

Why Do We Pray?

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Date: 22 February 2026

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[0 : 00] So let's pray together as we stand. Father as the disciples came to Jesus and asked teach us to pray so we come before you this morning at the beginning of our time of Lent and ask Lord that you would teach us to pray.

So speak to us now through your word we pray and draw us closer to you in prayer in Jesus name. Amen. Do please be seated. Well as we go through the next few weeks thinking about prayer we'll be asking ourselves lots of questions.

When should we pray? What should we pray for? What do we do when God doesn't answer the prayers in a way that we were after? And how do we hear God in prayer? Lastly how do we live prayerfully seven days a week so it isn't something that just happens on Sundays.

But today we're going to begin with a much more fundamental question. Why do we pray? Or rather why should we pray? Why would we willingly set time aside at home and at church to speak with God?

Well I want to give you three answers to that question this morning. Firstly we should pray out of duty. We should pray out of dependence. And we should pray out of delight. Duty, dependence and delight. We'll take them all in turn.

[1 : 26] Duty first of all. We are to pray to God because God told us to pray. That expectation is clear from the passage we had read a few moments ago in Matthew 6.

Jesus begins his teaching with the phrase when you pray not if you pray. And from the oldest of Old Testament times people have known that they should pray to God.

That it was their duty as people living in God's world to lift up holy hands and speak to God in prayer. As we read through the Old Testament we see prayer as part of tabernacle and then temple worship.

With God's temple being described as a house of prayer. In the Psalms and the history books we find prayers written down for us. As God's people poured out their hearts to him and brought their requests to him.

And as the gospel starts spreading out into Gentile areas. Prayer is taught as a vital part of Christian discipleship. So Paul writes to the Christians in Rome. Romans 12.12 tells them this.

[2 : 26] Be joyful in hope. Patient in affliction. Faithful in prayer. He writes to the Christians in Ephesus. Ephesians 6.18. And instructs them to pray in the spirit on all occasions.

With all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for the Lord's people. He commands the Christians in Colossae.

With something very straight to the point. Colossians 4.2. Devote yourselves to prayer. Being watchful and thankful. And that's just three of many, many references that I could find.

But I hope that whatever questions we might have. We do recognise that as Christians. One of the reasons we should pray. Is that it's our duty to pray. Maybe that's something we need to remind ourselves of.

In those times when we don't want to pray. That whether we feel like it or not. As Christians. It is part of our Christian duty to talk to God in prayer. It is a command.

[3 : 29] And we disobey him when we fail to come to God in prayer. Duty. There's the first one. Secondly. Dependence. We should pray to God.

Because we need to pray. You may have seen that sometimes cheesy posters that get put outside churches from time to time. It's one that I remember from my youth.

Seven days without prayer makes one week. W-E-A-K. But they're right. But I want to say that seven hours without prayer makes one week.

Maybe sometimes even seven minutes. Because time without prayer not only makes us weak. But it reveals our weaknesses. Because ultimately you and I are totally reliant on God for everything. And a refusal or reluctance to pray shows us how unrealistic we are in our abilities to exist or thrive in God's world without his help. So Sue read Jesus' teaching.

[4 : 30] Giving us the Lord's Prayer as a pattern for our prayers. So it might be useful to have that open before you at the moment. How can we live in a way that God's name is hallowed without God's help?

How can we live a holy life without his help? God is perfectly holy and righteous. We're weak. Easily led astray. Surely we need God's help. We're going to live in a way that brings him glory. How can we live in a way that helps bring God's kingdom to come without his help? We can't. Only God can bring sinners to repentance.

Not us. Only God can change the hearts of the wicked to walk in the light. We can't do that. In our work and worship and witness we need God's help or our efforts will accomplish nothing. As for doing God's will in our lives. Well firstly don't we need God's Holy Spirit to give us the wisdom to understand the scriptures and to know what God's will is? Later in the prayer Jesus tells us to pray not to be led into temptation.

[5 : 35] Because on our own we so frequently revisit those wells of sin and ungodliness that when we came to Jesus we said we would leave behind. Habits of selfishness and self-reliance, gossip and godless talk, doubt and disobedience cling to our old nature.

And without God's help and strength and courage it's so easy to give in. And although by God's common grace even those who don't acknowledge God find their basic needs met.

As Christians surely we know that everything we have comes from God. Our ability to earn money to cover the cost of our daily lives relies on God's provision to us of breath and energy and a clear mind.

And if we're living on our pensions or investments well only God's protection over those sources of income keeps them flowing. An international banking crisis, a devious chief executive, a created thief can rob us of all those things.

The fact that we have money to buy our daily bread, the fact that there is daily bread in those shops because God has sent the rain and the sunshine. So that the farmers can grow the wheat is a gift of God's grace.

[6 : 49] And of course that's true for everything we have isn't it? Our homes, our comforts, our family, our friends, the opportunities that come our way. Everything we have is a gift of God. We are totally dependent on God and his generosity for all we have for today and all we will receive tomorrow.

Look further down the Lord's Prayer when it comes to receiving forgiveness from God. That's something we don't receive unless we ask.

It's contingent on prayer. Seeking God's forgiveness and pardon requires that prayer of confession and an expression of trust in faith in Christ. And as for forgiving others, particularly those people who have caused us real pain, well we can't do that on our own.

That is a divine gift. We're to truly forgive those who have hurt us. We need God's help. Our lives are dependent on God giving us breath.

Our possessions and provisions are dependent on God's providing. Our ability to know and obey God's will is dependent on God giving us his wisdom. And if we want to please him, to glorify him, to become more like Jesus, if we want to be involved in the building up of his kingdom, then we need the help and in filling of the Holy Spirit, because we cannot do those things alone.

[8 : 07] If we want peace in our hearts in times of trouble, if we want an unassailable hope when times are dark, if we want to know that our sins have been forgiven and we want to have the joy of our salvation, if we want our courage renewed, find strength for the fight ahead, we cannot simply summon up those things from within.

We need God's help. And for that we need to pray and to ask. In his letter, the Apostle James writes that often we do not have because we do not ask.

Asking our Heavenly Father for intervention and provision shows that we've known how dependent we are on him, but it also opens up a way for God to act. And as Jesus himself tells us elsewhere in the Gospels, we have a Father who loves to give good gifts to his children.

The writers of Psalm 42 knew that. The range of emotions in the psalm is vast hunger, sorrow, pain, depression, hopelessness, sickness.

His enemies are mocking him for his faith. But he knows that the deepest hunger inside would never be satisfied by earthly solutions. For real lasting joy, for deep peace in the midst of trouble, for pardon and forgiveness from his failure to live as he should.

[9 : 29] And for a living, loving, life-bringing relationship with God, his Father. Well, he needs to pray. And so in the midst of those struggles, he cries out to God.

And he tells himself to cry out to God. And he does. Brothers and sisters, do we realise how dependent we are on God?

Dependent on his grace and power and mercy for even making it to the start of this new day? Are we aware of just how much we need God's help to accomplish anything good today?

All we have, all we are, all we will be tomorrow is dependent on God. That's why we need to pray. That's why we must pray.

It's our duty to pray. We're dependent on God, so we must pray. And lastly, we're to pray out of delight. We need to pray because being faithful in prayer both reflects and refuels our delight in God.

[10 : 43] See, surely spending time talking to our Heavenly Father is something that should be a delight and a joy to us. I read a sad article this week where a man said that over the years, his marriage had morphed from something that was loving and close into being something little more than just a house share.

The joys of intimacy and all the senses of that word had diminished to a point where there was little joy left. But they were still together. They still talked, albeit infrequently. But there was no closeness. There was no joy. Perhaps we too have grown too used to prayer, too used to the thought that we are a Christian, that that relationship with God has become cold and distant.

Maybe the wonder and excitement of spending time with the Lord and Creator of the universe, the Lord of all the armies of heaven, our Father, our Redeemer, our Sustainer, our Friend, has diminished because we have forgotten what a privilege it is.

Or perhaps our daily experience of our prayer lives have grown so dull and dry that any sense of awe and wonder, any sense of delight in God's presence has faded away to nothing.

[11 : 57] But if that is the case, we must do what we can to reignite that delight and wake ourselves up again. In prayer, you and I get to talk with God, to have his attention, to experience his peace and comfort, to bring before him our cares and worries, and to leave knowing not only that he has heard us, but that all those cares and concerns are in his hands.

We've just reminded ourselves in that last hymn just how powerful God is. What a wonderful place to bring those concerns. I want you to imagine for a moment, and you will need to struggle to imagine this, that you have a job working for a truly great Prime Minister.

A person of vision and integrity, of sound judgment, deep compassion, strong morals, wonderful leadership gifts. It would be amazing, wouldn't it?

Turning up to work every day, it would be a joy. Looking through the day to think, well, my role is rather insignificant, but this man, this Prime Minister is accomplishing some great things.

If you saw things change, the excitement and delight would grow, and it wouldn't go away. You would rush out of bed in the morning, because things were getting done.

[13 : 21] Brothers and sisters, we're not ushered into 10 Downing Street when we come to pray, but we're welcomed into the courts of heaven. And we don't talk with the Prime Minister of a small country, who is limited in his power to change things, but with the God of all glory and majesty, whose power is infinite.

That is a huge privilege. But it should be a time of joy and deep delight as well. And the fact that we struggle in prayer and so often miss out on this, and I'm speaking of myself here too, well, that is a tragedy.

And maybe if you're honest, that's your experience too. But perhaps starting from the position of prayer being a privilege would help us find fresh delight in coming to God.

And knowing that he hears us. And if, as with that sad man's marriage, we've noticed a dryness, the answer isn't to walk away, it's to dive back in, to seek a fresh intimacy with an experience of God until it does become a daily delight.

Because prayer should be a delight. Intellectually, as we remember who we get to speak with, and experientially, as we draw near to the God of all creation, and God draws near to us.

[14 : 39] Our hope is that the prayer course over these next five weeks might help us rediscover, or maybe discover for the first time, this delight. So please consider coming along, or at the very least, take a time to read a new book on prayer, and put what it says into practice.

Your spiritual health, your experience of God, your effectiveness as a Christian depends on it. Why do we pray? Well, it's our duty, it's a command of God. It's out of necessity, for we are utterly dependent on God.

And it is our privilege, and should be a source of ongoing delight, that our Father in Heaven is willing to talk with us, and to have us talk to Him.

May God teach us to pray. Amen.