

Why Pray?

Rom 12:12f

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Let us pray.

Dear Lord we would stop all our fretting and our racing around and we would be still and allow your dear love to flow around us and bathe us. Dear Lord we're sorry for all the frenetic activity in which we grow so big in our own lives. The bigger we grow, the more important we seem and the more worried we are.

Dear Lord, we would be still deep down inside and see that you are God and you run this whole operation without fretting and without anxiety and you have a plan for us that we can rest in. Dear Lord we thank you and we pray that you will speak to our hearts this morning so that we'll walk in peace this week for your glory. Amen.

We were talking about prayer you remember, and in verse 12 in Romans, God urges us to pray constantly, pray at all times. So we've been talking about what prayer is, itself.

There is a kind of prayer that gets you more worked up than it does bring you peace. We talked about that kind of prayer where you're really talking at God. And behind that kind of prayer is the misconception that prayer is a work that you do, a prayer wheel that you keep turning, a penance, a meritorious act. But if you go through the motions and if you speak at God all the things that you're supposed to tell him, then somehow he'll see you doing that and he will answer you.

That kind of prayer, of course, becomes very weary because it isn't prayer at all; it is just what we said, it's a kind of active penance or a meritorious act. It's a good work that we're trying to do and we think in response to putting our penny in, we'll get something out that we want. But prayer, loved ones, is not speaking at God; it's certainly at least speaking to him, it's being interested in him. We talked of how when people speak at us you feel, "This guy could carry on talking whether I'm here or not. I might as well leave and get on with something." And you have that feeling because you don't really believe that he is interested in your response at all, or interested in you. He is just interested in what he's saying.

So it's important to see that prayer to God is speaking to God. It's being interested in what God is like. "I wonder Lord, what are you doing at this moment? Are you with Jesus now? Can you see me? What do you really think of me Father?" Prayer is talking to God in that way.

Some of us make life more difficult than it needs to be for ourselves devotionally. Because we're so informal and easy-going in today's world we think we can talk to God just driving along on the freeway. Now, you can pray to God prayers that you just throw up to him at times during the day if you have a solid relationship with him built up through times of respect when you've talked to him with thought for him and consideration for him. But just as you can't run a marriage or a friendship simply on casual comments thrown out to each other as you pass through the door, sometimes you have to settle down.

In fact, often we say that, don't we, "Look, we have to sit down and talk this thing through. We

need to spend some time with each other as a family." We'll say that sort of thing because we know that's necessary in order to show real love and respect for each other and that's the same with God.

At times we do ourselves harm devotionally because we think we can whip in casually and informally into his presence as we are doing something else and we think it's kind of old fashioned, the getting down on the knees and then clasping the hands, but the truth is that's the way human beings naturally show great respect to someone who is very important. It certainly was in the old days, and don't you and I still feel that we wouldn't do that to the President, but we would look to see if our ties were okay at least and see if we looked all right! But at least we feel if Jesus were to manifest himself here physically in this room, we probably would do that.

So we talked about the importance of talking to God, preparing ourselves physically and emotionally and mentally so that you realize, "I am talking to God." Some of us have real trouble thinking that we're talking to God because we're so casual and informal about the way we prepare ourselves for prayer.

Indeed loved ones even in regard to communion, I think many times we modern 20th century people get very little out of the great sacraments because we don't treat them seriously enough. And you know from some of the words that I've read out of the common prayer book in the Anglican church and those of you who were Catholics and who were Lutherans, I think you know something of the need to prepare the Sunday or the week before we have communion.

It seems we've lost a lot and made things difficult for ourselves devotionally because we don't have a special room set aside where we kneel down, set aside a quiet time, a special time to get down before God and say, "Lord, I give you this half hour without any interruption; it doesn't matter what will happen, I am going to be here for half an hour Lord to give you my love and my attention." We said that prayer is speaking to God.

I would ask you, in your own prayer times, how do you run them? Some of you loved ones have great unreality in your prayer lives because you don't do some of these basic common sense things in coming to God and you don't set aside a special time. You don't set aside a quiet time, you don't set aside a quiet room, you don't pick the best part of the day. You choose the tail end of the day when you're almost half asleep before you get started to prayer because you're worn out. You're not giving God the best of your day and you're aware you're not because your conscience tells you.

So you start behind the 8 ball right there instead of giving to him the best part of the day, knowing that he knows that; "Lord, you see I am giving you the best because you are the best", and then your conscience rises up and combines with your spirit and you feel a rising your heart, "Yes I am being real with God."

So brothers and sisters, honestly, a lot of the trouble that you and I have with the sense of reality of God in our lives is because we don't treat him like God, we don't. We treat him like some thing or some idol that we make according to our own image. We said it's important in prayer to realize that we're speaking to God and to behave in the way that is appropriate for the person that we're speaking to: the king of the universe.

We said last of all that prayer is really not speaking at God or speaking to God, it's speaking with God. It's having a time when you finish with all your things and you're quiet and you wait upon God. The Bible says that that's actually what renews your strength, "but they who wait for the Lord shall

renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31) Many of us who are taking the vitamins and popping them like mad or trying to concentrate on a good diet but we're still worn out and enervated, weary and tired, might find that what we need to do is wait upon the Lord.

Wait upon the God who has created us. Wait, in an active sense; not passive, not "blank out my mind", because that's just TM and all the elemental spirits of the universe pour in with all kinds of wandering thoughts and wild ideas -- but really waiting upon him with a mind that is active, thinking upon him.

Those that set their minds upon God will have peace. So set your mind upon God and wait upon him and say, "Father, I look at you and think of what you're thinking. And whatever you have to say to me, just get it to me through my thoughts or through something in scripture or through something that will happen after I get up from this prayer time." So we talked about what prayer was.

Loved ones, why pray? Why pray? I submit to you that your answer to that question tells you something about your real relationship with God. That is, if you define prayer as talking to God because you're really saying, "Why talk to God", or "Why talk with God?" Now I am asking you, why do you talk with God?

Your answer to that question tells you something about your relationship with God himself. Let's imagine you going to the White House; there you are on the lawn, talking to the President. If I say "why are you talking with the President?" Your answer to that question tells me, and you, a lot about your relationship to the President.

If you say, "I'm talking with him because I have something here that I can't handle myself and indeed nobody can handle it but him and that's why I'm talking with him." That certainly tells us something about your relationship to the President of the United States. Or if you say to me, "I'm talking with him because I'm hoping some photographers will come along and take my picture speaking with the President. Then I can put it up in my basement and everybody will see I'm kind of a friend of the President. I like to be in the limelight with somebody who is important." Well, that says something about your relationship to the President and what your attitude to him is.

It's entirely different if you're his son or his daughter; if you say to them, "Why are you talking with the President", you'd stand back and say, "He's my father; why am I talking to my father, you mean? I love him and enjoy his company. We enjoy being with each other; we talk over everything that we do together in life, that's why. I just enjoy being with him -- he's like a part of me. It's like a husband and a wife, when you're away from each other, you don't feel whole. That's what it's like with my dad. I don't feel whole if I am away, that's why I talk with him, because I can't do without him. I have to talk to him as often as I can." It's interesting, isn't it?

The answer that a son or daughter gives to that is very different to the answer that one of us gives. So if you keep that in the back of your mind, I'd ask you, why do you pray? Why do you talk with God? Now the truth is I think that all of us have talked with God at least once in our lives and probably more than that. Almost every human being that lives, whether they hate God or are atheists or agnostics, probably all at some time talked to God. They've been like the soldier in the civil war who was in a big battle and the army chaplain asked him, "Do you ever pray?", and the guy answered, "Sometimes I pray. I certainly prayed last Saturday night at that battle but then I think everybody prayed there." Now that's called foxhole praying and probably all of us and every human

being who has ever lived has done some foxhole praying.

That is, we've been in the foxhole or in the trench or in the battlefield, and we felt the bombs coming down all around us and in desperation we cried out to God. Most of us have probably, at least one time, faced overwhelming danger and we've called out to God.

Now that's the kind of thing that's talked about if you'd like to look at it in a famous passage that you'll recognize once you read it. Its Psalm 107:23-28: "Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; they saw the deeds of the Lord, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded, and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; they reeled and staggered like drunken men, and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress."

Now that's foxhole praying, you see. When the storm is so overwhelming and the seas are so massive that you cry out to God in desperation; you cry out to him because the danger you're in is utterly outside your own control. So, many of us have been in that spot either in pending car accidents or in situations where the pilot announces he has lost three wheels or two engines and it's then that you sense, "Oh, there's no way -- I cannot help myself in this situation."

Isn't it interesting loved ones that at that moment, when we're faced with the stark reality of things, there are primeval convictions that seem to rise up inside us that seem to overwhelm any intellectual skepticism and they seem to say, "Okay, we're in trouble but somehow, somebody's in charge of this, someone's in control." It's strange that we have that feeling.

Strange, too, that the most swearing, blasphemous man alive at moments like that cries out, "My God", and really means it. Because we sense at that moment, when we have no time for the luxury of intellectual skepticism or caviling theologically, at that moment we somehow sense there is a deep innate conviction that somebody is in charge of this.

It's not the situation where nobody can do anything about this; there is somebody who originated this whole thing that can do something about it. So in that situation we cry out to God. Of course you can see how blasphemous it is to use those same words that loved ones have uttered -- think of all the plane crashes, tragedies, natural storms and earthquakes, and of all the people who have cried out at their last gasp of life, "My God" and they have meant it. Then we take those precious words and somebody does something that we don't like or we get a flat tire or we lose something and we say, "My God."

It's an insult to all of humanity, not just God himself; it's not just a jeering mockery. That's the thing about swearing, isn't it? It's not just something that our moms told us was wrong. It's a jeering mockery of the Father, isn't it? And it's a jeering mockery of every dear one who has ever died in agony and pain. But certainly, at those moments, we cry out.

We cry out at other moments too, loved ones. Lincoln said this, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all around me seemed insufficient for the day." I think we've felt that facing not only the critical danger; but someone with some overwhelming responsibility that we felt inadequate for and yet we knew that much depended on the outcome of it, and at those times it seems we feel like Lincoln, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I have nowhere else to

go. My own wisdom and that of all around me seemed insufficient for the day".

So virtually all of us, faced with critical danger to our own lives or faced with an overwhelming responsibility that we didn't feel adequate for, have cried out to God and asked him to help us. Yet loved ones, that kind of spasmodic praying, that kind of spasmodic crying out to God is very different from the kind of praying that Daniel talks about, if you'd like to look at it in Daniel 6:10: "When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously." That's a different kind of praying, you see.

He got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously. I mean that's obviously doing with prayer what we do with eating food. That's not regarding prayer just as a bailout in times of emergency, that's regarding prayer as a normal part of your everyday life that you need as food for your own heart and soul and spirit and emotions and mind.

In other words, that's beginning to make prayer a regular part of your life. It's living not just by an odd bailout from God when you're in trouble but it's living with his daily consultation as a necessity in your own life. Now that's a different kind of prayer, you see. That's different from the foxhole stuff and the fact is, if you see someone on the White House lawn with the President, they're regarding the President in a very different way in their conversation, to the way in which the President's son or daughter are regarding him. It's a vast difference. The others are there for a definite need they have at that moment and then they have their own families and they're off and that's their normal life. They just contact the President from time to time when they need to, in regard to what they do in this world. But when a son or daughter talks with him it's an entirely different situation.

Now there is as vast a difference between those of us who are God's children and the reason we talk to him, and those of us who are merely his creatures and the reason we talk to him. The interesting thing is you and I can tell what our relationship to God is by answering the question, why do we pray to him? That's it. You can tell because creatures pray to God when they're in trouble. They pray to him when they're facing something that they can't handle themselves; then they apply to God. Creatures pray to God when they can't get what they want by their own efforts and they need help to get it.

The attitude of a creature is primarily, "This is my life; I live it the way I want to. I do the things I want to do, in the light of my abilities and my particular interest, I am going to do a certain job or I am going to undertake a certain career or I am going to marry a certain person. Now most of the time I can handle this myself but there are times when I don't seem able to get the things that I feel I need or there are times when things overwhelm me a bit, and then boy, I do pray." Now that's what a creature's attitude is, you see.

A creature, a person who is simply created by God but has not been born in the Spirit and has not become his child, has the attitude to God that he is somebody who bails them out in times of difficulty. Now what they find is, over the years, he does not seem to be able to come up with the answers just when they want them and so more and more prayer for them deteriorates. It sinks from being something vital in their lives and becomes something that buoys up their courage at times, but gradually they don't pray as a means of getting things; they really just do it for form's sake or to

stir up their own courage and reinforce themselves.

Now, a child is utterly different, loved ones. A child of God, one of us who is his son or daughter, has a totally different attitude to our lives and I'll show you the kind of complex or deep verse that states that. It's Ephesians 2:10 and as long as someone doesn't ask me to separate it from predestination, I think we can use it because it is a deep one and yet it's the position of a child of God.

"For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Now that's a mouthful and at least we should try to see what it means for this that we're talking about this morning.

A child of God regards himself as somebody who is God's own workmanship. That is, he regards his life as being given certain abilities and certain gifts by God. He is put together by God, it's not chance. It's not just that his mom had this kind of a nose or his father has this kind of hair or dad could sing or his mom could draw, he doesn't think of it that way. He sees himself as God's own workmanship, made by God with all the creatureliness like nature and the inadequacies of his creatureliness done away within Jesus, that's it. Created in Christ Jesus, you see.

All that was done away within Jesus' death and in his resurrection, he was made whole and able for all that God had put him here to do. So he regards himself as God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus, and then this tricky piece, "for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." He believes that God has planned out his life for him.

God has dreamed a dream for him; he can't make him do it, but God has created him for a successful life that will develop God's world more according to God's way and according to his will. So he believes that in a real way, there are good works. That is, works and actions and things that he has to say and letters that he has to write and people that he has to meet and things that he has to achieve; there are good works that God has prepared beforehand that he should walk in them.

Now he can refuse to walk in them and he can turn away from it and in that sense, he isn't predestined to walk in them; but he is pre-designed to walk in them. There's a whole life that God has planned for each one of us here that is organized and prepared for us and that we will get full fulfillment in if we walk in that way.

So a child of God doesn't feel, "I'm here to make the best of it and to do what I can and I kind of shift as an opportunist does at the right moment and keep myself alive." A child of God says, "My Father has put me here with certain abilities. He has planned a certain life for me here that will develop his world and move it forward towards him and now I need to simply know what those things are so that I can act in accordance with it." So a child of God prays to his Father -- not to persuade the Father to do things for him, but to find out what the Father has planned for his life.

A child of God prays to God not to get God to do things, not to persuade God, not to tell him what he should do. That's why at times when we go into great detail and pray, "Now Lord, you know the guy that sits in the back and has brown hair, well, he has this trouble da da da..." We give God a full write out on the whole situation so that he won't get the wrong guy. Well, really that's dumb because you remember what Jesus said, "Your heavenly Father knows what you need before you pray." Your Father knows what you've need of before you actually pray and that's important. Would you look

at that loved ones, because they're Jesus' words. Matthew 6:8, Jesus says "do not be like them, (the gentiles) for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." Your Father knows what you need before you ask because he has already prepared your way for you and he knew that person would come into your life and he knows what that person needs and he actually wants to tell you what he is going to do with that person so that you can cooperate with him to bring that about in that person's life, that's it.

So a child of the Father prays to find out what the Father has planned for them to do in that situation so that he will do his part. Because it's the Holy Spirit coming down and whom we meet; that's what enables God to achieve things in this world.

A child of the Father has a totally different attitude to prayer; "it's just good to be with our Father." It's good to see things the way he sees them, "Lord, I want to see this the way you see it. How are you thinking about this? Lord, I want to see it through your eyes. I want to see it from your position. I want to see what you want to do in this situation and then let me know Lord what I've to do."

That's why when they walked around the walls of Jericho, Joshua did not call out, "Shout so that the walls will fall down and we'll be able to bring about God's will." He didn't. He said, "Shout, for the Lord has given this city into your hands." Has, past tense. Joshua knew what God was going to do and he knew what he and the others had to do to cooperate with that so he said, "Shout, for the Lord has given the city into your hands."

It was the same with Moses. He didn't say, "Well, let's get up tomorrow and let's hope that all that stuff is turned into bread; it's very normal to expect that kind of thing. I have often seen frost turn into bread. So let's get up and hope", he didn't. He said, "Get up because you'll see the salvation of God tomorrow. He'll provide food for you. It's already done. It's a thing that is already accomplished."

The prophets would repeatedly say to the kings, "The Lord has given the enemy into your hands. I know because I have talked with God and I know what he plans and this is what we've got to do in order to cooperate with his plan." Now loved ones, that's the same with you and me. I don't know what your life is like at the moment but if it's like mine, it probably has a combination of some things solved and some things not solved and some things actually that you can't see the solution to and probably a lot of uncertainties about the distant future and maybe some real uncertainties about the immediate future.

God knows what you are going to be doing next year. God knows that. God has planned your marriage. God has planned your next job. God has planned what he is going to do in your daughter's life. God has planned what he is going to do in your friend's and colleague's life at work, but unless you get a line on that you could mess the whole thing up!

What God wants you to do is to spend time with him in prayer so that you begin to see these different situations the way he sees them and you begin to sense what he is going to do in each situation and then you know what to do yourself. Just one other thing, you might say, "Do you always know what God is going to do in the situation?" No, but I always know what he wants me to do; sometimes he doesn't burden us with the big plan. Sometimes he doesn't burden us with what he is going to do or what somebody else is going to do, he just tells us what to do and we do that, and some other guy is coming along this road and we meet exactly there and the thing works, that's it.

Now, why do you pray? Why do you, yourself, personally, pray? Why do you talk with God yourself? Loved ones, if it's still the old business of trying to get things from him we're in trouble. You can see. We aren't even self-respecting, noble heathen.

He knows; he has planned the whole thing. He has it all organized. He is saying to us, "Listen to me. I have a plan. I am not dumb up here. I have it worked out and I can tell you what I am going to do but above all, I can tell you what I want you to do to make it work. Now will you listen to me? Will you listen to me?" And that's what prayer is for God's children; listening to a dear Father who has it worked out and he is going to tell us what we are to do.

That's why God's children live charmed lives. They seem like charmed lives because they're lives of confidence and peace and lives of stability and certainty. They aren't lives that are up and down according to every stray circumstance. They are lives that are based on the confidence that our God has worked this thing out and he is telling us day-by-day what we are to do in the midst of it.

I pray loved ones that you'll get on to that. I pray that each one of you would get on to that in your own life because it is a different way to walk and it is the way we were made for. We weren't made, you weren't made, to be at the beck and call of every happenstance, you weren't. Life is more certain than that. Your dear Father knows exactly the orbit you are to be in. He knows exactly the course you are to take and he can show you it step-by-step, he can. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we have had a different idea of prayer that we've, in many cases, been brought up with, but prayer is not just to get things from you that we think we need or want. Lord it is very different to begin to think of prayer as talking to a Father that loves us and has things planned and yet Lord, we do see with our own Dads how our relationship went on to a completely different level when it stopped being simply, "Give me this", or "Give me that", or "Help me with this or help me with that", and it began to be a walking with our friend and talking things over and seeing life the way he saw it and gaining from his experience and talking things over with him.

Lord, we see that our relationship with you is meant to be like that. You are our dear Father, except that you are different from our Dad; you own the universe and you have made us and you know exactly where we are to fit in. So dear Father, we want to establish a new relationship with you as children.

Father, will you tell us what we need to do to become your children. We would want to start this morning by at least talking with you as a child would; as a son or daughter would. Father we would ask you to begin to show us what your idea is for our lives and what you've dreamed for us and what your plan is for us. Father, will you now begin to help us see it through your eyes and get to know you so well that we will know what you would do in certain situations so that we will begin to live a steady, balanced, ordered life that will bring glory to you, rest to our own souls and light and life to our friends and our relatives and colleagues. We ask this Lord in your name and for your glory.

Now, the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and until we see Jesus face to face. Amen.

