

Why Pray...

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Matthew 6⁵⁻¹⁵ / 1 Tim 4⁶⁻¹⁰ /

My basic assumption today is this; sometimes it is important simply to remind ourselves often of why we do some things. Constant reminders are important for things which are priorities. This is not a shameful thing. It simply means we are taking ourselves seriously. We are not assuming that just because something is good it will mean that we are motivated to do it. Moses commanded the people of Israel to make tassels on their robes so that they might sew into one of those tassels a cord of blue. The idea being that each time they looked on that special blue cord sewn into the tassel they would remember and rehearse the 10 commandments. Now was this a particularly cynical thing for Moses to command them to do? Did this indicate that he didn't trust them to obey? I don't think so. I think what he was doing was simply taking their humanity seriously. We are people who can forget, who can allow even important things to fall away. We need reminders. Today I want to remind you why it is so important to pray.

1. In the first place it is important because prayer is our chief means of communicating with God. Through Christ we establish a relationship with God. Indeed this establishment is called salvation. But we all know that a relationship only prospers as we communicate with one another. Paul advises the young Timothy to treat His relationship with God like an athlete in training. In other words he must put something into it in order to get something out of it. Salvation. Prayer is the most fundamental way of working on our relationship with God and if we are struggling in prayer we will find our faith becoming weak and vulnerable to attack. Paul in speaking to the Corinthians says this...

¹Companions as we are in this work with you, we beg you, please don't squander one bit of this marvellous life God has given us. (2 Cor 6. The Message)

Don't squander what God has given you freely. Begin to pray. Begin to cry out to God with all your heart. Begin to grow in prayer – take lessons! Yes, I think we have assumed that anyone can pray – that somehow once we become a Christian it all just comes to us. Not true. Even the disciples sought lessons from Jesus on prayer. If you haven't learned to pray then get someone older in the faith to teach you because this could be one of the most important lessons you'll ever learn. We pray so that our relationship with God will grow. [testimony – Colin Fitz]

2. We pray because we find ourselves in a battle. **As Christians we live in a war zone!** We have an enemy of our souls whose great desire it is to see our faith destroyed or at least reoriented towards something which may seem worthwhile but which can never satisfy. Boyfriends, girlfriends, physical beauty or prowess, wealth, popularity, a secure career – all these cry out '**Put your faith in me!**' and they are all fakes. None of these can compare to the promise of God in Jesus. None of these can compare to a relationship with the King of heaven. And yet Satan whose focus in life is to steal, kill

and destroy, would have us place our faith in these. He is against us. He invents strategies to steal our faith and kill our hope and destroy our belief. IN Ephesians this is made abundantly clear. Here Paul says quite plainly...

¹²For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph 6)

We cannot take this life of faith for granted. We are targets and we must take advantage of every means of strengthening ourselves against attack. So after encouraging the Ephesians to put on various items of armour Paul then comes to the thing which tops it all off – the thing which no Christian can stand without – prayer!

¹⁸Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. (Eph 6)

Pray, pray, pray! Don't give up. Tell God what's happening. Share with others you can trust. Seek prayer from them. Work together with others to strengthen your faith. Only in this way can we defend ourselves from the attacks of the enemy.

3. There is a vision contained in Isaiah 11 of what the reign of Christ shall bring. It is a vision of vindication for the poor and dispossessed and of judgement on those who have taken advantage of them. It is a vision of an incredible peace which fills the earth and in the 9th verse that peace is explained. This is what it says...

⁹ They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea. (Is 11)

The key to the fulfilment of this vision is the knowledge of God. Our goal as Christians is to **get to know God**. But how do we do this. How do we get to know God? One thing is clear. The knowledge of God is not available to us as any other knowledge is. We cannot sit back and examine God as we might examine another object. Our intellect may inform us but first it must gain access to this knowledge and this access is not primarily academic. Nor is this knowledge available simply through our emotions, our hearts. Again, while God deals with our hearts and longs for our heart to be filled with His knowledge we cannot simply appeal to our affections for this knowledge. We may sing wonderful songs about loving God but that love must be informed by knowledge or it will grow cold. This knowledge comes only through prayer. As we pray we invoke the work of the Spirit through whom and in whom all knowledge of God resides. Without the Spirit we cannot know God and the Spirit works through prayer.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We pray so that the Spirit may work in us and bring to us the wonderful knowledge of God.

4. We pray because we need things. One of the Names for God in the OT is 'Jireh.' This basically means 'provider.' God is the One who provides for us. It is fascinating to note then that we are still directed in the NT to **ask**. Jesus says in Matt 7 ¹⁷"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.' We are called to ask for what we need. And we ask through prayer. Now there is much to be said about this and I am not specifically wanting to deal with asking today. Suffice to say that one aspect at least of this instruction in prayer has to do with the nature of a healthy relationship. We discover in human relationships that one of the main causes of problems are unspoken and unexpressed needs. When we need something from our partner or friend but are afraid to express all sorts of difficulties arise in the relationship including things called 'pretend agreements.' These are agreements that remain unspoken and which are often only agreements in the mind of one party but which become a major part of that relationship for both. God does not want a relationship of **pretend agreements**. He wants us to be open with Him so that He may be open with us. We pray because we need things.

5. We pray in order that we might know our place. Perhaps the most deceptive lie of Satan revolves around how much we can achieve independently of God. The problem for us in dealing with this lie is that God does call us to action. We are not brought into the kingdom of God to live life 'out of the world' but to be lights 'in the world.' But this action is to be action 'with God.' Action, if you like, in partnership with God. Jesus came not to do away with human action but to redeem it and bring it back to its original purpose which was to partner with God in Creation. There can be no great thrill than doing this because when you truly partner with God you partner with the most exciting and powerful Creator who knows you and loves you more than you can ever know and who will be your perfect partner for life. The question is, how do we avoid the great trap of falling in love with our own power and activity?

This, in fact, is of the nature of sin – it is to fall in love with our own independence; to say to God 'I know best, I will be in charge of my life, I will direct my own ways thank you very much!' How do avoid this? We avoid it through a disciplined life of prayer. We deliberately forgo action. We deliberately stop our incessant activity. We deliberately avoid filling our dairies and day with busyness for a period when we can lay everything before God and seek God and seek His way and His work. Prayer by its very nature is a repudiation of our sinful belief in lordship of our own action. It is a rejection of the idea that we can make our way in the world **without God**. **We need this in our life. We need to reject our own independence and come back to God and we need to do this regularly. For too long the Church has gotten the Christian faith all mixed up with its own ability to 'be Church' – to independently be religious and it simply hasn't worked.**

Friends, prayer is needed. It's needed in your life now and this church needs it if we are to be the people God wants us to be.