

Why and How we are to Pray

31st January 2021

4th Sunday after Epiphany

Deuteronomy 18:15-20 | Psalm 111 | 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 | Mark 1:21-28

Main Point:

Although humans were created to be God's representatives, spreading God's glory and name throughout the earth, they failed God's assignment.

God sent Jesus to be His ultimate representative. Jesus then called us to be God's representatives on earth. This not only teaches us *why* we pray, but *how* we are to pray: declaring the promises of God on earth.

Intro |

Have you ever told a child to do something. Then, in response, the child has asked 'But, why?' And, you, in your infinite wisdom, reply – because I told you!

The child groans ... and sometimes does what you asked! Or, perhaps not.

Why? Because, no one likes to be told to do something – just because.

But, if I asked you, *why* do you pray? How would you answer?

Would you say ... 'well, because the Bible says we are to pray.'

Sure ... but is that the only reason?

Do we just pray because Jesus told us to? Or, is our praying actually doing something?

I mean, if God is sovereign and His will is unable to be thwarted by humanity, won't He just accomplish what He wants, when He wants it, without us?

Does God *need* us to pray, or does He just *want* us to pray for our own good?

Today, we are going to look closely at *why* we pray.

As I read today's psalm and reflected on our series on prayer, I was reminded that one of the primary prayer books Jesus had to assist him in his prayers, was the book of Psalms.

So, today, I'd like us to look at *how* Psalm 111 is a perfect model of the type of prayer which Jesus taught his disciples to pray.

We'll see that today's psalm provides a wonderful pattern for us to learn *how* we are to put into practice the *why* of prayer ...

So, *why* do we pray?

Point 1 | We pray because, at the very beginning, God appointed us as His representatives on earth

The answer goes right back to the beginning of the story when God made the first humans.

He made humans as His 'representatives' on earth. Psalm 115:16 says that although the heavens belong to the Lord, **"he has given the earth to all humanity."**

What does it mean to be God's representative?

A representative is one who represents the will of another. So, as God's representatives, we are called to speak and act with authority on the part of or be a substitute or agent for another.

Sounds very similar to what God told the first humans, doesn't it?

So complete and final was God's decision to do things on earth through human beings that it cost God his own Son to regain what Adam gave away.

God had to become a part of the human race. What a staggering truth. Without question, humans were forever to be God's link to authority and activity on the earth.

So, the reason for the necessity of prayer is that God chose to work on the earth through humans, not independent of them. He always has and always will, even at the cost of becoming one.

Though God is sovereign and all-powerful, Scripture clearly tells us that He limited Himself, concerning the affairs of earth, to working through human beings.

So, time and time again throughout the Old Testament, God called prophets to be His mouthpiece on the earth, calling His people to live in obedience to how He designed them to live.

In our Old Testament reading God is foretelling the appointment of Joshua. As a prophet, God would put His words in Joshua's mouth, and he would tell the people everything God commanded." (Deuteronomy 18:18).

But, as wonderful as Joshua was, he could never be the true representative of God on the earth that we needed.

So, about 2000 years later, when Jesus said that Moses "wrote about him" in John 5:46, Jesus was alluding that He, Himself, was the ultimate prophet who would, not just declare God's word, but live out and be God's Word in the flesh, on the earth.

This is what made everyone so amazed at Jesus' teaching, He was quite unlike any other teacher Israel had ever heard.

Point 2 | Jesus was God's representative on earth, embodying God's will and character amongst us

We read that Jesus taught **"as one with real authority"** (Mark 1:22).

According to John 1:18, Jesus gave us a picture of God. We read, **"No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us."**

Jesus knew His role to re-present God on earth. He wore the mantle of authority Adam forfeited all those years ago.

Jesus knew the authority His Father had bestowed upon Him.

That's what made able to Jesus teach and live with God's authority.

And because Jesus wore the mantle of authority from His Father, He knew His Father heard His prayers (John 11:42), He only spoke what He heard His Father say (John 12:49), and He only did what He saw His Father doing (John 14:10).

But, before we assume that *only* Jesus had the authority to have His prayers heard and answered, we must digest a truly shocking thing that Jesus said.

Point 3 | Jesus appointed his disciples to wear the same mantle of authority Jesus wore: to represent God's character and will on earth.

When Jesus sent out 72 of his disciples, **"Look, I have given you authority over all the power of the enemy, and you can walk among snakes and scorpions and crush them. Nothing will injure you."** (Luke 10:19)

Then, shortly before Jesus ascended back to the Father, He appointed His disciples to wear the same mantle of authority that He wore during His earthly ministry.

He said, **"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."** (Matthew 18:18-20)

Do you hear the echo of what God said His prophets would do?

Disciples of Christ are modern-day prophets who declare God's will and character on earth – that's what prayer is ... declaring God's will and character to be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Point 4 | Psalm 111: A Pattern of Prayer – calling to remembrance God's faithfulness to his covenant promises

Knowing this, let us look now at the pattern of Psalm 111.

Interestingly in his commentary James Limburg entitles Psalm 111 and 112 the ABCs of theology and the ABCs of Anthropology. While Psalm 111 is about God, Psalm 112, its twin, is about the human response to God.

Because the psalmist chose an alphabetical structure, the best way to approach the psalm is thematically rather than structurally.

The prayer starts with a recognition of who God and His worthiness to be praised: **"Praise the LORD! I will thank the LORD with all my heart as I meet with his godly people."** (Ps 111:1)

I urge you to begin all prayer with adoration and praise to God. This causes us to raise our eyes to God, focussing on His ability and willingness to respond to our cries, rather than our inability to do anything.

Thanksgiving then follows with an intentional remembrance of what God has done.

"How amazing are the deeds of the Lord! All who delight in him should ponder them."

As we remind ourselves and others of God's powerful work in our own lives and in our communities our faith builds in expectation of God's faithfulness to accomplish His mighty plans in the world.

But it is verses 5-9 which are especially important.

In our prayer role of representing God's character and will on the earth, we recall God's faithfulness to His covenant promises.

We pray, **"He always remembers his covenant. ... All he does is just and good, and all his commandments are trustworthy."**

God's character is good and pure and His Word and promises are reliable, able to be trusted.

Application | Prayer is the way God chose us to partner with him in declaring God's covenant promises on earth.

Jesus told us *why* He instructed us to pray "in his name."

"You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!" (John 14:12-14)

Did you hear that? It is Jesus' name that has authority in heaven, on the earth and under the earth.

So, when we pray through Jesus, we pray with His authority, declaring God's promises and will on the earth – this brings glory and honour to God.

So, if you are mindful of a situation in which you currently do not see the culture of God's kingdom outworking – find God's promise concerning that situation and declare God's promises over that situation.

Or, if you see an injustice manifesting in the world, we pray for God's Spirit to do a work of transformation in that aspect of society.

Or, if your heart is breaking over a loved one who does not know the Lord. You find inspiration from the Apostle Paul's words, asking for the light of Christ to shine in their heart, and the veil of blindness to be removed (2 Corinthians 4:4-6).

There are many other examples of reminding God of His Word and promises.

If you look closely through the Bible you'll see how many prophets prayed this way (for example, Daniel prayed out the promise in Jeremiah 29:10-14, and also see Isaiah 43:26, 62:6).

Through our prayers we enter into a partnership with God. We become co-labourers with Him (1 Corinthians 3:9), His ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21) – praying God's will be done in the earth.

Jack Hayford said, "Prayer is essentially a partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand-in-hand with God toward the realization of His redemptive purposes on earth."

So, there is only one thing needed right now, let's pray,

My loving Father, as I learn more about prayer during this new year season, show me how to use what you have said before in your Word and declared previously in your promises to speak your will and character into the world. Give me confidence that as I pray in the name of your Son Jesus, I bring glory to you.

Some reflection and discussion questions

Let's apply today's message into our lives. Think of a situation which is currently occupying much of your prayer attention.

Fill in the following template,

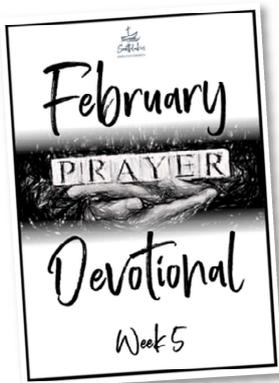
Heavenly Father, I am mindful, at the moment, of this situation or person:

I know, in your Word, you declare (*write out a Scripture or verse that is relevant*):

This Scripture reminds me that you are faithful to your covenant promises and I can rely upon you to work out your transforming power in this situation.

I entrust this situation to you and I choose to not worry or be anxious concerning it. I have placed this situation into your hands, and I know that your Spirit is at work, right now, bringing your promises to pass.

I rest in peace and confidence that you are at work. I ask these things in the name of Jesus my Saviour.



Look out for the February Prayer devotional

The January devotional has been developed using a number of prayer resources including:

1. Andrew Murray's 'Teach Me to Pray'
2. Rosalind Rinker's Prayer: 'Conversing with God'
3. Richard Foster's 'Celebration of Discipline'
4. Darren Cronshaw 'Dangerous Prayer'