

Session Two: Prayer

Why Don't We Pray?

Let's Remember



Let's Talk

"Seven days without prayer makes one weak." Allen E. Vartlett

"You may as soon find a living man that does not breath, as a living Christian that does not pray." Matthew Henry

"Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but laying hold of His willingness." Martin Luther.¹

"We must learn to measure ourselves, not by our knowledge about God, not by our gifts and responsibilities in the church, but by how we pray and what goes on in our hearts." J.I. Packer²

What is prayer and why do you think we do it?

¹ <http://www.christian-prayer-quotes.christian-attorney.net>

² Packer, J.I., *Knowing God*, IVP, 1993, p33

Overview Of This Lesson



Why Don't We Pray?

The bible speaks of prayer as though it is just common sense. There is no particular place in the bible where prayer is introduced. When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, giving them what we now call the Lord's Prayer, he was responding to their request: teach us *how* to pray – not what is that thing you are doing? (Matt 6). The idea or practice of prayer, in the bible, is just a matter of fact.

Read Genesis 3:8

What beautiful image is described in the first part of the verse?

What is the problem described in the second part of the verse?

Here are three reasons that cover the basis of why we tend not to pray or that we pray far less than we should.

Reason One: God Will Do Just What God Wants

Firstly, we believe that God already has a plan and **God will do just what he wants**. How could my prayers possibly make a difference to God's plans?

Does this sound true to you?

Reason Two: God Already Knows What We Need

Secondly, we have in our minds that **God already knows what we need** - so why bother him with the details. Since God knows everything and the bible tells us that he knows our thoughts before we speak them (Psalm 139), then prayer feels a little obsolete or redundant.

Does this sound true to you?

Reason Three: Our Time Is Too Precious

Perhaps a natural outcome of believing the first two statements is our third reason - **our time is precious**. We already know that our lives are busy and we have plenty of things to do - so let's just get on with it. God will do what God does - he knows already what I need - I know what I need to do, so let's all just get on with it. Ok?

Does this sound true to you?

Interestingly, the reasons why we should pray, are also the three reasons why we think we don't need to! When we look at these same statements, with a proper understanding of them, they should lead us to prayer. So, let's look again at the three statements and see that they are more of a reason to pray than a deterrent from praying.

God is Sovereign – he will do all that he pleases

God's sovereignty means that He is in complete control of everything: 'from international intrigue to the smallest bird-fall in the forest.'³

Read Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 46:10 & Daniel 4:35

What do these verses all say? How would you say this in your own words?

Read: Isaiah 46

This chapter compares the living God with idols.

How are idols described in verses 6-7 & 1-2?	How is God described in verses 4-5 & 9-11?

³ John Piper: <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/a-very-precious-and-practical-doctrine>

God Is In Control And All His Plans Will Succeed:

- 1) God is alone in his divine authority,
- 2) He is in control of the events of time,
- 3) He will call things into action just as he has planned them.

What That Means For Us

Recognising that God is sovereign means that **we are not** in control of all things. This does not just mean that there are things in the universe that are outside of our command - that is obvious. No, this means that our lives are also in submission to God's sovereignty. We may make plans to do this or that, but if those plans are not God's plans, then our plans will fail. We will become frustrated with our attempts to move forward and get things done because it is God's will that will triumph.

Read Proverbs 16:1-9

What is this passage saying about human plans?

*Knowing God is
sovereign means I
need to talk to God
about my plans.*

God Is Personal: He Cares About You

The second complaint about prayer was that God already knows what we want before we ask and so there is no point in asking him. This is a distorted idea of one of the greatest things about God. **God is personal and he cares!**

Read Psalm 139:1-18; Psalm 23 & Psalm 95:1-7

What is the Psalmist marveling at?

*God's sovereignty
matched with God's
love for us is the
most wonderful
combination of news
that you will ever
hear!*

Consider the three possible combinations for God and discuss how they would impact on us.

- 1) God is all powerful and yet unloving
- 2) God is all loving and yet limited in his power
- 3) God is all powerful and loves perfectly

Genesis 3:8-9

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'

When Adam and Eve turned their backs on God, he didn't turn his back on them. But he pursued them.

The bible is a story about men and God. It is ultimately a story about one man - the Lord Jesus Christ. This is where God became most personal!

While remaining sovereign, all-powerful and always in control - he also became one of us - a man. God's concern for the human race proved to be personal to him when he sent his Son into a world that didn't want to know him. **The truth is that God knows what we need more than we do. God knows how to help us, and he can do it!**

*Prayer is the obvious
benefit of a fixed
relationship with
God.*

*Prayer is faith
speaking*

God Has Time For Us – God Has Plans For You

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

What do these verses mean? Put it in your own words!

How are we described in verse 10?



Read 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

Visions like these are not the norm – even this passage describes it as a rare gift!

Notice, however, how the reality of heaven is described – the realness of God – and how Paul here describes the two worlds colliding – the realm of God with the realm of humans.

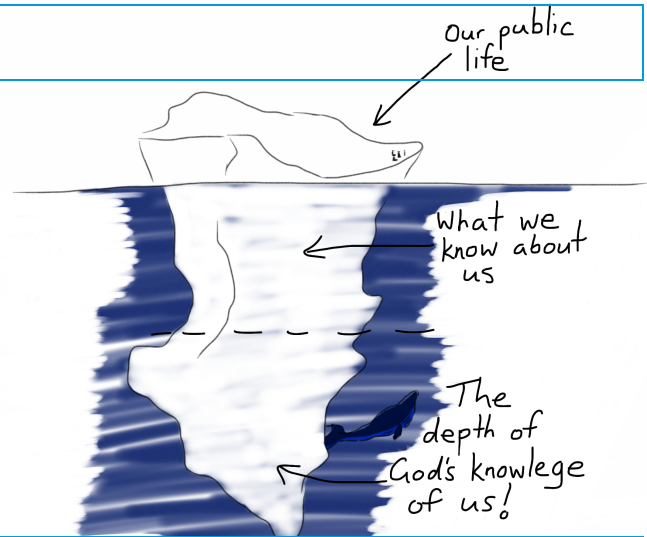
Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

What did Paul pray to God for?

What changed as a result of prayer?

As far as you are concerned, the greatest project that God cares about and God will work on is you!

Picture It!



Describe It!

Describe prayer – what is it and why do we do it?

Apply It!

If we don't pray, it is because we have fooled ourselves to think that we are in more control of our lives than God is. We have direct access to God through the LORD Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus, we get to call the almighty 'Father.' Prayer is not a meditation experiment. It is a real life conversation with the creator of everything. Our sovereign God has done everything for you so that you can come to him in prayer. He is always awake and always ready to hear us. He has plans for you and wants you to be interested in what they are. So, why don't we pray!

*Prayer is knowing the
one true God who
loves you and invites
you to speak.*

For Next Week

Look at how Jesus taught his disciples to pray in **Matthew 6:5-15**. As you read that passage, answer the following questions.

What things stand out to you in the passage?

What questions do you have when reading the passage?

What is Jesus inviting us to be like or to do?

"To pray is not only to be truly godly; it is also to be truly human. For here are human beings, made by God like God and for God, spending time in fellowship with God." John Stott⁴

Here are some more verses on prayer

Philippians 4:4-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; 1 Peter 5:6-7

⁴ Stott, John, *Christian Basics: an invitation to discipleship*. Grand Rapids, 2003, 91.

Listen To A Sermon

Does God Really Listen?

Even though prayer is an obvious expression of faith, it can still feel unnatural. Moving from the feeling of talking to the floor to talking with a God who listens is a matter of knowing who it is we are speaking with.



Read Something Great



This QR-code points to a PDF version of the first chapter of an excellent book on the topic of prayer: **D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation***. The whole book examines the way Paul prays but the first chapter is worth the price of the book!

