

## Seven Reasons to Pray – Some Obvious, Some Not so Obvious! By Dan Hayes

This article is an unapologetic attempt to motivate ...ME! Yes, me. Because if anyone needs help in getting motivated to pray, it's yours truly. I mean, I know prayer is important. There's sure enough of it in the Bible, and you can find tons of books on prayer. Not only that, but all the godly people I've ever met testify to the crucial nature of prayer in their lives. So I understand I should pray but ...

Well, let be honest. Sometimes (often?) prayer is hard and even confusing for me. As Tim Downs asks, "Is it hard to pray to an unseen, infinite, omniscient being? You bet!" And, living in this world so bathed in materialism, about the only reason people give me for praying is "to get answers." So when I don't get the answers I want (and sometimes not even any answers), I don't know why I should keep praying. So ...

"What's that," you say? "You feel that way, too? You think everybody feels that way? You just gave up praying three weeks ago because you didn't have any more motivation either?" I understand totally.

If any of the rest of you out there feels the same way, come along as we explore some reasons.

### Why Pray!

Well, as I said, sometimes you get the impression that prayer is a grocery list: "Our Father, who art in heaven ... gimme, gimme, gimme! And, by the way my name is Jimmy!" This is sort of a "shop'-till-you-drop" method of praying. But I cannot see that as the prime reason nor the most satisfying reason.

So sometime ago I began to study how and why Jesus prayed. After all He got more answers than anyone else, and He seemed to have more than one reason to pray. I was amazed! First, because it seemed like He prayed all the time. The Bible says, "He would often withdraw to the wilderness and pray." (**Lk. 5:16**) Often is right. He prayed almost every chance He got. He was sinless, so it wasn't that He was praying for forgiveness of sin or anything like that. Why, then, did He pray so much?

The more I study, the more good motivations I found to pray. I found they're basically the ones Jesus Himself had. And since, as I said earlier, I'm often flummoxed about prayer and get discouraged, these reasons almost always give me a lift – and many times even a jolt. So here goes!

I am first called to prayer because it is a key vehicle to building my love relationship with Jesus Christ. Hear me now – this is important. Christianity is not primarily rules. It is a relationship.

Aren't you sick (I think everybody is) of "rules based" Christianity? Every day somebody's got another rule for us to follow to be "good" Christians. Don't get me wrong. Certainly there are commands in God's Word and promises as well. Certainly Christ has standards, but we don't become Christians because we "receive standards." We become Christians because we receive Christ, who loves us, died for us, lives in us daily.

What we need, then, is to build our love-grace relationships with Him. And we tend to know so little about love-grace relationships. We have to learn to allow Him to embrace us, to care for us, to point out our needs (and how to fill them). We need to listen to Him, and we desperately need to talk to Him.

Where and how is all this done? A big part of it occurs as we learn to pray prayers that affect an inward relationship with Him. In **Ephesians 3:14-19**, Paul prays, "that you may be able to comprehend ... what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know [by experience] the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge ...

"Know" in this passage in the same word used for the intimate closeness of a husband and wife in sexual embrace. "Whoa – too strong for me, Dan." Well, the Bible doesn't think so. Paul is praying that you and I will experience that kind of love with Christ – not sexual, but intimate, deep, close, unfettered. It is so deep that Paul says it "surpasses knowledge." Imagine he wants us to **know** what is too deep ever to be **known!**

Where do we experience this? One place we can learn to do so is (surprise!) in prayer. Even Paul's desire for us to experience this is voiced in a prayer (**Eph. 3:14**). When we "get down and get honest" before God, we are on His turf in a unique way. Seldom do we get closer to Him than in prayer. As we learn to pray for Him to show up inside of us, in ways we can experience, He manifests Himself often in our emotions.

One girl who learned to pray this way wrote the following: "I now know Christ is here all around me, just waiting for me to reach out, to let Him love me." When we pray, we can pray to experience this love, to be bathed in it, to learn how to give it back, to learn how to let it seep into the dry cracks and crevices of our lives.

In fact, the longer I live, the more I think that the **core** reason for the gift of prayer is that we learn to receive, experience, and return His love in genuine relationship. Prayer is one place where God can get at us (and we think prayer is for getting at Him!) to minister to us deeply. Knowing this, we may find ourselves becoming more eager to spend time with Him.

Second in our list of reasons is that prayer is an important instrument in our overcoming sin and temptation. Perhaps no experience in the earthly life of Christ is more instructive on prayer than Jesus' teaching and subsequent modeling in the **twenty-second chapter of Luke**. The fact that his disciples were patently oblivious to what was happening only shows us our same frailty today.

In **verse 39**, Luke sets the scene. On the night before His death, Jesus and His apostles (now eleven) have left the upper room. They have navigated the winding path up the Mount of Olives to the grove called Gethsemane. The eleven are troubled and confused about all they have seen and heard so far, yet Jesus knows that the greatest temptations are soon to be before them – His capture, His trials, His scourging, His mockery, the lure of their denial, His Crucifixion.

In **verse 40**, mindful of their need for fortitude, He addresses them. He says, "pray [in order] that you may not enter into temptation." What did He mean? He simply meant that the antidote to yielding to the temptations of fear, discouragement, and despair was fervent, heartfelt prayer. This would fortify their faltering faith and courage. How could He know this? Because He, too, faced His own darkness. Looming in the next few hours was the enormity of death and hell for the combined sins of humanity. He came to the culmination of His purpose on the earth, and the terror of that must have clutched at His throat. Even more subtle, perhaps were the whispers of rationalization which rose seductively from the tempter.

"Certainly they won't appreciate what I am doing for them. They will cast it away. Many will ridicule Me and trample My Father's gifts underfoot. How can I bear the sins of the butchers of babies in Bethlehem? How can I stand to be clothed in the sins of all of the child molesters and mass murders and the Adolph Hitlers of the ages? How can I bear the devil's glee as he turns the screws of my agony?"

"Perhaps there is another cup. Yes, perhaps I can let this one pass, return to My gracious Father from whom I have never in all eternity been separated. Yes that possibility exists. I can go to Him now, avoid the dreaded cross, discuss it further, find an alternative plan ...."

We are naïve if we think these thoughts and these temptations to abort His mission in the eleventh hour did not occur to Him. Far greater than the disciples' temptation was the one He faced, and how infinitely more cosmic were its ramifications. One sees the shadowy figure of Lucifer himself delivering these thoughts to Christ.

So what did Jesus do? How did He cope? He modeled exactly what He had told His struggling band to do. He prayed so that He could defeat (not "enter in") temptations so intense, that His sweat was bloody. He was in such agony that, in answer, an angel became visible to help Him bear up under the strain.

And bear up He did! For triumphantly, at the end of that hour, he could rise from prayer, having settled with His Father, "not My will but Thine be done." Prayer had been the means of His victory. He returned to His men, only to find them asleep! He had told them to pray. Instead, they followed the college students' motto: "When is doubt; sack out!"

He roused them (maybe none too gently). He confronts their tiredness, their crankiness at being awakened, and says again (verse 46), "pray that you may not enter into temptation."

Notice that He told them this in the beginning of this passage, then He demonstrated it in the body of this passage, and he reiterated it at the end of this passage. When you face temptation, PRAY, PRAY, PRAY! That is what will see you through. That is what He is trying to teach. It is a simple message but hard to remember.

Well, how about you? How about me? Usually we pray only after we have yielded. What about seeing prayer as our first (not last) option: the fortifying of our courage and strength prior to our temptations? If we would pray more, perhaps we would yield less!

Third in our series of reasons to pray is the following: we pray because prayer is crucial in determining God's will.

OK. Maybe you feel on firmer ground here. Many say, "I always use prayer when I want to know God's will. I pray about my choices; and, when I have 'peace' about one of the options, then I go with it."

How many times have these words been uttered?—"I did it because I had peace about it!" But, is that really the purpose of prayer? Prayer certainly is vital in determining His will, but not because it gives us peace. Let me show you how faulty such thinking is (and I thought this way for a long time). How many of you have ever shared your faith, witnessed to another person?

Well, right before you shared your faith, which was probably "God's will", how many of you felt this warm, calm sense of 'peace'? Weren't you rather scared, nervous? Perhaps your Adam's Apple turned to applesauce, and the butterflies in your stomach turned to helicopters! Your palms sweated. Even your hair sweated. No great feeling of peace there, but you did it anyway because it was God's will, right!

You see, you knew it was God's will in other ways besides subjective emotion. You used God's Word, the volitional promptings of the Holy Spirit, and maybe some training you had received. Peace is often only a synonym for comfort or relief, behind

which people hide so they won't really have to find God's will. God's real will often produces scary feelings, not warm fuzzy ones.

So wait. How does prayer help determine His will then? Jesus again gives us a demonstration in Luke's Gospel. Read the **sixth chapter, the twelfth through the sixteenth verses**. Here, He prays all night about what seems at the time an insignificant issue in history: the choosing from the crowd which followed Him, a special group of disciples which we now know as Apostles.

Who would have cared what group of men an obscure rabbi in an obscure province of an obscure corner of the Roman Empire chose for leadership. No major newspaper or television station covered the story of that all-night prayer vigil. Yet 2,000 years later, 2.15 billion people around the world call themselves by this "obscure" rabbi's name because of those prayers.

Obviously, what He needed to know was which of His many followers in the crowd were chosen by His Father to be Apostles. How did prayer help? It helped in the way John Wesley described centuries later. "I find," Wesley said, "that the chief purpose of prayer in seeking God's will is that prayer puts my will into an unprejudiced state. Once my will is unprejudiced about the matter, I find that God suggests reasons to my mind why I should or should not pursue a certain course."

The chief purpose of prayer, then, is to get our wills unbiased! The purpose is not to give us an ethereal sense of comfort. See, we usually pray to God about His will in some area, knowing (usually) that we are already leaning in a certain direction. We implore Him first to help our wills move back to the center – that is, willing to do whatever His will is. Once we arrive there (and it may take some time), He shows us through our minds why one alternative is better than another and therefore is His will for us.

Thus it must have been on that night for our Savior. As He prayed, He must have had preferences for His followers. He probably had a list – at least a mental one. Perhaps Peter was already on it, but perhaps Andrew was not. Thomas certainly wouldn't have been on mine, and neither would Simon the Zealot. Maybe they weren't on Jesus', either. Yet, through the work of His Father and His own yielded nature in intercession, the reasons came clear to Him why these three plus nine others should be tapped.

Our searching out of God's will can be the same. We pray so that our wills (not our emotions) can be yielded to the Divine "whatever." Then **II Timothy 1:7** becomes alive: "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and sound judgment." May the tribe of "unprejudiced wills" and "sound judgment" increase!

We come now to the fourth of our obvious (or not-so-obvious) reasons to pray. It is this: prayer is a major way in which we accomplish God's work in the world.

Here is a major accelerator to my motivation to pray, and it stems from one of the most unbelievable statements (literally) Jesus ever made. It is found in **John 14:12-14.**

We have come back to the night of the Last Supper. Judas has left to betray Jesus. His leaving allows Christ to pass on some of the most powerful of His earthly teachings to the remaining disciples. In this context, He is here discussing His deity, His union with the Father, and the works of God in the world. Suddenly, He makes this statement: "Truly, truly ... he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father."

Look at that statement. Savor it. Regard it, Pursue it. Study it. Imbibe it. If it is true ...!

"He shall do." Jesus did not say "they shall do." He did not say, "the corporate body all combined together will do." He used a singular pronoun meaning one person. "The very works that I do and greater than these" in His statement.

What works did our Lord do on earth? Oh, just a few simple ones: cleansed the lepers, healed the sick, proclaimed release to the captives, taught tens of thousands, led thousands to salvation, raised the dead, healed those born blind. Piece of cake! We might say that one Christian in a hundred thousand or a million could do those things. Perhaps a Billy Graham, an Andy Stanley, or a John Stott could do at least some of those works; but not me – not Joe or Betty "ordinary" Christian. And even then how will the Grahams, Stanleys, and Stotts do greater works that our Lord? Yet the plain fact of Jesus' statement is that the only qualifier to doing such works is "[the one] who believes in ME." How?

This brings us to **verses 13 and 14.** These are often misplaced in the context, yet they obviously relate directly to **verse 12.** "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." And, since He knew they would not get it the first time (and neither would we), He repeats it: "If you ask Me anything in My Name, I will do it."

Shout it from the housetops! Prayer is a primary way His greater works get done! True, most of us will not be worldwide evangelists, though a few may be. Most of us will not be gifted in healing, though some will be. Most of us will not be great preachers and teachers, though some reading this might be. But every one of us can pray. Every one of us can touch the lost masses of earth and help snatch them from eternal darkness to eternal life. Every one of us can participate in Christ's healing power spreading both medically and miraculously across the earth. Every one of us can

put up our hands and stop the forces of moral degradation that threatens to engulf the depth of the human spirit. Every one of us can do these things through our prayers!

Today, if I will, I can spend 15 minutes behind the wall of North Korea influencing them for God and for good. Today I can spend 20 minutes touching the entrenched minds of the Saudia Arabian or the ascetic monks of Nepal. Today, I can stand against pornography and rape and incest and sexual child abuse in the far-flung communities of this country. Because, when I talk to God in my living room or office, or church, He is the same God who reaches into families, into Nepal, into Arabia, into North Korea, into homes. I participate with Him, not only through my efforts and works where I live, but also throughout the world in accomplishing His works through my prayers. It matters not what sort of gifts, talent or personality I have. It matters only that I take this time to cooperate with Him in my prayers. And that is all that matters for you, too. May we grasp this before much more time passes.

Fifth in our series of reasons to pray is that prayer is a major weapon in fighting spiritual battle. **Ephesians six, verses ten to twenty**, outline some of the armaments in the arsenal of God. We are reminded that ultimately our struggles are not against human, but against powerful spiritual beings and forces in the "heavenly places" (the spiritual realm which directly influences the natural, material realm).

The picture here is that of a war. Life as a Christian is not a playground; it's a battlefield. While there is much beauty and love in the world, it is often bent and twisted by our Fall and Satan's machinations. Thus, the war for souls between God and Satan is fought by God and Christian co-combatants.

We are instructed by Paul, an experienced soldier in this combat, to be clad and armed for our struggle. In this passage, he uses some the most vivid imagery in the New Testament. Modeling a Roman Legionnaire, we put on the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, loins girded with truth, feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

Now, it seems at first glance that we have a complete set of armor and weaponry. And if I were writing this passage, I would say, "Now get out there and fight the battle!"

But interestingly, Paul does not say that. In fact, he waits until **verse eighteen** to describe the heavy artillery of this army of God – persistent prayer. Notice what he says in **verses 18, 19**: "With all prayer and petition pray ... with all perseverance and prayer ... and pray ...

In two verses, we are commanded to pray five different times. Do you think he is trying to make a point? He is attempting to seize our attention concerning prayer's power in the defeat of Satan and his servants. Parallel to this text is **II Corinthians**

**10:3-4.** "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses."

The weapon of prayer softens Satan's fortresses. Hell's gates cannot prevail. It is our prayer, reducing the wall to rubble so that the troops can go through. Too often, the gospel moves slowly because the "softening-up" process of prayer has been neglected. When practiced, however, prayer "puts the wind at the back" of Christ's soldiers.

A few years ago one powerful administrator at a prestigious university was blocking the placement of additional full-time Christian workers on campus because of his own disbelief in the gospel. The Christian students on campus resorted to prayer. Feeling that no one had the right to keep students from hearing about Christ, they prayed that God would either change this man's heart or remove him from his position.

For six months they prayed faithfully. Suddenly, for no "apparent" reason, he was transferred to a powerless position and a replacement named. Among the first question the replacement asked was this: "Why aren't there more Christian workers here?" The workers came, and the gospel flourished. Prayer is key to fighting this spiritual battle.

You are probably beginning to get the message that prayer might be the most multi-faceted gift of devotion which the Lord has bestowed on humanity. The sixth reason underlines that truth: prayer is the necessary pre-requisite to sweeping spiritual awakening.

We are indebted to God for providing in two verses (**II Chronicles 7:13, 14**) a summary of all He says on this subject in the entire word of God: "If I shut up the heavens so there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My Name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

As I say, this is a précis, a summary, of the rest of God's teaching on the subject of spiritual awakenings or revivals – those times when God manifests His presence in time and space in such obvious ways that masses of believers become stalwart and committed and multitudes of unbelievers crowd into the Kingdom of God.

Such manifestations have occurred numerous times in biblical and post-biblical history. Yet every time they occur, one clear prologue has existed. Somewhere, there has always been a group (or many groups) who have given themselves to fervent, consistent, persistent prayer for the very purpose of cleansing from sin and the reviving of the body of believers and the conversion of the lost. J. Edwin Orr once said, "every



revival in history could be traced to find at its source a group of people gathered for prayer.”

Something about such group prayer breeds honesty, openness, and humility. Usually this group is the first to be struck by God’s awesome, yet gracious presence. Then revival spreads through and beyond them to the reaches of the church, community, or campus. Examples abound.

At Yale University in 1905, prayer meetings began to multiply. A faculty member was so impressed that he sent John R. Mott a letter in which he wrote: “We want you to come to Yale for a series of meetings ... The Spirit of God is here with us in power ... I have never known a time when there were so many inquirers.” The result of those meetings was an awakening in which one third of the Yale student body were involved in small group Bible Studies. K. S. Latourette goes on to write that the class of 1909, who were freshman in 1905, produced more missionaries than any other class in the history of Yale.

The key? Humility, repentance, and persistence in prayer. These are what we need today to lay the foundations through which God can manifest His person in powerful ways. As we pray, we experience change which revives us. Then we become the seeds of revival to change those around us. As the concentric circle enlarges, awakening spreads more broadly and quickly. And all of this is the fruit of prayer. What a wonderful reason to pray – to see the resultant awakened church, campus, city or country. May we be driven to our knees to pray for such a reality of His presence.

We come now to the last of our seven reasons. It is compelling because it is not linked to any sort of earthly result. It is this: prayer itself is inherently valuable to God. In other words, whether we ever see any answers (and we will) and whether we ever derive any personal benefit (and we will), God sees prayer, even standing alone, with an incomprehensible value.

Two wonderful demonstrations of this are found in **Hebrews 7:25** and **Revelation 5:8**. In the first passage the writer informs us of the occupation and passion of the Lord Jesus since His ascension: “He always lives to make intercession....”

Think of it: He always lives to make INTERCESSION. S. D. Gordon, amazed, put it this way in summing up the life of Christ: “Thirty years of living, thirty years of serving, one tremendous act of dying, and two thousand years of prayer. What an emphasis on prayer!” Prayer, then, is so important to the Lord that it has been perhaps the chief activity of Christ since He bodily left our planet. God obviously values prayer in a way we do not.

The second passage is equally strong. In **Revelation 5**, we are admitted to a rare view of heaven's throne room. We do not have many illustrative descriptions of heaven, but this is one of the most vivid. In this tableau, we see the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, the Lamb (Christ), and God the Father. The book of the Judgments of God is being given to the Lamb, and the verse reads: "And when He has taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty four elders fell down before the Lamb, and the verse reads: "And four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp and golden *bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints*" [Ital. added].

In heaven, prayer is incense. What is the incense used for? It is used for fragrance, for the aroma of perfume. Two of the gifts from the Magi at Christ's birth were incense. The thrust of this verse is this: when God chooses the perfume, the perfect aroma of His heaven, it is the fragrance of prayer.

Consider that there were other choices He could have made. He could have used the perfume of service, or of Bible Study, or of witnessing, or of hard work, or of tithing, or of church attendance, or any one of a number of wonderful Christian activities. Yet, in His perfect wisdom, He chose prayer.

Perhaps He chose it because in virtually all of the other disciplines there are so many differences among humans in gifting, strengths, energy, etc. But in prayer, we all regardless of our differences, have equal access to Him and equal love and grace and power from Him at our disposal.

In any case, when we arrive in heaven and (no doubt) fall on our faces before Him, the aroma we will notice will be that of intercession. All of which makes us ask: "If God values prayer that much, how much do I value it?" Certainly, I should place it at a more central point in my life than I usually do.

There they are. Seven (of many) reasons for us to give much more thought and attention to prayer than is currently common among Christians. Even in this writing, I found myself pausing often to take prayer action based upon these motivations. I hope the reading affected you in a similar way.

In closing, I want to share a passage which has greatly challenged me on the subject of prayer. Leonard Ravenhill wrote the following:

"The church has many organizers, but few agonizers; many who pay, but few who pray; many resters, but few wrestlers; many who are enterprising, but few who are interceding. People who are not praying are playing.

"Two prerequisites of dynamic Christian living are vision and passion, and both of these are generated by prayer. The ministry of preaching is open to a few. The ministry of praying is open to every child of God.

"The secret of praying is praying in secret. A worldly Christian will stop praying; a praying Christian will stop worldliness.

"Tithes may build the church, but tears will give it life. That is the difference between the modern church and the early church. Our emphasis is on paying, theirs was on praying. When we have paid, the place is taken. When they had prayed, the place was shaken (**Acts 4:31**).

"In the matter of effective praying, never have so many left so much to so few.

" Brethren, let us pray!"

May this remind us frequently of seven or twenty or on hundred reasons to pray.