

The Five Purposes of Prayer

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If God already knows our needs, why do we need to pray? If we don't understand the five purposes of prayer we probably won't be motivated to pray.

Imagine a huge building filled with thousands of rooms. Inside those rooms are all the good possibilities for your future—job opportunities, provision of every kind, guidance, and wisdom to make right decisions. The problem is all the doors are locked and you can't get in. But suppose someone puts a supernatural key in your hand that will open every door. You can choose to use the key or not use it. If you don't use the key, the doors won't open for you.

That's a picture of how prayer works. God won't automatically do everything for us. Instead, He has given us a key to use, which is prayer. **Prayer is a privilege** God gives us where He lets us participate in His will being accomplished on earth (Matt. 6:10). However, if we don't use the "prayer key" the door will remain closed for some of God's blessings. Here are five reasons to pray.

Reason #1 Prayer is how we develop a relationship with God.

What if prayer didn't exist? Suppose God didn't provide any way to contact Him when we're in trouble. The Lord announces, "There's no such thing as prayer. You cannot talk to Me and I won't talk to you. I will not intervene in your affairs. If you want help...sorry, but you're on your own!" You would literally "not have a prayer." The good news is God does want us to pray so we can get to know Him in a better way.

Prayer is connecting our heart to God's heart. Prayer isn't measured by how many words we say because many non-stop talkers never really communicate with others. Prayer is having a heart-to-talk with God, letting Him know what's on our heart. "Pour out your heart before Him." (Psalm 62:8). Our closeness to God can be measured by how much we talk to Him when we're NOT at church.

James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." "Drawing near" isn't referring to distance because God is inside us. It's talking about drawing nearer in our hearts. A husband and wife can be standing next to each other but their hearts can be miles apart. That can happen with God, too. Jesus the Pharisees honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far away (Matt. 15:8). They missed the primary purpose of prayer—to develop a relationship with God.

Prayer is like talking on a phone, which also means listening. Some people do all the talking and never listen. When I worked for a Christian college in Georgia, I once had an appointment with a lady that I didn't know to talk about some business with the college. I had a one hour time limit with her. After meeting her, she started non-stop for the entire hour. I kept waiting for her to take a breath, to pause, to take a break between words where I could get a word in edgewise, but she never did. Finally, after an hour I had to leave. I said, "It was good talking to you!"

Sometimes we also do that with God. We talk and talk and never listen. It's a monologue instead of a dialog. And we've missed the primary reason to pray—to get to know God.

Reason #2 Some things will not happen unless we pray.

Why should we pray if it doesn't make any difference? James 4:2 tells us "you do not have because you do not ask." To say it another way, if we don't use the key the door won't open. God can change our circumstances if we will use the key and call out to Him for help.

Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, was threatening to conquer Jerusalem. King Hezekiah knew he would be defeated unless God stopped Sennacherib. Hezekiah prayed that God would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrian army. God answered him, "**Because you have prayed to Me** about Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard you" (2 Kings 19:20 NASB). God came to his rescue **because** he prayed. If the king hadn't prayed Jerusalem would have been destroyed. Prayer brought something to pass on earth that would not have happened if he hadn't prayed.

Prayer can make a difference in what happens in your life. Are you asking Him for help and guidance? Don't give up. Keep praying and don't lose heart. God has placed in your hand the key, but it's up to you to put it in the doorknob.

Reason #3 Prayer shows God how desperately we want something.

"The effectual fervent (desperate) prayer of a righteous person avails much" (James 5:16). When we pray out of desperation we touch God's heart and catch His ear. Our prayers show Him how desperately we want something. As Jesus passed through Jericho, two blind men sitting by the road cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us!" (Matt. 20:30). Even though a huge crowd surrounded Him, Jesus stopped when heard their cries for help. He then answered their request and healed them.

On another occasion, a woman who had a hemorrhage for 12 years touched the hem of His garment. While a large crowd was touching Him, Jesus felt power leave Him and she was healed (Mark 5:24-34). What was different about her touch than the others touching Him? She was desperate for a miracle.

Reason #4 Prayer is the way we release our burdens to God.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6-7).

Sheep are not designed to carry burdens. You've heard of "pack mules" but you've never hear of "pack sheep." God didn't design us to carry burdens on our souls. When we pray correctly, we transfer our burdens and problems into the Father's hands. If you are still burdened down after you have prayed, you never let go of your problems! When we've truly prayed, we've released our concerns into the Lord's hands and we let Him carry the load.

Joe was walking to the Laundromat carrying his dirty clothes in a duffel bag on his back. On the way, he ran into his friend Lou who started telling him about all the problems he was going through. Joe told him he needed to give his burdens to the Lord.

Lou said, "I already did that, but I still feel burdened down. How can I know that I've released them?"

Joe let go of his duffel bag, which immediately fell off his back to the ground. He said, "How do I know that I dropped the sack? I haven't looked around to see if it's off my back."

"You know because it isn't weighing you down any more," Lou replied.

"And that's how you'll know if transferred your problems to God. They won't weigh you down anymore."

Reason #5 When we pray, God intervenes in other people's lives and changes them.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus told us to "pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:28)? Let's think about that. He told us to pray for our enemies because our prayer releases the Holy Spirit to convict them of their sins and bring them to repentance. Remember, some things will not happen unless we pray. We don't typically like to pray for those who mistreat us, but if we will pray for the Holy Spirit to convict them we might see some surprising results.

James 5:16 says, "Pray for one another that you may be healed." It doesn't say to pray for yourself to be healed (although there is nothing wrong with that) but to pray for others. God has set it up so that He wants to work through the prayers of others to help us. Our prayers are part of the reason others are healed mentally and physically—and also in them being saved.

Only the Holy Spirit can convict us of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). When we pray for a lost person to be saved, the Holy Spirit begins to pull on that person's heart where it becomes easier to surrender to Him than continue in rebellion.

Dr. Randy Byrd was a staff cardiologist at the San Francisco General Hospital and a professor at the University of California. He conducted a ten-month study of 393 patients admitted to the coronary intensive care unit of the hospital. In the "prayed for" group were 192 patients, while the remaining 201 patients were not prayed for.

Prayer groups around the country were given only the first names, diagnoses and prognoses of the designated 192 patients. The groups were asked to pray for the patients by name once each day. No other instructions were given. None of the patients, nurses, or physicians knew which group the patients were in.

The results were startling. The prayed-for patients were 5 times less likely to require antibiotics and 3 times less likely to develop fluid filling the lungs. None of these prayed-for patients required breathing tubes compared to 12 in the other group, and fewer of the prayed-for patients died. The findings were published by the American Heart Association.

Dr. Byrd's study shows that praying for others really does make a difference even when the patients don't know they are being prayed for. Think what could happen if we started praying for others and ourselves about everything. Our prayers could change the world!

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