

## What Is Prayer? | Ephesian 6:18

What is prayer? As the video made clear, prayer is simply talking to God. But it is more than that. It is also listening to God. It is best described as a conversation with God, where both parties are given a chance to speak and be heard.

But why would we want to talk to God? The film poked at some ideas that make us smile, but sadly some people believe. Some pray to avoid disaster, or so they think. Some pray because they don't want to be struck by lightning! Some pray because they were told to – of course all Christians pray! But there has to be a better reason why people will spend hours in prayer, and say they want more! There must be a reason why those who spend the most time in prayer seem to accomplish the most for God. There must be a reason why the people who seem most peaceful in life are the ones who pray the most.

Why is this?

Because praying is about building a relationship with God. It is not simply about rattling off our list of things we want God to do for us. It is far more than the words we speak – or think – in the name of prayer.

Prayer, at its heart, is a means to build relationship with God. Back in the first book of the Bible, the book of Genesis, we read that God used to walk in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve and talk with them. We are not told what they talked about but we know that Adam and Eve had a great relationship with God for years, maybe centuries, before sin entered the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience. But as they walked through the garden and talked together, conversing like friends, that was prayer.

Sin drove Adam and Eve from the presence of God. You may remember that Adam and Eve hid when God showed up for their daily stroll and chat. They felt guilty. They felt shame. Something had come between them and God. The relationship had been damaged.

From that time forward God has been reaching out to people, trying to establish a relationship with them, but always there is that sin problem. The wrong we have done makes us push God away. In fact, we sometimes think we do not need God at all and do not even try to establish a relationship with him. This breaks God's heart for we were created for this one purpose, to have a relationship with our Creator, with God, one that would last through all eternity.

So at just the right time God sent his Son, Jesus, to bear the guilt and shame and punishment our sins deserved. The wages of sin was death, so Jesus died to take that on himself. Now all who confess their sin, repent and turn to Jesus for forgiveness find that the wall that separated us from God has been broken down. We are able to come into God's presence and once more walk with him, and talk with him. The relationship lost in the garden has been restored through Jesus.

Every relationship requires communication, a sharing of ideas, thoughts, dreams, goals, stories. This is true in our relationship with God. It also requires effort and commitment to communicate. But since our relationship with God is built on the principle of love – God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16) – and “we love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19) – we rather enjoy spending time talking and listening to God.

An important and pleasant part of my day is sitting down with Lise and just talking. We talk about our days, our kids, our church family, our aches and pains, our past holidays and the ones we hope will happen in the future. Talking and sharing and getting to know each other better is all part of a healthy relationship.

And prayer is that wonderful gift of communing with God, speaking to him, yes, but also hearing from him.

And this is what we are called to do in Ephesians 6:18: **“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 all the Lord’s people.”**

Pray in the Spirit, Paul says. This is important. But what does it mean? Does this mean pray in unknown languages or tongues? No, here it is about our relationship to God. When Christ becomes Lord of our lives the Holy Spirit comes to live within us. He desires to direct our lives, shape our lives and work through our lives. It is the Holy Spirit who will connect us to Jesus and the Heavenly Father, and the Holy Spirit communicates what God wants for our lives.

Praying in the Spirit is praying in submission to the Spirit. And here is a great promise: The Holy Spirit will even help you pray. Romans 8:26 says: **“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;”**

That is very good news for all of us. The Holy Spirit is helping us pray, taking the real needs to God. We are not alone in prayer – God even helps us in that.

Why? Because above all things God wants to have a relationship with you! He loves you and wants to be in your life. He is always near us, waiting for us to invite him in.

Since we are called to pray in the Spirit, we must be sure the Spirit lives within us as. This will be true for all true believers of Jesus Christ.

Then it says we should pray at all times, or on all occasions. How does this work?

This means we live with the awareness that God is always with us. When we jump on the bus – he is there. When we sit in class at school, God is with us. When we head to the office, or dust the shelves at the store, or do the laundry at home, God is with us. This means you can talk with him at all times.

There are times you may **not** want to break out in conversation to God – like in your Calculus class or in the grocery store. You may want to whisper a prayer, or think a prayer, knowing God is with you: “God, I need help with this question!” or “God, thanks for all the choices we have in our stores!”

Though you may have a great conversation with Jesus as you drive your car, you still need to pay attention to the road and the other cars as well. So God does not get your full attention. It would be good to set aside some time when God gets your undivided attention – no TV, no cell phones, no distractions - just you and God in conversation...

Think about it – God is with us always, so why not acknowledge him more through your day? On all occasions...

With all kinds of prayers...

Often we start our prayer life with memorized prayers. Remember the prayer your parents taught you to pray before bed? Mine was, “Now I lay me down to sleep, pray the Lord my soul to keep...” Or maybe your first prayer was a prayer for the food: “Come Lord Jesus, be our guest. May this food to us be blessed. Amen.” These are good when we start out praying. The best prayer to memorize would be what many call the Lord’s Prayer, or the “Our Father.” This can really help you commune with God if you really mean what you say.

But you will soon find you want to say more. Then go ahead and talk to God as you would to a friend. And know that you can share anything with God. Paul goes on to say we can pray for the requests we have. Our lives are filled with needs, especially when it comes to living as a strong, fruitful Christian. Requests, or petitions, sometimes look like a list of people who are sick or going through difficulties. Sometimes the requests are for the salvation of family, friends or even our neighbours. Sometimes the requests are for finances, or a job, a promotion. Requests can be for anything.

In the context of this verse, Paul is speaking about spiritual warfare. He has told Christians that this journey with Jesus is not an easy one, that there is an enemy of our souls who will attack and try to bring you down. God has provided armour to protect you, and he has given you a very powerful weapon to destroy the plans and purposes of Satan: prayer.

There are people who do not think of prayer as a weapon, but Paul believed it was. He asked for prayers so that he would share Jesus fearlessly and clearly (v. 19)

I read this week someone refer to prayer as calling for an air strike. When you pray, you’re calling in the big guns. You’re not just doing what you can do; you’re unleashing the power of heaven to do what God can do.

This article went on to describe a mountain village in Mexico. There was a group of communists in that town who intended to violently oppose the revival meetings taking place, and their mob

was waiting outside the meeting hall with clubs and torches. Of course, the Christians INSIDE had no weapons - no way of defending themselves... and eventually, they would have to leave. So they held a prayer meeting, they all knelt down and prayed, and when they marched out to face the mob - the mob had disappeared. They had called in an air strike! ([Jeff Strite](#) on Aug 30, 2020)

**“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12)**

How can we successfully fight this battle? Calling on God through prayer.

Did you know that you can share your anger, your frustrations, your doubts and fears with God in prayer as well? We sometimes think we need to present to God our most put together self, but the truth is, He knows we are a mess at times. In fact, he knows it better than we know it ourselves.

Did you know that 1/3 of the Psalms are what they call Psalms of Lament. These are songs, yes, but also prayers to God that express the deep disappointment, disillusionment and pain of the believer who is still seeking God despite that pain.

We read this is Psalm 13:

How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
<sup>2</sup>How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

The Psalmist is very honest with God about what he is feeling. I believe God is pleased with that kind of honesty, especially when it is followed by words like these from that same Psalm:

But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
<sup>6</sup>I will sing the Lord's praise,  
for he has been good to me.

All kinds of prayers can include a cry for help, or a shout of anger, or a plea for answers. God can handle our emotions as much as our problems.

When I was eighteen and lost my father to cancer, I jogged every morning from my home to the cemetery and back again. On that journey, as I ran along that quiet country road, I would pray. At least today I recognize it as prayer. I would sometimes yell at God, “Why?” At other times I just wept. Sometimes I told God how unfair he had been to take my dad, and at other times I

simply asked God to give me strength. Looking back I realized that all of that was communicating with God, building a relationship that was real. And though I never heard the voice of God, I felt his presence as I ran, and I now know that the answer to all my prayers at that time could be summed up in this one response from God, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

All kinds of prayers and petitions –

And pray for one another. You are not the only one going through spiritual battles. Every one of your brothers and sisters in Christ is being tested and tried every day as well. Some are standing strong, some are finding it hard. We need to pray for each other, that God would give strength and wisdom and faith and hope and joy...

This month we have focused on the privilege of prayer, the invitation of God to commune with him, to build that relationship and get to know him better. May we not look at prayer as simply a duty, or a means to get something from God, but as the way we build a relationship with Jesus. May we look forward to spending time in prayer. May we value it as one of God's greatest gifts to us for the journey.

One last story, and it comes from Switzerland. One day a group of amateur climbers was scaling part of the Matterhorn mountain in Switzerland.

As they came to a narrow, hazardous place a gust of wind swept down on them. The experienced guide, knowing the danger this posed for the group, quickly shouted, "Get down on your knees! You are only safe on your knees!" The group immediately dropped to their knees.

How true this is for the Christian as well, right? We are only safe on our knees. May we be people known for our love, yes, but also for our desire to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers. Amen.