

October 3, 2021

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18; Philippians 4:4-7; Romans 12:9-12; Colossians 4:2
“Prayer...It Changes EVERYTHING!”

1 Thessalonians 5:12-18 Common English Bible

12 Brothers and sisters, we ask you to respect those who are working with you, leading you, and instructing you. 13 Think of them highly with love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. 14 Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are disorderly. Comfort the discouraged. Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else. 16 Rejoice always. **17 Pray continually.** 18 Give thanks in every situation because this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:4-7 Common English Bible

4 Be glad in the Lord always! Again, I say, be glad! 5 Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. 6 Don’t be anxious about anything; rather, **bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers** and petitions, along with giving thanks. 7 Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

Romans 12:9-12 Common English Bible

9 Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. 10 Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. 11 Don’t hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! 12 Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you’re in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer.

Colossians 4:2 Common English Bible

2 Keep on praying and guard your prayers with thanksgiving.

Here are some supposedly true variations of famous prayers and scriptures offered by children...

"Hail Mary, full of grapes." Should be Hail Mary full of GRACE!

"Give us this steak and daily bread and forget our mattresses." Give us this day our daily bread...

"Lead a snot into temptation." LOL...lead us NOT into temptation!

"He suffered under a bunch of violets." He suffered under Pontius Pilate!

"Our Father, who art in Heaven, how didja know my name?" ¹

You have no doubt heard the expression...Prayer Changes Things. In an article by Pastor Dennis Lee he states, "While prayer may change the circumstances that surround us, and the problems that assail us, what prayer is meant to change is us."

So Prayer Changes Things...and Prayer more importantly changes...US. Do you agree? So is that the main reason we pray? To change us? To change things? There are lots of categories of prayer aren't there? There are prayers of Healing, Salvation, Strength, Calmness, Assurance, Confidence, Direction, Wisdom, and many, many others. And if you are like me...you have prayed each of those kinds of prayers and probably many other types as well.

In an article titled, "Why Do We Pray" by William A. Barry S.J., which appeared in the Ignatian spirituality.com site the author states, "Honesty compels me to say that I often do pray for utilitarian reasons. First of all, most of my prayers of petition ask for some good result, either for me or for someone else or for all people. Moreover, I feel contented when I remember in prayer the people who mean much to me, even if my prayer is not answered. I notice, too, that I feel better about myself when I pray regularly. I feel more centered, more in tune with the present, less anxious about the past or the future. So, I suspect that I do pray for the purpose of psychological or physical health. But does that exhaust my motivations for prayer?"

¹ <https://www.beliefnet.com/prayables/joke-galleries/funny-kids-prayers.aspx>

Thinking of prayer as a conscious relationship, or friendship, with God may be illuminating. Why do we spend time with good friends? As I pondered this question, I realized that I relish times with good friends for some of the same reasons just adduced for spending time in prayer. If I have not had good conversations with close friends for some time, I feel out of sorts, somewhat lonely, and ill at ease. When I am with good friends, I feel more whole and alive.

Still, I do not believe that my only reason for wanting time with them is to feel better. I want to be with them because I love them. I am genuinely interested in and concerned for them. The beneficial effect that being with them has on me is a happy by-product. Moreover, I have often spent time with friends when it cost me trouble and time, and I did it because they wanted my presence. Haven't we all spent time with a close friend who was ill or depressed, even when the time was painful and difficult? Such time spent cannot be explained on utilitarian grounds. We spend that time because we love our friend for his or her own sake.

Of course, there are times when we need the presence of close friends because we are in pain or lonely. Friendship would not be a mutual affair if we were always the ones who gave and never were open to receive. But if we are not totally egocentric, we will have to admit that we do care for others for their own sakes, and not just for what we can get from the relationship. We spend time with our friends because of our mutual care and love. Can we say the same thing about our relationship with God?

Barry concludes this section by saying, "Prayer is a conscious relationship with God. Just as we spend time with friends because we love them and care for them, we spend time in prayer because we love God and want to be with God." ²

About 30 years ago I was sitting in my office having lunch and the church phone rang. Since it was lunch time, I answered the phone because the secretaries were gone for their lunch hour. I was surprised to hear my

² <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-what-how-why-of-prayer/why-do-we-pray/>

Dad's voice on the phone and I knew right away the news could not be good. My Mom had suffered a heart attack and Dad was telling me that if I wanted to see her again, I needed to get there as soon as I could. The problem I faced was that I was in Moline, IL and my Mom was in Clinton, IN. That is about a 4-hour drive normally. So, I called Anita, ran by our house, got a few things packed and headed to Clinton. I kept wondering how I should pray...I didn't know if Mom had any chance of having a good quality of life because they had shocked her several times to get her back and I simply wasn't sure how much damage to her there had been. I had finished at least 2 ½ years of seminary and had been a pastor for at least that amount of time, but as I hit the road, I ran out of words to pray fairly quickly.

Then at some point it just came to me to pray something I was comfortable praying and so for the next couple of hours I kept praying the prayer I knew so well...the Lord's Prayer. I have no idea how many times I prayed it but I know it brought me peace and assurance that God was with us through it all.

I got to the hospital and my family had their own waiting room. That evening it was decided someone should stay at the hospital and since I had no place to call home there, I was the logical choice. After midnight a nurse came to the waiting room and woke me up with a smile on her face and she said, "Your Mom wants to see you." I couldn't believe it!

I practically ran down the hall to the ICU went in and Mom was awake. She looked at me, smiled and squeezed my hand. We knew then that she was coherent, and she recognized people and she was able to move everything. From there, over the next few days she just kept improving and by the end of the week I felt comfortable heading back to our home so I could prepare for that week's church service.

By the way...later Mom said she gained a lot of confidence and assurance she was going to be ok after seeing me there. I was overwhelmed with feelings of, "Wow, I am special! Look at what I did!" And then she said the real reason she felt so confident was she had asked me if I had brought a

suit when I came and when the answer was no I had not...she decided then and there that God wasn't ready for her yet because I would not have had a suit for her funeral! Do you know why I didn't have a suit with me? I really never thought to pack one...and since Anita and the kids would have come later if things had not gone well...I could have had her bring me a suit. Prayer sometimes works in ways that surprise us!

There are lots of ways to think of prayer and lots of acrostics to help us remember how to model our prayers. For me the one I use a fair amount is A.C.T.S. Which stands for, "Adoration: Give God praise and honor for who he is as Lord over all. Confession: Honestly deal with the sin in your prayer life. Thanksgiving: Verbalize what you're grateful for in your life and in the world around you. Supplication: Pray for the needs of others and yourself."

There are other acrostics as well as other memory helps to remember how to structure our prayers. Also, I think it is worth reminding you that the real reason to pray is to have an intimate conversation with the God who loves you beyond compare. Have you ever been in a relationship? Have you ever tried being in a relationship where you NEVER communicate at all? It is not a good way to be in relationship and I think one could argue that one really can't be in a relationship with no communication at all. If that is the case...then why would we think it is not necessary for us to try and stay in communication with God?

So...that is all how to pray, and we are back to WHY do we pray. We know we don't get every prayer answered the way WE want them answered. And in the area of healing, it gets really tricky when we realize that healing comes in different forms. So, then, why would God want us to pray?

One article I found by Carley Marcouillier that appeared on BibleStudy.com says there are at least 4 main reasons we pray and those are:

1. Prayer is a Place of Honest Expression.
2. Prayer is a position of Surrender.

3. Prayer is a process of becoming more attuned to God's movement.
4. Prayer is a practice of pursuing God's presence.

Carley goes on to say, "Ultimately, the most significant purpose of prayer is the pursuit of being in God's presence. In moments of stillness and silence, we learn to regulate and realign our souls to rest in the source of our strength. One commentator describes this pursuit of God's presence as unity of life. This unity of life is the heartfelt prayer of David in Psalm 27:4, "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."

David's prayer was not just words of spiritual desire. He says, "I ask" and I also "seek after" the presence of God. Is this the song of our souls also? Do we ask and seek to be connected with Christ all the days of our lives? This is the essence of prayer's practice, to slow down and sit at Jesus' feet. To linger in the Lord's presence and grow daily more dependent.

So, whatever season we may find ourselves in, we should pray in this way. We need to learn to make prayer a safe place and whole-heartedly surrender to our Lord's will. We need to gain endurance through the process of our awareness of God's movement and never cease to find moments or hours to simply be found in His presence.

So...why doesn't everyone pray without ceasing? Why are there those who say they don't know how to pray? Prayer is essentially a very basic and easy thing. It is simply communicating our hearts, our minds, and our feelings to God. We don't have to use a specific formula and we don't have to learn a new language to do it. We simply have to be willing to open ourselves to God.

Many years ago, I got a call that scared me. Our good friends' son who was just a year older than Justin had been diagnosed with Leukemia. It was a sudden thing in that they had simply assumed he was getting the flu and had taken him to the ER because he was feeling so poorly. When they got

to the ER it just so happened the Doctor who was on that evening had just finished a rotation at the University of Iowa in the pediatric oncology unit. So he was very familiar with the presenting symptoms for many pediatric cancers. What he saw with the young man got his attention and he immediately ordered some scans and blood work which indicated his suspicions were right. By midnight they were in the pediatric care center at the U or Iowa and were deciding how to go after the leukemia. I decided to drive over, really just to show support for the family. But when I got there, they asked me to pray for Jared...I hoped all they meant was that I would...you know...keep him in my thoughts and prayers and not be asked to pray out loud in front of everyone.

But that is NOT what his mom desired. She wanted me...a brand-new pastor, who was NOT their pastor just their friend, to pray for her son who was our son's age and who was facing a life-threatening disease. I was scared and I felt completely out of my league! But what was I supposed to do? So I simply prayed to God, silently, for God to give me the words to say...and then I prayed. As I prayed, I was amazed the words just kept flowing out of me. When I got done, I opened my eyes and I said something to the effect of, "I hope that made some sense." And when I looked at his mom she was crying and had a grateful look on her face as she said, "That prayer was perfect! Thank you so much!"

So, if you think that every time a pastor prays, she/he knows exactly what they should pray that is not true. We rely upon God and the only way to fully do that is to get out of the way. Sometimes it works amazingly well...sometimes not so much. But the point is God is always willing and present to intercede on our behalf. What we are asked to do is to make ourselves available to pray. If you never pray out loud in a group for any reason that is ok...not everyone ever feels comfortable doing that. Yet, in my experience it is a good idea to be open to doing even that which is outside of our comfort zone and then in letting go and letting God we may just be amazed!

So, here is the idea. We are beginning a time of 100 days of prayer. You should have a card that gives you the main prayer to pray every day and in

addition it lists each day and the special areas of focus for that day. PLEASE take the time to do this. Imagine what is possible if ALL of us pray EVERY DAY! If you don't have the card or if you lose it or simply want/need a new one just let us know. Scripture teaches us we are to bring everything to God in prayer. We are to devote ourselves to prayer. We are to keep on praying and we are to be in prayer continuously!

This week has been a difficult one for our family. My brother's widow suffered heart failure and even though they brought her back she never regained consciousness and brain scans showed she was not going to recover. So the very difficult decision was made by her children, our niece and nephew, to disconnect the life support and leave it to God to take her home. My prayers all week were for a miracle. I wanted Betty to be healed and still have lots of living and life left. But that's not what happened. So, the question may then become..." So should we pray for healing?"

And for me the answer is..."Absolutely!" Those healing prayers helped Betty's family feel the love and support of many, many others! And I believe they helped Betty as well. So, I suppose it is still true to say prayer changes and makes LOVE felt by all.

As we begin these 100 days of prayer...let us open ourselves to God and may our hearts truly pour forth our thoughts, our desires, and our willingness to LISTEN as God hears our prayers and directs us in our thoughts and actions. And may we bear witness that prayer changes EVERYTHING and EVERYONE! Amen