

Question Five: What Is Prayer?*

I. The Reason for Prayer

- A. God wants us to pray so that our dependence on Him increases.
 - 1. He doesn't need us to pray so that He can find out what we need. He already knows those things (Matt. 6:8).
 - 2. He wants us to trust Him for provision, as children trust their parents (Luke 11:9-12).
- B. God wants us to pray so that our love for Him and our relationship with Him will deepen and grow.
- C. God wants us to pray so that we understand our place in the larger story of God's plan for creation (Matt. 6:10).

II. The Effectiveness of Prayer

- A. When we pray, God often does respond by granting those requests (Luke 11:9-10). Scriptural Examples:
 - 1. Exodus 32:12-14: God responded to Moses' prayer that God relent from destroying his people by changing the way He was going to deal with the nation.
 - 2. 1 John 1:9: God responds to our confession of sins by forgiving us and cleansing us.
- B. A key reason that we do not receive things that God would delight to give us is that we do not ask for them in prayer (James 4:2).
- C. The only basis for our prayers to be heard by a holy God is through faith in Jesus Christ. He stands as the mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:5; John 14:6). God is under no obligation to hear and grant the prayers and requests of sinful humanity, although He may choose to do so.

III. Our Attitude in Prayer

- A. We should bring requests before God that are in line with his will (1 John 5:14). When we do this, we are praying not necessarily for what we want but for what God desires. How do we do this?
 - 1. We can pray things that are directly revealed as part of God's will from Scripture (John 15:7).

* The material in this handout is a summary of chapter five, "What is Prayer?" in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know*, ed. by Elliot Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 48-52.

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2. When we don't directly have a revelation from God in his word, we should ask God according to general principles from his word. We should bring the request that seems the best as far as we can understand God's will in the situation.
 - a) *Sometimes God will answer the request we ask.*
 - b) *Sometimes He will help us better understand the situation so that our prayer is moved to ask something else.*
 - c) *Sometimes He will remain silent.*
 3. We still should approach God in prayer with the belief that we have already received what we are asking (Mark 11:24).
- B. We need to realize that sin hinders our prayers (Ps. 66:18, Prov. 15:29; 1 Peter 3:12).
1. God does not hear only the prayers of perfect people because none of us are perfect. But, as we seek to live holy lives, our prayers will be more effective and in line with God's will.
 2. When we do sin, we can use prayer to seek forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9).
- C. When our prayers in faith are not answered, we must realize that God may have something better for us within His will. Two examples:
1. Jesus prayed in Luke 22:42 that God remove the cup of suffering that He was about to face, but He submitted to the Father's will.
 2. Paul pleaded with the Lord to take away his affliction in 2 Corinthians 12, but God had different plans for Paul.

Questions to Ponder

- Since prayer is so effective, why do we not pray more?
- How have you recently experienced the benefits of prayer?

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