

What Is Prayer

Simply put, prayer is conversing with God. Not just talking to the Lord but listening. The latter is easy (being quiet before God). The former is easy as well (saying what's on your heart). Merriam-Webster defines prayer as "an address (such as a petition) to God in word or thought."

Prayer is spiritual communication between man and God, a two-way relationship in which man should not only talk to God but also listen to Him. Prayer to God is like a child's conversation with his father. It is natural for a child to ask his father for the things he needs.

Prayer is not meditation or passive reflection; it is direct address to God. It is the communication of the human soul with the Lord who created the soul. Prayer is the primary way for the believer in Jesus Christ to communicate their emotions and desires with God and to fellowship with God.

Prayer can be audible or silent, private or public, formal or informal. All prayer must be offered in faith (James 1:6), in the name of the Lord Jesus (John 16:23), and in the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26). As the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* puts it, "Christian prayer in its full New Testament meaning is prayer addressed to God as Father, in the name of Christ as Mediator, and through the enabling grace of the indwelling Spirit" ("Prayer" by J. C. Lambert). The wicked have no desire to pray (Psalm 10:4), but the children of God have a natural desire to pray (Luke 11:1).

Prayer is described in the Bible as seeking God's favor (Exodus 32:11), pouring out one's soul to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:15), crying out to heaven (2 Chronicles 32:20), drawing near to God (Psalm 73:28, KJV), and kneeling before the Father (Ephesians 3:14).

Paul wrote, "***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus***" (Philippians 4:6–7). Worry about nothing; pray about everything.

Everything? Yes, God wants us to talk with Him about everything. How often should we pray? The biblical answer is "***pray without ceasing***" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We should keep a running conversation going with God all day long. We can pray under any and all circumstances. Prayer develops our relationship with God and demonstrates our trust and utter dependence upon Him.

We pray to praise God and thank Him and tell Him how much we love Him. We pray to enjoy His presence and tell Him what is going on in our lives. We pray to make requests and seek guidance and ask for wisdom. God loves this exchange with His children, just as we love the exchange we have with our children. Fellowship with God is the heart of prayer. Too often we lose sight of how simple prayer is really supposed to be.

When we make petitions to God, we let God know exactly where we stand and what we would like to see happen. In our prayers, we must admit that God is greater than we are and ultimately knows what is best in any given situation (Romans 11:33–36). God is good and asks us to trust Him. In prayer, we say, essentially, "***Not my will, but your will be done.***" The key to answered prayer is praying according to the will of God and in accordance with His Word. Prayer is not seeking our own will but seeking to align ourselves with the will of God more fully (1 John 5:14–15; James 4:3).

The Bible contains many examples of prayer and plenty of exhortations to pray. God's house is to be a house of prayer, and God's people are to be people of prayer: "***Dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love***" (Jude 1:20–21).

What is the purpose of prayer?

Prayer is an important part of the Christian life. It is the way we communicate with the Lord and praise Him. To understand the purpose of prayer, it is important to first understand what prayer is not. There are many wrong views in the world and culture about prayer, even among Christians, and these should be addressed first. Prayer is not

- bargaining with God.
- making demands of God.
- only asking God for things.
- bothering God and taking up His time.
- a way to control the Lord.
- a way to show off one's spirituality before others.

Many people believe that prayer is only about asking God for things. Although supplication is a part of prayer, it is not the sole purpose of prayer. Praying for the needs of ourselves and others is needed and beneficial, but there is so much more to prayer. A. W. Tozer warned, "Prayer among evangelical Christians is always in danger of degenerating into a glorified 'gold rush'". But God is not a magical genie who answers our every wish, nor is He a weak God who can be controlled by our prayers.

The best way to learn about the purpose of prayer is studying the example of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Jesus prayed for Himself and for others, and He prayed to commune with the Father. John 17 is a great place to see Jesus' use of prayer. He not only prays that the Father be glorified but also prays for His disciples and **"for those who will believe in me through their message"** (John 17:20). Submitting to the Father's will was another aspect to Jesus' prayer life, highlighted in His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: **"Yet not my will, but thine be done"** (Matthew 26:39). With any request we have, we must submit to God's will.

In addition to interceding for others, prayer is also a way to strengthen our relationship with God. Jesus set the example, as He prayed to the Father throughout His earthly. Those in relationships will naturally seek to communicate with each other, and prayer is our communication with God. Other good examples in the Bible of those who spent time in prayer are David, Hezekiah, and Paul.

Ultimately, the main purpose of prayer is worship. When we pray to the Lord, recognizing Him for who He is and what He has done, it is an act of worship. There are many examples of prayer being an act of worship in the Bible, including 2 Kings 19:15, 1 Chronicles 17:20, Psalm 86:12–13, John 12:28, and Romans 11:33–36. How we pray should reflect this purpose; our focus should be on who God is, not on ourselves.

Interestingly, the model of prayer that Jesus gave the disciples in Matthew 6:9–13, known as the Lord's Prayer, has all these elements. The first part includes praise and worship of God, and then the second part moves on to praying for God's will to be done. After this, there is supplication for ourselves and others, as well as asking for strength to deal with temptation. Jesus modeled this prayer for His disciples, and it shows all the reasons for prayer with the central focus of worship.

Prayer is an important part of the Christian life, and one's prayer life should be developed. Not only does prayer affect our lives and the lives of others, but it is also a way to communicate with the Lord and grow in our relationship with Him. At the heart of prayer is an act of worship to the Lord. God's Word places an emphasis on the power and purpose of prayer, and, therefore, it should not be neglected.

Author Warren Wiersbe sums up the purpose of prayer well: "The immediate purpose of prayer is the accomplishing of God's will on earth; the ultimate purpose of prayer is the eternal glory of God" (from *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: How the Lord's Prayer Teaches Us to Pray More Effectively*, Baker Books, 2010).