

Prayer

Prayer is one of those topics that implies we have access to a being who is beyond our world and who can make a difference in the circumstances we may be facing. Interestingly, Wikipedia reports that most major religions in the world involve prayer in one way or another.

So the question is, does it work? Does who we pray to matter?

Isaiah sets a scenario of those who worship idols, the very situation that Israel encountered many times over in their travels, and contrasts Yahweh and the idols of the nations:

⁵ 'With whom will you compare me or count me equal? To whom will you liken me that we may be compared? ⁶ Some pour out gold from their bags and weigh out silver on the scales; they hire a goldsmith to make it into a god, and they bow down and worship it. ⁷ Even though someone cries out to it, it cannot answer; it cannot save them from their troubles. (Is 46:5-7)

And he goes on to share God's thoughts on the matter in the same chapter:

⁹ I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. ¹⁰ I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." (Is 46:9-10)

Now, in light of what Isaiah has shared with us, the question is sometimes asked, 'If God is so sovereign, what is the point of praying? Surely he already knows what he is going to do.'

This raises a very good point, and there are a number of very potent reasons that the Bible reveals to us why our sovereign God would want us to pray to him. It comes down to having a correct understanding of how God has sovereignly chosen to exercise his sovereign powers in relation to humanity.

Why Does God Call Us to Pray

Because God is sovereign, we do need to start with the manner of his existence. And what we discover is that the very nature of God as a trinitarian being reveals an inherent relational interactivity, which is hinted at throughout the Old Testament, and clearly revealed in the New Testament. This is witnessed in the relationship between the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, and confirmed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as a result of Jesus completing his earthly mission and presenting his perfected human life to the Father at his ascension to the Father's right hand.

This inherent relational interactivity is first seen in the creation narratives, which reveal that God has created us as his image-reflectors, and thereby has called us into a collaborative partnership with himself as his co-regents in creation management. (Gen 1:26-28; 2:7, 15)

Secondly, the creation narratives also reveal that God is a conversational God who speaks directly and personally to his image-reflectors, showing that he is not only personal, but inherently relational, rational, and reciprocal, both in his inner nature and how he has

created us to respond to him, and function with him and with each other. (Gen 1:26-28; 2:15-25)

However, beyond the relational inner nature of God, the biblical accounts also reveal God's intention, even after humanity's expulsion from the immediate presence of God, to continue to draw his image-reflectors into a collaborative and conversational relationship with himself, which again is clearly seen his response to Adam and Eve's disobedience. (Keep PP open here)

While he did expel them from the safe place of the Garden of Eden, he graciously provided clothing for them and explained how things would unfold for them.

Later, he spoke to Noah and called him into a collaborative partnership to save humanity through his family. He also called Abraham and his family into a collaborative partnership that would ultimately become the nation of Israel through whom the Messiah would come.

He responded to the cries of the enslaved Israelites and called Moses to deliver them from the Egyptian bondage. And after a confrontation with Pharaoh where Yahweh proved his sovereignty over Pharaoh's authority, Moses led the entire nation of Israel out of captivity into the freedom of God's purposes for them. Each of these patriarchs, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, prayed to God as part of their journey of growth in their faith-walk with God.

There are many stories throughout the Old Testament that we could turn to, but listen to what he had to say to Solomon and Jeremiah:

¹¹ When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace, ¹² the LORD appeared to him at night and said: 'I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. ¹³ 'When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, ¹⁴ if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. ¹⁵ Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. (2Chron 7:11-15)

While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him a second time: ² 'This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it – the LORD is his name: ³ "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." (Jer 33:1-3)

The Apostle Paul has a number of things to say about prayer – here is an example:

⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7)

Paul outlines for us the practical nature of prayer and the supernatural outcomes of relating with our God through the avenues he has given us of our faith in Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, utilising our gifts of language and understanding of our circumstances.

Finally, Jesus actually shows us how to pray through what we now know as the Lord's Prayer – he gives us a practical format with which we can build our prayer times around:

⁹ "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

(Matt 6:11-13)

There are seven discernible topics in the format that Jesus has provided us with, and in a few weeks we will begin to work our way through them, spending a week on each topic. We will conclude that walk through Jesus' prayer with a practical example of how I sometimes use that format in my own prayer experience.