

A New Year, a New Dependence

The Basics of Prayer

MYTH 1: Prayer has to be done with fancy words or special formulas.

FACT 1: Prayer is the conversation of the heart with God.

1 Samuel 1:12-13 “As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard.”

MYTH 2: Only really “spiritual” or devout Christian people can pray.

FACT 2: God will hear the prayers of anyone who calls on him.

Jonah 1:14 “Therefore they [the unbelieving, pagan sailors] called out to the Lord, ‘O LORD, let us not perish for this man’s life.’”

MYTH 3: You can only pray about big, important stuff and “things that matter to God.”

FACT 3: You can pray to God about anything.

Philippians 4:6-7 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

Prayer = Approaching God with reverent communication, talking to God.

Petition = Specific requests that you desire.

MYTH 4: If we have enough faith, God will answer our prayers the way we want.

FACT 4: God answers our prayers in four different ways. (at least)

1. He says “yes,” and gives you what you asked for. (Psalm 34:4)
2. He says “wait,” and gives you what you asked for later in his timing. (Hab. 2:3)
3. He says, “no,” and gives you what you need instead of what you asked for. (2 Cor. 12:9)
4. He says, “I will do immeasurably more than all that you can ask or think.” (Eph 3:20)

The Mysteries of Prayer

Why pray if God knows everything that’s going to happen?

Prayer builds faith, because prayer isn’t only about getting stuff you want – it’s conversation. (Ray) There are lots of parts to prayer that aren’t about asking him for anything – thanking him, praising him, confessing sin, etc. (Swirsky)

Because prayer is mostly about praising God and thanking him! (Marisa)

Prayer is for our good. It builds our relationship, our faith, we grow when we pray, we mature when we learn to pray in his will. (Rickey Williams)

Prayer is an opportunity to be a part of what God is doing. (Eric Nelson)

When we all pray together, the community can glorify God as we see him answer, and it builds our faith and unity. (Daniel Mowery)

Mystery: God chooses to involve us in his sovereign plans through prayer, for our good.

Since God knows the future, does prayer change things?

Acts 13:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

Mystery: God shows us that outcomes are determined by our prayer, even though God is never surprised and knows all things that have happened, are happening, and will happen.

Can anything inhibit my prayers?

Psalm 66:18 “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”

Proverbs 28:9 “If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.”

James 4:3 “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”

Zechariah 7:13 “As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear.”

Isaiah 1:15–16 “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean...”

1 Peter 3:7 “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way... so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Mystery: Even though we are all beset daily by sin and weakness, and so none of us truly deserve to have our prayers heard, there are some attitudes of the heart (manipulation, hypocrisy, self-service, hatred, pride, etc.), which God knows, which inhibit our prayer. God always hears us when we come to him in humble recognition of who he is.

The Necessity of Prayer

We must pray for our needs – food, clothing, healing, etc. (Matthew 6:9-13)

We must pray in order for the kingdom of God to grow. (2 Thess. 3:1)

We must pray so that God gets the glory, or he will not honor our ministry. (John 14:13)

Questions for Personal Study

1. What does it mean for you that prayer is “the conversation of the heart with God?”
2. Do you pray only for things you need, or do you pray robustly in terms of thanksgiving, praise, repentance, etc.?
3. Is there any sin in your life that may be inhibiting your prayers? Will you humble yourself to ask for forgiveness?
4. Are you praying regularly for God’s kingdom to grow? Why or why not?