



## Excerpt...God Wants Us to Pray

***“The eyes of many are closed, and they do not know that a supply for every need is at hand. Through understanding, our eyes are opened, and then we may see to lay hold of the blessings that were all of the time within our reach.” Nora Holm1[1]***

Prayer for most of us begins with our need for help. However, it is what our prayer life becomes that shapes the quality of our lives. Prayer is a privilege, a challenge, a delight and a mystery, but most of all it is a loving, creative and transforming fellowship with God.

The Bible reveals that God wants to be known and He wants to have fellowship with us. God making Himself known and encouraging us to know Him was the way Jesus Christ described eternal life, *“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*2[2]

Jesus described what close fellowship with God is like: *“He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him . . . and we will come to him and make our home with him.”*3[3] God created us to enjoy loving fellowship with Him.. He is our heavenly Father and we can approach Him in prayer as a child to his father. It is natural for children to ask their parents for what they want and trust that they will generously respond. We are to approach our heavenly Father with that same eagerness and trust. Jesus promises that God welcomes our prayers and will generously respond with good things.

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1[1] Runner’s Bible

2[2] John 17:3

3[3] John 14:21,23

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This truth will change our lives, but it will only happen if we frequently set aside time to acknowledge our need and *allow* God to be our loving Father. This is why Jesus made it clear that the one condition necessary to enter into the kingdom of God's love is to become as a little child so that He can become a Father to us. *"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*<sup>4[4]</sup>

When we observe the character and life of Jesus, we may think He was especially loved and gifted because of His unique relationship with His Father. But just before Jesus was arrested and crucified, He prayed for all believers. We learn from His prayer that we are meant to have the same kind of relationship with God as He enjoyed.

*"I pray . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."* John 17:21,23

Prayer was essential to Jesus. He found time to pray in the midst of a life of pressure, difficulties and continual interruption. He depended on His fellowship with His Father for wisdom and strength. In the few years Jesus spent with His disciples, He told them very little about how to spread the gospel or how to organize His church. Rather, He taught them how to pray. He knew that if they learned how to pray they would be equipped for life.

After Jesus died, the disciples were faithful in prayer. They had an inner freedom and peace in spite of the difficulties they faced. They were known for their hope, their love and their courage. If we are faithful in prayer like the early disciples, we will experience the same inner freedom and quality of living. Even when we do not completely understand our circumstances, we will have peace and courage. Assured of God's love, we will be confident He will see us through to victory.

1. What does God say to us about prayer?

**Jeremiah 33:3**

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<sup>4[4]</sup> Matthew 18:3

**Jeremiah 29:11-13**

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God's blessings do not come to us automatically. If they did, we would take for granted both the gifts and the Giver. Our heavenly Father waits to answer our prayers. Why does He wait? He wants us to seek Him in trusting dependence, as a child to his father.

***“The Lord longs to be gracious to you, he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice, blessed are all who wait for him! How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you.!” Isaiah 30:18, 19b***

The blessings of God are for the children of God. They come to those who believe and trust in Him. We can know some things about God through nature, science, art and life experience. However, the full blessings of God are for those who believe in all that God has promised.

“Belief...means adherence to, committal to, faith in, reliance upon, trust in a person or an object, and this involves not only the consent of the mind, but an act of the heart and will of the subject. Belief, then, is synonymous with faith, which in the New Testament consists of believing and receiving what God has revealed.” 5[5]

We have a heavenly Father who loves us so much that He wants to share our life – a Father who works with perfect love, in perfect wisdom and power.

2. What did the apostle John write about Jesus?

**a. John 1:12** \_\_\_\_\_

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**b. I John 5:11** \_\_\_\_\_

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When we become children of God, the gift of the life of God is breathed into us by the Holy Spirit. *“Spirit gives birth to spirit.”*<sup>6[6]</sup> This is called our spiritual birth, when the presence of God comes to dwell within us. However, God respects our freedom. We can either starve His life in us through neglect or we can nourish it through prayer.

3. Jesus appeals to us to seek His Father in prayer. What does He instruct us to do? What does He promise us will happen and why?

**Matthew 7:7-11** \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>6[6]</sup> John 3:6-7

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Jesus used three different verbs to set forth His promise of answered prayer. When we “**ask**,” we show a willingness to recognize our need. It is difficult for some of us to accept the fact that we are in need. When we “**seek**,” we have a desire to know the mind of God on the matter. It means we are willing to be patient until we receive insight into God’s eternal point of view. “**Knock** and it will be opened to you,” is an encouragement to be an active part of the answer. We are not to sit passively and wait for God to place the answer in our laps. We are to act positively to help bring about the answer. Jesus is encouraging a persistent journey of asking, seeking and knocking.

### ***Question for private reflection:***

*What do you think is keeping you  
from going to God more often in prayer?*

4. Jesus also encourages us to pray with others. What does He teach us?

**Matthew 18:19-20** \_\_\_\_\_

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Jesus is not saying that praying with others is more or less effective than praying privately. There are blessings in both. When we pray aloud with others, there is often wisdom and love that God can give us through them. Frequently others see our problems and responsibilities more easily from God’s point of view because they are not emotionally involved. In addition, barriers come down when people pray together and God’s love flows between them.

### **Question for private reflection:**

*Is there someone you could ask to  
pray with you on a regular basis?*

**Ask God to lead you to the person  
of His choosing.**

## **Jesus taught about the kingdom of God and prayer.**

Jesus went from town to town urging people to experience His Father's kingdom. He told the crowds, *"Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand!"*<sup>7[7]</sup> He was asking people to turn from their selfish ways and listen to what He was offering: spiritual birth, knowing God personally and sharing in the blessings of His kingdom.

The kingdom of God (or the kingdom of heaven) is where God reigns -- where a wonderful quality of life is lived in surrender to His will. Jesus taught His disciples to pray for the coming of God's kingdom, *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done."*<sup>8[8]</sup> When we seek God's will in prayer, He hears us and His kingdom grows within us.

5. What does the apostle John say about this?

**I John 5:14** \_\_\_\_\_

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6. How are we to look at life and the kingdom of God?

**Matthew 6:25-34** \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>7[7]</sup> Matthew 4:17

<sup>8[8]</sup> Matthew 6:10 RSV

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Many of us think it is not prayer we need. We just need to do better with our lives – become more organized or have a bigger house or a better job or enough money in the bank. But life is never perfect. Troubles find us and there is always something we want that we do not have. The answer is to yield ourselves in prayer to the will of our heavenly Father. He is the only One who perfectly knows our needs and can fulfill them.

***Question for private reflection:***

*How would seeking God's kingdom first make a difference in your life?*

As we learn to trust God, we enjoy a growing experience of God's kingdom within us. And the more we appreciate God's kingdom on earth, the more fully we will enjoy His kingdom after our death.

It is God's desire to give us the blessings of His kingdom and He has made a special provision for us to approach Him in prayer through our mediator, Jesus Christ. *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*<sup>9[9]</sup>

7. In the ancient Hebrew world, prayer was common. Jesus did not have to argue about its importance. But apparently many of the prayers He heard were insincere and lengthy. What did Jesus say about this?

**Matthew 6: 5-8** \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>9[9]</sup> 1 Timothy 2:5

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Jesus wants us to go to our room and close the door. In other words, we are to quiet ourselves, deliberately setting aside the vivid stream of our minds and opening our hearts to the presence of Jesus.

The above passage (Matthew 6:8) has been the source of some confusion regarding prayer. Why should we pray if God already knows what we need? It is true that God, in His omniscience (all knowing), sees our lives in their entirety. But this does not mean that our prayer is not crucial to the working out of God's plan. He knows what we are going to pray before we speak. But the way He *answers* our prayer may well be based on the fact that He knew from the beginning that we would pray about it.

Our willingness to surrender to God's care and plan may be the very thing God is waiting for before He brings something new into being. Prayer is not trying to get God to do what we want. It is seeking to know the mind of God and aligning ourselves with His purpose.

Some people think we should only pray about the important things. But how do we know what is ultimately going to be important? And by praying for small things, our lives become more peaceful and we are freed to care and pray for the larger things.

We must be careful not to reduce God to our level. He is the one who is concerned with the whole universe -- from planets to snowflakes and microcosms. Everything is marked by His creative power and love. God cares for the smallest detail of our lives and we will know His loving provision as we offer ourselves to Him.

***“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:13-14,16***

8. How does Jesus remind us of God's care for us and for every detail of our lives?

**Luke 12: 6-7** \_\_\_\_\_

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God is often most real to us when He makes Himself known in the small areas. It is then we grow in our conviction of His faithfulness and can pray confidently and earnestly about the larger issues.

9. What things are we to take to God in prayer and what are we promised as a result?

**Philippians 4: 6-7** \_\_\_\_\_

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Taking everything to God in prayer means sharing even the trivia of our daily lives with Him as well as our hopes and dreams, our failures and our weaknesses, our negative feelings and our thanksgivings — the circumstances which trouble or challenge us and the relationships which frustrate or bless us.

## God's Purposes for Prayer

To summarize this first lesson let us look at what the Scriptures say regarding God's purposes for prayer:

- a. To know God and His will for our lives.**

God wants to be known and He reveals Himself through nature, through events and through personal communion. He wants us to respond to His initiative by seeking to know His mind and His heart.

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***“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” John 17:3 “Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10***

***“. . . come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:12b-13***

Our prayers are not to be said in order to change God’s mind but to know His mind.

**b. To bring glory to God.**

The phrase “bring glory to” is similar in meaning to the word “glorify.” One of the primary meanings of this word is “to reveal the true nature and purpose of God.” When prayers are answered, God’s glory – His loving nature and purpose -- are revealed.

***“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.” John 14:13***

***“Those who offer praise glorify me” Psalm 50:23***

**c. To enjoy loving fellowship with God.**

God created us in love and is seeking the closest kind of loving communion with us. It is His desire that we return His love with our own.

***“. . . the Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.” Psalm 32:10b***

***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. And with all your strength.” Deuteronomy 6:5***

**d. To believe that God sent Jesus, His Son.**

God wanted to free humankind from their bondage to sin, evil and death so they could live in His love. To accomplish His purpose, God sent His Son to live among us. God wants all people to believe this.

*“Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, thank you for hearing me. (You always hear me, of course, but I said it because of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me).’ ” John 11:42 LB*

*“I pray . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” John 17:21*

**e. To experience eternal life (God’s kingdom) here on earth.**

It is God sharing Himself and His kingdom with us that gives us a new quality of life, abundant in meaning and creative fulfillment.

**“So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32 LB**

**f. To bless God’s people.**

If we see God as someone who loves us only when we behave well (as some children believe about their parents), then it is hard for us to believe that God wants to bless us — for it is our human nature to make mistakes. The truth is that God never withdraws His love and it is His delight to bless His people. Answered prayer is one of the ways God blesses His people.

***“the Lord is fair in everything he does, and full of kindness. He is close to all who call on him sincerely. He fulfills the desires of those who reverence and trust him; he hears their cries for help and rescues them.” Psalm 145:17-19 LB***

***“For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in you!” Psalm 84:11-12***

## **Personal Reflections**

I used to pray only when I wanted something important or when I was frightened. I was the center of my life and I often used God and others to serve my purposes. Now I know that when I pray, my heart, mind and spirit are linked with God and something wonderful happens in me, for me and through me to others.

There were two significant events that led me to a deeper prayer life. When I was in my early thirties, I committed my life to Jesus Christ. I was invited to a gathering in my neighborhood and there I was told by the guest speaker that God has a wonderful life plan for me -- better than anything I could bring about myself. I had been somewhat successful in business, but not in marriage. Married at 18 -- divorced at 22 -- married again at 26. Was there a life planned for me that was better than anything I could execute for myself? The speaker told me that, if I wanted to know this plan for my life, I needed to know Jesus Christ, who came to reveal His Father. I was skeptical, but I took a moment to consider what I had to lose and what I might gain. I invited Jesus Christ into my heart and into my life that day.

The second most challenging event occurred about eight years later. My husband was killed in an automobile accident on the way home from a bar. He had been an alcoholic for many years. At the time of his death, my children were twelve and fourteen years old. I was sued by the people injured in my husband's accident. My prayer life took on a new urgency. I depended on God more than ever before — for help with my children, my finances, my health and my future.

God knows me more than I know myself. He loves me more than I love myself. How comforting to draw close in prayer to someone who loves me and wants to help me with my life!

I soon discovered, however, that simply because I *wanted* to pray did not mean that I was *faithful* to pray. The greatest distance is from my head to my heart. I knew that God wanted me to turn away from my selfishness and my attachment to the world, but my knowledge wasn't translating into action. There came a day when God convicted me

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with the truth that I have always found time to do what I want. I asked Him to give me the desire and the time to pray.

I began by simply talking to God. I was sure that my desire and attitude were more important than what physical posture I used or the style of my words. I made my goals for my prayer times easy to reach so I would not become disheartened and stop entirely. I started to keep a simple prayer journal and soon realized that answers to prayer were

coming in greater frequency than mere coincidence and with greater effect than my human abilities could have produced. My trust in God's faithfulness began to grow.

I know now that the amount of time I devote to prayer is evidence of how much I have accepted my weakness and acknowledged my need. It is also evidence of how much I believe that God will meet me in my need and transform my weakness by His power.

There were times when my desire to pray would weaken. I would allow trivial things to fill my days and keep me from prayer. Then I would think, "I haven't been able to pray as I should. I am hopeless." I felt less drawn to prayer because I was looking at the past and my failure rather than looking to the future and to God's love. My guilt was driving me farther away from Him. One day, while reading the following Scripture, it struck me that I needed to ask God to change my heart so it would become a top priority for me to be with Him in prayer.

***"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees" Ezekiel 36:26***

When we want to please God, He helps us to be obedient.

***"For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." Philippians 2:13***

God showed me that the best part of the day to spend time with Him was in the morning. I gradually became more disciplined in the evening and went to bed earlier so I would be rested by morning and have the time and the desire to be with Him.

We have to be careful about the problem of guilt insofar as prayer is concerned because it can discourage us from praying. Most of the time we are not as bad as we think we are, nor are we as good as we think we are. The truth is, we are who God *says* we are. We are His beloved children. He loves us because of who *He* is and not because of who we are or how faithful we are to pray.

We are all at different places in our faith and in our life of prayer, but I am certain we have two things in common: our need to overcome the distractions of the world and our need to surrender to God rather than trying to be in control. There is often something false we are clinging to for happiness and feelings of control.

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How much better off we would be if we would surrender the selfish pursuits that we cling to and cling to God instead. He has a better life for us than we can ever find for ourselves!

*“My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.” Psalm 63:8*