

If God is God, Why Pray?

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Preacher: Wayne Schuller

[0 : 0 0] Our dear Lord Jesus, we pray knowing that you're before the Father's throne and we give you our heartfelt praise now and ask that as we reflect on your word together, we might sense your power and our responsibility to pray.

Please work this in us that we might be a prayerful people in this place. Amen. Amen. Friends, our God is a big God.

Our God, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a very, very big God. He is powerful. He is almighty.

He is sovereign. He is purposeful. He is self-sufficient. No one can stop him or block whatever he plans.

This view of God is a uniquely Christian view because to the unbeliever, people are big and God is small.

[1 : 1 1] But we actually know that God is big and people are small. For example, the prophet Isaiah teaches, all the nations of the world are like a drop in the bucket.

All the nations are as nothing before him. They are accounted by him as less than nothing in emptiness. All the nations of the world. Six, seven billion people are nothing to God compared to his greatness.

God is big and we are small. And if you think your God is too small, then I recommend the prophet Isaiah. He's a great medicine for having a bigger God.

Isaiah 40 teaches, To whom then will you compare me? Who is my equal? Says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see.

He's saying, look at the stars. Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name, because he is great in strength, mighty in power.

[2 : 1 3] Not one is missing. Not one star is missing from the sky. God numbers them, names them, sends them out. God is mighty in power, not just in creation of the universe, but actually in sustaining our universe.

Some people think wrongly that God created everything and then kind of disappeared, as it were, and handed control maybe to us, or handed, delegated everything over to laws of science, but actually that's not true.

The Bible says God sustains and holds together every atom in their place. Hebrews 1. And Jesus is sustaining all things by his powerful word.

Present, ongoing. Jesus sustains everything. He taught, Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.

Even the very hairs of your head are numbered. Omnipotence. Omnipotence. Not one bird will fall to the ground apart from God's power, God's will. Omniscience.

[3 : 1 6] Even the hairs of your head are numbered. God is all-powerful and all-knowing. A big God. And so today we continue our series on thinking about prayer, and we're asking the question, If God is God, why pray?

If God is that big, why pray? The Bible is very clear and very humbling to read, I think, that God doesn't need us. Paul teaches, The God who made the world and everything in it, He who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is He served by human hands, or we could say, or even by human prayers, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives all people life and breath.

God doesn't need us. It's very humbling. But if God doesn't need us, then why pray? Why pray? If God is self-existent, self-determining, which He is, I mean, God isn't knocked around like I am just by the emotional attacks and the heat and just the ups and downs of life.

God isn't knocked around like that. He knows what will happen and what He wills will happen. So why pray, is the question today. Many times the Bible teaches, God has ordained the number of days for each of us to live.

He knows, He has it written down, our days. Psalm 139, All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

[4 : 49] So why pray for the sick or those dying if the number of days is already kind of set? What difference does it make? I believe God chooses who will be saved.

Ultimately, it's His mercy. God says, I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy. So why pray for my unbelieving friend if it ultimately depends, you know, on God?

If God has said it, then why pray for it? God's power is so mysterious that He can even use evil agents, He can even use the evil choices that people make and the devil makes for His plan and purpose and good.

That's inscrutable, that's so mysterious to us. And if God is so mysterious in His will, why pray? Now there's one answer we don't want to give to this question.

It's a dead end and I hope you don't take it because many Christians take this path. That is to say, we have a reduced God to say that God is not actually all powerful.

[5 : 56] He's only mildly powerful. God actually needs our prayers to prod Him along or to alert Him to a need. God needs our prayers to wake Him up.

He won't act unless we remind Him. I think that's a weak view of God, a false view of God that's not biblical. You know, Christians say things like, God won't act unless we all get together and all get in the same place and all pray for the same thing.

Then God will be able to act. Then we'll release God to act. But surely that's a lie. Every page of the Bible shines forth God's majesty and power that God can't be that weak.

But we're caught in a bind between a weak God who needs our prayers and a majestic God for whom, while prayer becomes, we don't know how it fits in.

Is God so powerful that prayer is irrelevant? For example, are you tempted to think, I could pray, but it's only going to be luck as to whether it's God's will.

[7 : 01] And if I don't pray, it was going to happen anyway. Are you ever tempted to think that? Well, I've got three answers to this question today. Three answers. And they're all going to be an encouragement to constant prayer to a big God.

Constant prayer to a sovereign, all-powerful God. The first answer is the quickest answer. And that is to remember who you are before God.

You are made in God's image. You are created by God to relate to Him, by Him, for Him. You are made for prayer.

It's part of your design. It's part of your template for being. A critical responsibility of being a human in God's image is to pray. Prayer is commanded and expected by God's image bearers.

God will hold you accountable for not praying. There are many people I know, good people, doing good things. But God says to them, you're spending your life ignoring me.

[8 : 06] You were made for prayer. You were made for me. It doesn't count that you're doing good works in the world. You were made for me. Made for prayer. Prayer. The prophet Samuel understood this.

I mean, he knew it as an image bearer and as a prophet. He said to Israel, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you.

He knew that he had a responsibility to pray. And I think we all carry that responsibility as image bearers. So although God is big, I want to say you are also responsible to pray.

In the Bible, God's power never reduces human responsibility. And human responsibility never diminishes God's power. You are responsible for prayer and God is sovereign.

In one sense, there's mystery here. But just remember, it's what you were created to do. So pray. Answer two. That's answer one. Answer two.

[9 : 08] This gets a bit harder. God may be sovereign, he may have plans and purposes and ends in mind, but his plans actually include answering your prayers.

His plans include answering your prayers. So for example, in our reading in Matthew 9, Jesus is looking out on the crowds and he has compassion for them. They're harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

And the question is, whose job is it going to be to redeem these people, to reap this harvest? And the answer, of course, is it's the job of the Lord of the harvest.

Jesus calls God the Lord of the harvest. It's his job. It's his harvest, his lordship, his doing. But then Jesus says, pray.

Pray for workers. And so in Jesus' mind, God is the Lord of the harvest. It's his, his job to do. But we also have a role to play and a role to pray, as it were.

[10:15] Jesus says, it's God's job, but pray for it to be done and he will use you as a worker and as a prayer. God's sovereign will is to use our prayers. A quote from a theologian, God ordains not only ends, but also the means to those ends.

Prayer, simply put, is one of the means that God has ordained so that his children can use it to receive blessing from him. So God has ends, but he also ordains means to an end.

Let me give an example from outside of prayer. God has numbered the days that you will live, but you never say, I hope you never say, well, God's numbered my days. I'm not going to eat today, you know, because I'm going to live.

I'm just going to live. God's ordained it. That's foolish. Of course you eat and take medicine and see doctors. They are means that God has sovereignly set forth that you will use to live the number of days he's set.

And it's the same with prayer. God has commanded and promised prayer. It's a means that he will use to bring about his purposes. It's a gift to you. It's a privilege we have as God's people to be used by the sovereign God in our prayers.

[11:33] 1 Thessalonians 5 says, This is God's will that you pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. You see, think about what's going to happen this week in this church.

God may have already foreordained that the prayers we pray at the prayer vigil on Tuesday and Wednesday, passionate prayers, pleading prayers, humble prayers, he may have foreordained that those prayers will be used by him in mighty and powerful ways for the spreading of his kingdom.

I'm sure that's true in the short term and I'm definitely sure it's true in the long term that he will use those prayers for those ends, as a means to those ends. Are you coming to the prayer vigil?

Don't miss out on that opportunity to be used by God and to shape what is happening in the world. God may have ordained that your secret prayers for the ministers in this church is going to be the critical thing that keeps them from sexual sin.

God may have ordained that your prayers will be the means for that end or your prayers will be the means by which people will recover from sickness or by even friends coming to a saving faith in the Lord Jesus.

[12:56] God delights in his sovereignty to use our prayers. Even when we pray consistently with no answer to that prayer and never give up, Jesus said, God, the sovereign judge, wants you to always pray and never give up.

God's power, I think, is a great motivator to prayer. I think it's right to feel guilty if you don't pray.

When things go wrong in my life or in my family's life to people that I know I should pray for, I feel some sense of responsibility for that, that if I haven't been praying, that I should have been praying.

Conversely, when I hear about, say, what's happening with the growth of the gospel in China, I'm motivated to pray for that because I want to be part of that. I want a piece of that action.

I want to be used by God for a revival to pray for that. So answer one, we're made in God's image, made to pray, responsible to pray.

Answer two, the sovereign God promises to use our prayers as part of his plan. There are means that he uses to bring about his plan. The Lord of the harvest invites you to pray for the harvest, to even be a worker for the harvest, even though he needs you in either of those.

[14:17] It's God's gift to us. Now, answer three, I'm trying to think more about what is it about God's character and who he is and what he's done that should motivate us to pray.

And I'm thinking, our God has shown himself to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What is it about God as Father, Son, and Spirit that motivates prayer?

If Jesus is truly God, then why pray? Jesus entered our world, became one of us with that, with his sort of gunshot directed on the cross, to head to the cross so that he could die in our place, so he could wash away sin, propitiate God's anger and wrath.

God's death. If Jesus is truly God and the gospel is true, then we are won back to God. God has achieved our salvation and we can have fellowship with God.

We can know God. We can pray to God. I think prayer is a fruit of the gospel. It's almost the fruit of the gospel. Why did all these things happen in the gospel so that we could come to God, so that we could know God?

[15:32] God. For Christ died for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. So prayer, from our perspective, is the goal of the gospel. What is heaven?

What is heaven going to be? Heaven was going to be prayer and praise to God face to face. Heaven is prayer consummated. If you believe in the gospel, if you believe you're going to heaven, then you should be a prayer.

Prayer now, from a distance, is our foretaste of heaven, especially as we pray with all God's people and praise him together. Prayer is a fruit of the gospel.

If the gospel is true, if Jesus is truly God and is one salvation, then we should pray. And there's more to who Jesus is about prayer. Let me read you this great verse on prayer.

You may not know it. Jesus said, Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see.

[16:32] A ghost does not have flesh and bones. As you see, I have. Do you know when Jesus was saying that? It was, of course, on the beach after he had died and been risen from the dead.

He says, I now have a glorified human body. I am still fully God and fully man. And we believe in a physical resurrection. And also that when Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, he took that with him.

He took his humanity with him back to the Father. And so right now, one of us, the Son of God, fully God, fully human, sits at the right hand of God.

Jesus is God's right hand man. And we have a brother and an advocate and a high priest in the throne room of God, the center of the power, the center of his sovereignty.

When we pray, our prayers go straight to the Father's throne because we are in Christ and Christ is at God's right hand. How can you not pray knowing that?

[17:42] How can you not pray if you've got such access? One for you, how could you not pray?

We have a brother who can sympathize with our weaknesses, even our weaknesses in prayer.

A permanent high priest. So friends, Jesus is God and fully God, fully man at God's right hand. A great motivator to pray for the access one for us.

And lastly, if the Holy Spirit is God, if God is Father, Son and Spirit, why pray? If the Holy Spirit is God, why pray? Don't you know, says Paul, that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?

If you're a Christian, then God dwells in you in a unique way. God's image bearers are now God's temples of his Holy Spirit.

Sometimes Christians wrongly say, and I think this is a bit American, I'm not quite sure who started it, but they say, invite Jesus into your heart. I don't really buy that because Jesus is God's right hand.

[18:54] I think what they mean is to say that when we trust in the Lord Jesus, he sends and we receive the Holy Spirit, the deposit in our hearts. God dwells with us.

And it's incredible to think that 24-7 this week as you work, as you eat, as you do your grocery shopping, as you do your gardening, God dwells in you.

The Holy Spirit, God himself, dwells in you. It's like you are carrying around a mobile phone with free call credits, but you never use it.

You never ring anyone. And you see an accident happen, a car crash, and you never call for help.

The phone lies dormant in your pocket. Are you a living temple of God's Spirit?

Are you a prayerless temple? I'm not even sure you can have a prayerless temple. What kind of temple are you? Paul says, Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

[20:01] With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray. You're a temple of the Holy Spirit. Pray on all occasions. The Spirit is always with you.

Friends, God is God. We want, don't we? We want God to be God. We don't want to diminish His power or glory. We were created and redeemed for communion with God.

We were created and redeemed for prayer, for adoring God, for confessing sin, for thanking Him and for giving requests for every need. Your prayerlessness or your mediocrity in prayer is like a sermon that you preach to the world.

You preach, God doesn't matter. The Holy Spirit in me doesn't matter. It's irrelevant. Or you're saying to the world, God isn't powerful or He's powerful but He's abstract and mechanical. What message this week are you preaching implicitly to your spouse or children or people around you? I think the reason that a sovereign God allows us to pray and uses our prayers is that it brings Him so much glory to have His image bearers redeemed by His Son, temples of His Spirit. [21 : 22] Depending on Him in prayer, it brings Him so much glory. He delights in it that we become the vehicles of His glory. Everything about God, everything about God is a motivator to prayer.

The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Bible teaches both Jesus is interceding for us to the Father and the Spirit is interceding for us. God Himself has prayer within Himself.

God is relational. Of course we must pray. You can never say that God is so powerful that it becomes mechanical. He's all-powerful and relational.

So we must pray. We must pray for the sick, knowing that God can answer and delights to answer our prayers. We will pray for the lost, knowing that God alone has the power to make the difference in their lives.

In our Colossians reading, Paul says, pray for a door to be opened. Paul knows God is sovereign. When a door is opened, people get saved. So pray for it. I think the question, if God is God, why pray?

[22 : 38] If you let that become a kind of excuse not to pray, that God is sovereign, He'll take care of it anyway. I think that's at best an immature question and at worst a very weak excuse.

It's a petty excuse for prayerlessness to say that God somehow doesn't need, doesn't want me to pray. I think it's gutless to blame God's sovereignty for your own lack of prayer.

If your theology of God is a disincentive to pray, then either it's bad theology or it's good theology misapplied. It's a dodgy thing to blame God for your own laziness.

If you choose to live as a practical atheist six days a week, please don't pin it on God. Don't pin it on God. Everything about God, the Father's power, what He has done in His Son, what He has given us in the gift of the Spirit, is an incentive to a life of prayer.

prayer. The great reformer John Calvin has said, and this is a great quote, that we lie on earth poor and famished and almost destitute of spiritual blessing while Christ sits in glory at the right hand of the Father clothed with the highest majesty of empire, that we are so in needy and prayerless and He sits in such glory and honour that can only be, Calvin says, imputed to our slothfulness and our narrowness of faith, to our laziness and our kind of narrow mindedness.

[24 : 30] Friends, this week will you take seriously your responsibility as an image bearer to pray, as one who was created and designed for prayer?

this week, what advantage are you going to take of the access opened up to you through Christ at the right hand of the Father?

This week, what kind of temple of the Holy Spirit will you be? By what persistent and disciplined praying before the very throne of God will He delight to sovereignly use to achieve all His purposes?

Friends, let me encourage you this week and beyond to live a life of prayer, not despite God's power, but because of God's power and of everything He is and of everything He has done.

Let's bow our heads now and pray. Praise to the Lord, who over all things so wondrously reigneth, shelters thee under His wings, yet so gently sustaineth.

[25 : 47] Hast thou not seen how thy heart's longings have been, granted in what He ordaineth? Heavenly Father, our heart longings and our prayers are many, and we are so thankful to you that in your pleasure you've chosen to use our prayers to achieve your purposes.

We repent of our failure to pray for those things on our heart and those things in your world that are important. I pray, Father, that your character as Father, Son and Spirit, your identity, your being and what you've achieved for us in the gospel would motivate us to pray always and to pray in the Spirit continually.

Please, Father, don't let us in our famine, in our weakness, turn our back on the exalted Jesus.

Don't let us be a prayerless temple.

Don't let us treat our faith in you like a mechanical thing when it's a very real relationship we have with you. Lord, we pray that you would forgive us and by that same Spirit in us, empower us, to live a life of continual prayer.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.