

Question 1: Why is prayer important?

Discussion

If God is in full control of what's going to happen, what's the point in praying?

1) Christians are instructed to pray

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ **pray without ceasing**, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 Thess 5:16 – 18)

2) Jesus assumes all Christians will pray

⁷ And **when** you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words (Matthew 6:7)

3) Vital means of self-examination

⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:5 – 6)

“A minister may fill his pews, his communion roll, the mouths of the public, but what the minister is on his knees in secret before God Almighty, that he is and no more” (John Owen)

4) Changes the way God acts

You do not have, because you do not ask (James 4:2b)

5) Modelled for us by heroes of faith

⁴ As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven (Nehemiah 1:4)

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42)

Question 2: What is prayer?

1) A personal, communicative response to our knowledge of God

- *This means that our prayers are really affected by the **amount** and **accuracy** of how **much** and how **well** we know God. Therefore, the clearer our understanding, the better our prayers are.*
- a) God acts through speaking, His verbal actions are an extension of Himself (e.g. Gen 1:1 – 3, Isaiah 55:10 – 11);
 - b) God speaks to us through His Word (Hebrews 4:12, 2 Tim 3:16)
 - c) Jesus Christ is the ultimate Word of God (John 1:1 – 14, Hebrews 1:1 – 3)
 - d) God is the one who took the initiative in revealing Himself to us (John 1, Galatians 4:9)

Application for our prayer lives

- *A vital component of prayer is to immerse ourselves in Scripture, in God's Word. In God's Word we meet God, learn more about Him, and get our vocabulary for prayer*
- *We should pray rationally, using words*
- *We should pray using a variety of words and forms*
- *Prayer is a privilege that rests completely in God's grace to reveal Himself*

2) More than just an exchange of information but a means to encounter God and know him more deeply

- a) A person would only be motivated to pray if they wanted to know God more deeply (Psalms 27:4, Philippians 3:7 – 8)
 - *A person would only want to know God better, when his or her heart has been transformed by the reality of God's love through Christ,*
 - *Put another way, we would only **seek** our happiness in Christ if we have **tasted** the happiness that we can get in Christ. Like what it says in Psalm 27:4, we would only want to seek God and dwell in His house if we see He is beautiful.*
- b) God warns us against praying to Him as though He were a means to an end (James 4:3 – 5)

Application for our prayer lives

- *Prayer is dynamic, a two-way encounter with God of knowing and being known*
- *Pray to God as though He is the end in itself, and not just some means to an end*

"In prayer we leave the business of time for that of eternity, and conversation with men for conversation with God" (Paraphrased from Jeremiah Lanphier)

Question 3: How are we able to pray?

1) Only made possible by Christ's work on the cross

- a) On our own, no one deserves to approach God (Isaiah 6:1 – 6, Ex 33:20; 1 Samuel 6:20),
- b) Jesus is our mediator, we approach God on the basis of Christ's life and faithfulness, and not our own (Rom 8:34, 1 Tim 2:5, Heb 8:6;12:24, Heb 4:14 – 16, Heb 10:19 – 22, John 14:13 – 14; 15:16; 16:23 – 24; Eph 2:18)
- c) It cost Jesus everything to be our mediator (Mark 15:34)

Application for our prayer lives

- *Understand the privilege of prayer and what it cost Jesus. This should translate into thanksgiving*
- *Christians go to God with the intimacy of a friend and the confidence of a child*
- *We are to pray in Jesus' name*

2) Enabled by the Spirit of Adoption

- Intercedes for us on our behalf, even when we don't know what to pray for (Romans 8:14 – 16; 8:26 – 28)
- Enables us to understand Him, and to converse with God as our Father (Gal 4:5 – 6)

Application for our prayer lives

- *Be comforted that even in the times where you don't know how to pray or what to pray, God is helping you*

Question 4: What can we do to deepen our prayer lives?

Where am I in my prayer life?

<u>Sailing</u>	<i>Wind is in your sails</i> , God is real in your heart and you are having a rich, joyful prayer life
<u>Rowing</u>	<i>You are still moving, but</i> You find prayer and Bible reading more duty than delight
<u>Drifting</u>	Experiencing all the difficulties of rowing, with spiritual dryness and difficulties and so you've given up on trying
<u>Sinking</u>	Heart has become hard and you are frequently giving in to thoughts of self-pity and resentment

- *Wherever you may be in your prayer life, it's never too late to start. Let's go through some things we can do to deepen our prayer life.*

1) Plan and persevere to pray

- a) Cultivate a regular, daily discipline of prayer (1 Thess 5:17 and see Part 1)
- b) Important to persevere, endure and pray until we get through duty to delight, preaching to our heart till it responds rightly. Discipline will eventually bear fruit as God seeks for us to worship Him (John 4:23)
- c) Even after prayer life begins to flourish, seasons of dryness can return
- d) God helps us in our quest to pray (Rom 8:26 – 28)

Suggestion

- Are there specific times in the day that we can set aside to pray? (e.g. lunchtime, travelling, before work)

2) Cultivate the right posture

- a) Our need for prayer (see Parts 1 and 2)
- b) Our privilege and means of prayer (See Part 3)
- c) Our inadequacy in praying and corresponding dependence on God (Romans 7:19, Philippians 3:12, 1 John 1:8)
- d) Submissive trust of God while praying with confidence and hope (Matthew 6:10, Romans 8:28, James 4:2)

Suggestion

- Would it be helpful to set aside time before we pray to order our hearts?

3) Praying as a response to God's revelation

- a) Meditate, memorise, and paraphrase scripture, preaching God's truths to our hearts (Psalm 1) (Be careful not to just recite scripture, or mechanically paraphrase it in the same way)

Potential questions to ask ourselves when praying as a response to Scripture

- What is the text teaching me about:
 - God and his character?
 - About human nature, character, and behavior?
 - About Christ and His salvation?
 - About church, or life in the people of God?

- What is the text instructing me in provide:
 - Any example of me to follow?
 - Any command for me to obey?
 - Any error for me to avoid?
 - Any sin for me to forsake?
 - Any promise for me to claim?

- How does the text lead us to:
 - Praise and thank God?
 - Confess Sin?
 - Appeal to God in petition and supplication?

Suggestions

- Use Psalms as springboard, by repeating, paraphrasing or responding to the Psalms
 - *For example: Psalm 27:4 says "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple."*
 - *This teaches me that God is beautiful, and is worth forsaking all else just to be in His presence.*
 - *It's a command for me to think about whether I've been seeing God on His terms or my terms. Perhaps I have been trying to find joy in something other than God, perhaps a situation at work has been consuming me.*
 - *So in light of these things, I respond to God, praising Him for His beauty, thanking Him for allowing me to dwell in His house, asking Him to help me see His beauty more clearly, confessing I don't love Him enough.*
- Use the Lord's prayer as a template to pray by paraphrasing based on your circumstances (see annex for details)
- See Annex for some possible devotional materials

- b) Be sensitive to the Spirit, that it may fill our hearts with rich thoughts and ideas (Psalm 119:18; Romans 5:5; Eph 1:18)
- c) We can't meditate on God's Word without meditating on Christ (John 5:39)

4) Go beyond just asking God for stuff

- *Our prayers reflect how we view God. If we're just asking God for stuff, this suggests a very one dimensional view of God. But if we see God in His proper colours, we'll see that God is a God who deserves our praise, whom we should thank for every good thing, who we need to confess our sins to, and who we should depend on every day.*

a) Praise and Thanksgiving

- i. Thanksgiving is praising God for what He has done, while "praise" is adoring God for who He is in Himself
- ii. Praise and thanksgiving provide the necessary context for the other forms of prayer such as confession and supplication.
- iii. We can't force ourselves to praise God out of nothing. Praise is the result of enjoying God and seeing Him more and more in all His glory.

Suggestion

- How can we develop the habit of praising and thanking God?: Make every pleasure into adoration. Express gratitude to God for giving that thing, but also to praise God by dwelling on God's character and quality that resulted in the giving of the thing

b) Confession of Sins

- i. Understanding God's righteousness and justice and seeing the cost of His grace is vital in helping us understand the magnitude of God's grace
- ii. Remember the freeness of forgiveness, the security we have in Christ, and the costliness of forgiveness (see Part 3)
- iii. True repentance involves both admitting and turning away from sin

Suggestions

- Our prayer life is an important tool for self-examination, where we examine our lives and find the sins that otherwise we would be too insensitive or busy to acknowledge. To facilitate self-examination, we can:
 - Be intentional in meditating on key passages that would allow us to examine our lives more closely (e.g. 10 commandments, fruits of the spirit etc)
 - Once we are aware of sins, to ask ourselves: Do I grieve my sin? Do I grieve the wrongness of my sin (not just the consequences)?
 - To meditate on the gospel and press gospel truths into that area of our life

- *For example, just this week I've been meditating on 1 Corinthians 13, where verse 4 says: Love is patient and kind. God used the verse to convict me of several areas of my life where I have been neither patient nor kind, to encourage me to confess this area of sin in my life. Pressing the gospel into this area of my life meant being assured of God's love in spite of my perfect love, being convicted of the need to honour God by loving others, seeing Jesus as the perfect model of love, and understanding that I love not out of my own strength, but because God first loved me.*

c) Supplication

- i. We should ask God for things in our prayers because God instructs us to do so (Matthew 6:11 – 12, James 4:2b)
- ii. We should not see God as a means to an end, or to say 'my will be done'. But at the same time, we should not be timid or perfunctory in our petitions to God (See part 3)
- iii. We should ask God to grant both our desires and his will and wisdom (John 14:13 – 14 and 1 John 5:14)

Suggestions

- One way to examine reasons for making any request to God is to lay out in our prayers the reasons we are making the petition instead of just 'machine-gunning' requests. These reasons can be in light of:
 - What we have learnt from scripture
 - God's character and our understanding of what delights and grieves God
 - The Gospel and the fact that we already have the ultimate good thing

- *So for example, at our youth group one common prayer request is for exams. Instead of just praying that exams would go well, we might pray from Matthew 6:25 and 33*

- *Therefore we pray starting by thanking God for providing for all our spiritual and physical needs. We ask that our exams may go well, but more importantly, we pray that we align ourselves with His will, ask him for help to honour him with the talents he has blessed us with, to honour him by seeking first his kingdom and righteousness, acknowledge that much of our anxiety is due to idols in our loves, and for help in trusting in his unfailing love*

Suggestion

- Use the acronym of ACTS to remind ourselves of the different facets of prayer – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication

To see the law by Christ fulfilled
And hear his pard'ning voice
Transforms a slave into a child
And duty into choice

- William Cowper, Olney Hymns

Sharing and prayer

- Where are you in your prayer life? (Wind in your sails, rowing hard, drifting, sinking)
- What is one takeaway you had from today's session? Spend some time praying for each other.

Brief breakdown of the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6)

1. Address:

- *Our Father who art in heaven*
 - Realise our standing in Christ before we proceed to prayer
 - An address, that should comfort us by our status as His children

2. Adoration and thanksgiving – God centeredness

- *Hallowed by your name*
 - As Christians, we bear God's name. Therefore we are praying that God keep us from dishonouring His name, by empowering us to become ourselves good and holy
 - That we would honour God by being captivated by Him, and increasingly understand and love His holiness
 - That more and more people would honour God and recognize Him as holy.
- *Thy Kingdom come*
 - Asking God to extend his royal power over every part of our lives, and over all the earth, both that we **would** and that we **would want** to crown Him as King.
 - There is also the future-oriented element of asking for the full consummation of the future perfect kingdom.
- *Thy Will be done*
 - To trust God's will
 - For God to grant us the grace to bear hardship in light of trusting God's will

3. Supplication

- *Give us this day our daily bread*
 - "daily bread" as a metaphor for necessities rather than luxuries (cf Proverbs 30:8)
 - This is prayed for in light of what we've prayed for in adoration and thanksgiving
- *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*
 - This is about our relationships with God and others
 - If we have not seen our sin and sought radical forgiveness from God, we will be unable to forgive/seek the good of those who have wronged us. Unresolved bitterness is a sign that we are not right with God
- *Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil*
 - Does not mean that we will not be tempted
 - Rather, to be led into and enter temptation (Matt 26:41) is to entertain and consider the prospect of giving in to sin.
 - For protection from evil

Summary of principles from the Calvin, Luther, and Augustine, and the Lord's prayer (from "Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God" by Tim Keller)

What it is

- Work - Prayer is a duty and discipline (but it will bear fruit)
- Word - Prayer is conversing with God
- Balance - Prayer is adoration, confession, thanks and supplication.

What it requires

- Grace - Prayer is "in Jesus' name," based on the gospel.
- Fear - Prayer is the heart engaged in loving awe.
- Helplessness - Prayer is accepting one's weakness and dependence.

What it gives

- Perspective - Prayer reorients your view towards God.
- Strength - Prayer is spiritual union with God.
- Spiritual Reality - Prayer seeks a heart sense of the presence of God.

Where it takes us

- Self-knowledge - Prayer requires and creates honesty and self-knowledge.
- Trust - Prayer requires and creates both restful trust and confident hope.
- Surrender - Prayer requires and creates surrender of the whole life in love to God.

Resources about Prayer

- 1) Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God" by Tim Keller
- 2) Knowing God by J.I. Packer
- 3) Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine by Wayne Grudem

Devotional Materials

- 1) My Rock; My Refuge: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms by Tim Keller
- 2) Search the Scriptures edited by Alan M. Stibbs
- 3) For the Love of God by D.A. Carson (pdf available free online)