears**

John 9:31--*"We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him."*

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### **2. God Responds**

It is in God's nature to be responsive to His children. Matthew 7:7-11--"*Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened. Or what man is there among you, when his son shall ask him for a loaf, will he give him a stone? Or if he shall ask for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!*"

### **3. God Acts**

John 15:7--"*If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.*"

Matthew 21:22--"*And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.*"

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

So, when we are Spirit filled [God's Word abiding in us], pray believing, and ask in accordance to His will our prayers will be effective.

Today we considered the Purpose of Prayer, to communicating with the God who created us and to have a personal relationship with the one who gave His son to be a substitute sacrifice for our sins.

In our next lesson we will look at Preparation for Prayer, the basic things we need to know in order to build a strong foundation for our on going communication with God. In the following weeks we will look at Prerequisites to Prayer, Patterns for Prayer, and Problems with Prayer. I pray this will energize our prayer lives.

#### **The Bottom Line:**

I want to complete this lesson by meddling a bit, perhaps even inciting some legitimate guilt. I want to ask you some questions I have been struggling with for some time in my own Christian life.

If you are married or dating what would happen if that special one you love so much came to you and ask you to be more consistent in your communication. If they said, "I love you, just talk to me."

What if they ask you to read letters they write to you when you are traveling and to phone them in response to those letters? Could you say no? Could you ignore the letters and not call for days at a time. For even one day? Could you even imagine not talking every day?

Let me pose an even more drastic scenario:

What if you were in the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup> and were trapped on one of the upper floors and a fireman came to you and led you to safety, **saved your life**, how would you feel about him? *Did you see the pictures of the memorial services?*

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What if the same fireman contacted you later asking you to keep in touch with him? What if he asked for an on going relationship. What if he wrote you letters and asked you to call him in response. Could you tell him no? He saved your life!

And yet, isn't that what we do to God?

He saved our lives, not just for a few additional years, but forever and all He asked in return is for us to have a personal on going relationship with Him. Just read His letters and talk to him everyday.

Is that too much to ask? I think not.