

Why Should I Pray?

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Introduction.

- A. In our hymnal, we have a hymn that asks the question, "Did you think to pray?" Sadly, for many Christians most of the time, the answer is "No." We don't pray for much the same reason that I often forget to call my parents: they aren't right there in front of me, so I don't think about them, and I don't call them. Of course, that changes whenever I run across some question that I need to ask my dad about some home renovation project. I remember him easily when I need help, but not otherwise. That holds true for God too. We remember Him when our car is stalled on the train tracks and the train's coming, but not otherwise.
- B. Of course, that's exactly the opposite of what God wants. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to pray without ceasing, and a host of other passages reaffirm the importance of prayer in the life of the Christian. For our third New Year's resolution, then, let's resolve to pray more. As with our previous resolutions, let's set a achievable goal with this. Let's resolve that every day, at a time that is not a mealtime, we're going to say at least a short prayer with our families. This could be before we all leave for work or school in the morning; this could be when everybody's back under one roof at the end of the day. But it needs to happen sometime.
- C. This is not something that we should do just because. Not only does the Bible tell us to pray, but it also gives us a number of reasons why we should. We need to understand them so that we can accomplish the goals they set forth. Let's look at some this morning to answer the question, "Why should I pray?"

I. Dealing with the Status Quo.

- A. When we consider the reasons why we should pray, the first one that presents itself to us is **TO THANK GOD**. Paul discusses the importance of this kind of gratitude in 1 Timothy 4:4-5. The point here is actually fairly subtle. What Paul is telling us is that when we thank God for the gifts that He has given us, we sanctify them. We acknowledge where they came from and promise to use them only in godly ways.
- B. Folks, in the modern-day United States, we really need to spend a lot of time thanking God for the good things He gives us. I'm sure that just about all of us, in our heart of hearts, would like more money and more possessions than we have. However, friends, no matter how much stuff we have, we're always going to feel that way. We should not allow this ever-present desire for more to blind us to the greatness of the blessings we already have. How many of us have ever seriously wondered where our next meal was going to come from? How many of us have had to live outside because we couldn't find a place to stay? How many of us have ever lost everything we owned in some catastrophe? Friends, most of the people alive on the earth today would die of joy if they were half as wealthy as we are right now. Let's be thankful for all of it.
- C. As important as those things are, though, the spiritual blessings that we have in Christ are even more important. Paul tells us in Ephesians 1 that we are richly blessed with every one of those blessings. We are blessed with the right to pray itself. We are blessed with salvation from our sins. We are blessed with a congregation of people who love us and want to help us get to heaven. If I started naming off all of our spiritual blessings this morning, I would run out of time before I ran out of blessings. That's amazing because we didn't earn those things. God gave them to us because He loved us. Let's thank Him for it.
- D. Let's also remember to make use of one of those blessings in our prayers by praying **TO SEEK FORGIVENESS**. John considers this topic in 1 John 1:9. Back when I was still a bachelor, I was of course responsible for paying my own bills, even though I don't have anything approaching an administrative mindset. Sometimes, in the course of doing this, I would overpay one month, or pay twice, or something. The next month, in place of a bill, I would get a statement from the utility company saying, "You used this much electricity, but you don't have to do anything about it. Your debt has already been paid." That's the way that our forgiveness is in Christ. We come to God, confessing our sin, repenting, and seeking His forgiveness, and He says to us, "Yes, you committed this sin against Me, but you don't have to do anything about it. Your debt has already been paid." There are times when that doesn't seem fair to me, when it doesn't seem right that I should get off so lightly for just asking. However, that's the way that the grace of God is, provided that we ask for it. It's not like we're automatically forgiven for every sin that we commit. We have to acknowledge those sins, and come to God in prayer, and ask for forgiveness, but then, He is faithful to grant it.
- E. Another thing that we should pray for is **TO SEEK PROTECTION**. We see Ezra doing precisely this in Ezra 8:21. Ezra here is beginning his journey with the people from Babylon to Jerusalem. This is dangerous territory they're passing through, they have their whole families with them, and they're carrying with them a tremendous amount of money for use in the temple. Furthermore, the king has offered soldiers to Ezra to accompany them and protect them, but Ezra has refused the offer so that he would not appear to doubt God. Ezra knows that he needs God's help, and so he asks God for it and receives it.

- F. We need to have the same attitude in our lives. Much of the time, we live in the midst of an illusion of safety, but all it takes is one serious illness or one job loss, and we soon realize how vulnerable we really are. Even beyond that, we are spiritually vulnerable. Satan is constantly scheming to destroy each one of us, and there is nothing we can do by ourselves to ward off the devil's assault. We are in a precarious position just like Ezra was, and we need to acknowledge our dependence on God by asking him for help. Whenever we see that we're in danger, we need to respond to that by seeking out the One who is truly able to save us.
- G. There are times, though, when we need to ask God's blessing not just to seek protection, but **TO DISPEL ANXIETY**. There are times when, rather than being unmindful of the dangers around us, we swing to the opposite extreme and spend all of our time stressing about those dangers. As my wife would surely tell you, this is something that I myself struggle with. There are times when I can worry with the best of them. We see Paul's answer for all of us worrywarts in Philippians 4:6-7. We need to act as wisely as we are able, ask God for His blessing, and then allow ourselves to enjoy the peace of the knowledge that everything is going to work out. Remember, folks, this was written to Christians in the first century, who had to worry not just about losing their jobs, but about losing their lives. Like them, we need to find our peace in prayer.

II. Seeking Improvement.

- A. However, friends, it is not merely ourselves whom we should pray for. We should also learn to pray **TO HELP OTHERS**. Let's look at the example of Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9. In the junior high class recently, we've been talking about how respect starts with thinking about other people, instead of thinking about ourselves. This same other-focused attitude needs to appear in our prayer lives. We need to pray not just for our needs, but for the needs of others. It's especially interesting to me here that Paul is praying not for the physical needs of the Colossians, but for their spiritual needs. How often do we think about that? How often do we consider our brethren through God's eyes? How often do we ask Him to help them grow in the ways that will make them most useful to His kingdom? Let's remember others' needs, especially spiritual ones, as we pray.
- B. As we reverse our focus again, though, we also see the need to pray **TO DEDICATE OURSELVES**. Paul and Barnabas do this in Acts 13:2,3. Clearly, this is a more formal occasion, but the basic action is something that we can do for ourselves every day. Remember, folks, we aren't here to serve ourselves and carry out our own will. We're here to serve God and carry out His will. We need to begin every day with that in mind, no matter what we're doing. We need to go to work for God. We need to go to school for God. We need even to use the leisure time that we have in a way that pleases Him and glorifies Him. Prayer is a wonderful way for us to dedicate ourselves to this life of service, and to seek His help in doing what He wants.
- C. Another good reason to begin our days with prayer is **TO FIND WISDOM**. James discusses this in James 1:5. This is something that all of us should identify with. There are two kinds of people in the world: those who need more wisdom and know it, and those who need more wisdom, but don't. If we're in the second group, we need to move to the first group, and if we're in the first group, we need to look for help from God.
- D. None of us live lives that are easy to figure out. Every day we are presented with a vast number of choices, and it can be very easy to make the choice that looks good in the short term, but is disastrous in the long term. My brother says that of all the criminals he deals with, one characteristic stands out. They aren't good with consequences. They just don't get that if they rob the convenience store, the next day, they're likely to get arrested. They aren't wise people. Folks, when we compare our wisdom levels to the wisdom level of God, we look just as foolish as those small-time criminals. We make bad decisions all the time and don't even realize it until tomorrow comes along and smacks us upside of the head. We're foolish, but thankfully, we don't have to stay foolish. This passage tells us that if we look for wisdom from God, He will give it to us generously and without reproach. It's something all of us need, folks, and it's something that God is happy to give us. Let's pray for wisdom, so that we can learn how to turn our bad decisions into good ones.
- E. Finally, though, we should learn to pray together with our families **TO FIND JOY**. Prayer is ultimately something that makes us happy. Consider Jesus' thoughts on the subject, in John 16:24. Not surprisingly, this is an idea that many in the denominational world get wrong. They believe in "the gospel of health and wealth." You see preachers preaching this all the time on TV. They're telling people that the reason why they should be Christians is so that they can become materially prosperous. People like to hear this, because they think that if they can get enough money, they'll be happy. Religion for them is just a get-rich-quick scheme.
- F. We know, of course, that God isn't going to bless anyone who becomes a "Christian" just to get a heavenly handout. The sad thing about the whole health-and-wealth way of thinking, though, is that God would really give them what they really want, if only they looked for it instead. Christianity isn't about material riches, but it most certainly is about happiness and joy, and one of the main tools that God uses to give us joy is the way He answers our prayers. There are some prayers He answers "No," to, because He knows that getting what we want is not what's best for us right now. There are many prayers He answers yes to, so that our lives are filled with physical good things, but more importantly, so that we drink deeply of the joys of the spirit. Most importantly, though, He answers our prayers so that one day, we can find the joy of heaven.

Conclusion. If you want to set your feet on the path to heaven, begin tonight by coming to the Lord.