



The Doctrine of Prayer

What Can Prayer Accomplish?

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Prayer is a wonderful privilege and responsibility that all Christians have.
- B. There is much power in prayer due to the fact that we communicate with the Almighty.
- C. Through prayer our needs can be met. (Consider Matthew 21:22, Judges 16:28, 1 Samuel 1:27)
- D. Answered prayer requests are what we most frequently think of as the benefit of prayer. We have needs/requests and we bring them to God and he supplies our need as he wills.
- E. Yet, there is much more that prayer accomplishes for us.
- F. In this lesson, we look beyond the fact that prayer can accomplish what we ask for and study other aspects of what prayer accomplishes.

II. ALIGNING OUR HEARTS WITH GOD'S

- A. Our hearts are not always aligned with God's heart or his will for our lives.
- B. One of the blessings of prayers is that as we communicate with God in sincerity, he is working on our hearts.
- C. We may begin praying for one outcome according to our will but by the end we are praying for a very different outcome. This is God working in us to bring us on his page.
- D. One such example is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 12.
 - 1. Paul had been given a thorn in the flesh that was at the least an irritation and hindrance to him (2 Corinthians 12:7).
 - 2. He asked God to remove this thorn on three different occasions (2 Corinthians 12:8).
 - 3. The Lord eventually answered Paul saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9a)
 - 4. Paul ceased to pray for the Lord to remove the thorn because he had his heart aligned with God's through his prayers.



5. Now Paul said, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10)
 6. Paul had one desire when he began praying but by the end, he had a much different desire.
 7. This is because the Lord had worked on his heart and answered him through his prayer and changed Paul’s desire to align with God’s desire.
 8. Psalm 37:4 says, “Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”
 - a. This verse can be understood in two different ways.
 - b. One possibility is that as we delight in the Lord and seek after him, that he then puts righteous desires within us.
 - c. This seems to be what takes place as we communicate with the Lord. We begin with our desires in mind but we end with his desires in mind.
- E. Consider also Asaph’s example in Psalm 73.
1. Asaph was “envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” (Psalm 73:3)
 2. Asaph had his focus on the world which led him to observe “Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.” (Psalm 73:12)
 3. In his heart he had concluded that the wicked were better off than the righteous and thought “Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.” (Psalm 73:13)
 4. But eventually, Asaph turned to the Lord with these thoughts. It was when he sought the Lord that his heart and mind was changed and aligned with God’s heart, “Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.” (Psalm 73:17)
 5. Asaph thought he had come to correct conclusions and that he was correct when he sought out the Lord but after spending time in the sanctuary of God, the Lord helped him to see that he was wrong and then Asaph corrected himself and his heart was aligned with God.
- F. We turn our thoughts over to God when we communicate our hearts unto him and by doing so, we afford him the access to our hearts to align us.

III. A NEARNESS TO GOD



A. Introduction

1. There are several things that can cause a distance between us and the Lord.
 - a. Sin will distance us from the Lord.
 - b. A lack of communication with the Lord will distance us.
 - c. Allowing our hearts to grow cold will distance us from the Lord.
2. Certainly, no sincere Christian desires to be far from the Lord, yet, that is exactly where we all find ourselves at times in our lives.
3. One of the remedies of our spiritual distance from the Lord is prayer.
4. By seeking the Lord through Bible reading and opening our hearts up to him in sincere prayer, the Lord will draw nigh and our fellowship will be restored.

B. The Lord draws nigh those that seek him.

1. We have a responsibility to seek the Lord.
 - a. James 4:8 states, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.”
 - (1) There are two parties involved in this passage: Us and the Lord.
 - (2) The first party that must act is ourselves. We must first draw nigh to God.
 - b. Psalm 145:18 says, “The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.”
 - (1) Again, there are two parties referenced: Us and the Lord.
 - (2) We are required to take the first action and call upon the Lord.
 - c. Lamentations 3:57 says, “Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not.”
 - (1) The two individuals here are Jeremiah and the Lord.
 - (2) Jeremiah took the first action and called upon the Lord.
2. The Lord responds to us by drawing nigh.
 - a. In the example verses above we saw that it is us that needs to first seek the Lord.
 - b. Once we have sought the Lord and spoken to him, then the Lord fulfills his part in the relationship. He will draw nigh to us.
 - (1) “Draw nigh to God, **and he will draw nigh to you.**”



(2) “**The LORD is nigh unto all them** that call upon him”

(3) “**Thou drewest near** in the day that I called upon thee:

3. The scriptures assure us that when we pray to the Lord, he draws near to us. This is one of the wonderful accomplishments of prayer in our lives.
4. In each verse above, there is a specific pattern found. First, we call upon the Lord, then secondly, he draws nigh to us.
5. As stated above, we often find ourselves far from the Lord spiritually and we must take right steps to be close to the Lord again. We need to seek the Lord through prayer.

IV. INCREASING OUR FAITH

A. Introduction

1. Praying to the Lord about our cares in life is an exercise in trust.
2. We bring to the Lord our most delicate, sensitive, painful, and burdensome matters because we have confidence that he is able to help us.
3. Our belief is that the Lord can help us but just like the father of the child with a dumb spirit in Mark 9:14-27, in our hearts we say, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”
4. The father believed Jesus could heal his child but his faith would be strengthened when the Lord answered his request.
5. When we pray and ask the Lord for help and he answers and provides help, our faith is increased.
6. This is another accomplishment of prayer in our lives.

B. Manasseh knew that the Lord was God because of prayer.

1. Manasseh was a wicked king of Judah who wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Chronicles 33:1-9).
2. Because of his great wickedness and hardness of heart, the Lord brought judgment upon him and caused the Assyrians to take him captive to Babylon (2 Chronicles 33:10-11).
3. Finally, Manasseh was broken and humbled himself and sought the Lord in prayer.



- a. According to 2 Chronicles 33:13a, “And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom.”
 - b. The Lord heard Manasseh’s prayer and responded in a great way by delivering him from Babylon and returning him to Jerusalem.
 - c. So, one accomplishment of his prayer was deliverance from his bondage.
 - d. Yet, there is another greater accomplishment for him in prayer. His faith in God was established and increased.
 - e. 2 Chronicles 33:13 ends with, “Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.”
4. Because Manasseh humbled himself and prayed the Lord delivered him and his knowledge and trust of God greatly increased.
 5. In fact, his heart was so changed because of his increased faith in the Lord that he began doing what was right and pleasing to the Lord (2 Chronicles 33:14-16).
 6. When we exercise ourselves in prayer, our faith in God will increase!

V. HELPING OTHERS

A. Introduction

1. Often when we think of helping others, we think of aiding them in some form or fashion with our labours, skills, finances, conversation, etc.
 2. Have you ever had a missionary come into your church to present his ministry and never request your financial support but rather desire your prayers?
 3. Missionaries certainly need our financial support but they have learned that the greatest help they can receive is from God through the prayers of saints.
 4. Prayer is something that can be made for all people regardless of the intercessor’s talent, skills, finances, or abilities.
 5. A person that is physically confined to their home is able to offer the greatest help to others through prayer. Every Christian can help another greatly by praying for them.
 6. Prayer can accomplish great things for others who are in need of help.
- B. The prayers of the Corinthian believers were a help to Paul and those ministering with him.



1. Paul and Timothy begin the epistle of 2 Corinthians by speaking much of the sufferings that saints go through.
2. In 2 Corinthians 1:8 they say, “For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:”
3. They were in dire situations and were nearly defeated. To despair of life is extreme.
4. Though the Corinthians could offer no physical help as they were separated by a great distance from Paul and Timothy, they did still help in a mighty way.
 - a. Their help is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 1:11, “Ye also **helping together by prayer** for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.”
 - b. While Paul and Timothy were despairing of life due to their great trouble, the Corinthian believers were faithfully praying for them.
 - c. When there was nothing else that could be done, and even if there was; prayer was the greatest help to be offered.
5. Prayer is not to be an underestimated help for others. The key is that we must be faithful to pray for others for God works in mighty ways through our prayers.
6. We may never know just how much our prayers for others can accomplish but be assured that they are a great help to those we pray for.

VI. CAUSING THE LORD TO REPENT

A. Introduction

1. Do not misunderstand the meaning of this section. God has never done wickedly or sinned that he needed to repent.
2. The scripture is clear, “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19). God has no need to repent due to lying or having sinned but the Lord does repent.
3. The scriptural definition of repent does not mean turning from sin as is commonly thought. Genesis 6:6 gives the clearest definition, “And it **repented** the LORD that he had made man on the earth, **and it grieved him at his heart.**”
4. Therefore, the Lord does repent, or is grieved at his heart and will change his plans accordingly.



5. When the Lord repented in Genesis 6, he decided to destroy all, except eight, of mankind in a flood.
 6. We are going to look at a couple examples where God repented and changed his plans according to an individual's prayer.
- B. King Hezekiah's prayer caused the Lord to repent.
1. According to Jeremiah 26:18, the Lord had sent Micah the Morasthite to prophesy against Judah while Hezekiah was the king. The first chapter of Micah speaks much of God's anger and judgment against Judah.
 2. Isaiah the prophet had his ministry during this same period and also prophesied against Hezekiah that the Lord was going to kill him (2 Kings 20:1).
 3. God's plan was to use Assyria to judge Judah and take them captive and to end Hezekiah's life.
 4. But Hezekiah responded to these announcements from the Lord with humility and prayed, "I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore." (2 Kings 20:3).
 5. After Hezekiah prayed, the Lord responded. 2 Kings 20:5-6 says, "Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, **I have heard thy prayer**, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake."
 6. Jeremiah 26:19 tells us, "Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? Did he not fear the LORD, and besought the LORD, **and the LORD repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them?** Thus might we procure great evil against our souls."
 7. Instead of killing Hezekiah and allowing Assyria to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord repented and altered his plan.
 8. Because Hezekiah humbled himself and prayed to God, God hearkened unto Hezekiah and altered what he had intended to do. Prayer moved God in a different direction!
- C. Moses spoke to the Lord and caused the Lord to repent of what he thought to do.
1. God had delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt and brought them to the mount and was meeting with Moses, giving him the commandments.



2. Israel grew impatient and desired Aaron to make them gods to go before them and Aaron made for them the molten calf (Exodus 32:1-6).
3. This wickedness so disgusted the Lord that he responded saying, “And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.” (Exodus 32:9-10).
4. The Lord had determined to kill all the children of Israel and start over with Moses. Keep in mind that God is not a man that simply loses his temper and says things that he does not mean. What God said he intended to do.
5. But Moses interceded for the people and besought God to have mercy and spare the people (Exodus 32:11-13).
6. God had already made known what he was going to do but this was before Moses besought him and because Moses besought God, God changed his thoughts.
7. Exodus 32:14 says, “And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.”
8. It is truly astounding that the prayers of one individual can cause the Almighty to adjust what he had planned and go a different direction! This is the power of prayer and what prayer can accomplish.