

WHY WE PRAY

*"Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work."
— Oswald Chambers*

THE BENEFITS OF PRAYER

We live in a culture where busyness is the norm. We like to be on the move, and we value productivity. We also prefer to see the results of our labor immediately – instant gratification is our default desire. It's no wonder that prayer can sometimes feel unproductive or counterintuitive to getting things done! However, Scripture gives us countless reasons why prayer is a worthy and fruitful use of our time personally, and how it pays dividends in the furthering of the Kingdom! The following are four of the many reasons why time in prayer is never wasted.

1. Prayer is relational.

Can you imagine going weeks, or even months, without talking to one of your closest friends or family members? Without communication, our human relationships are not able to grow or flourish. The same is true in our relationship with God – we only grow closer to Him when we spend time communing with Him in prayer. In Scripture, we see Jesus draw away from the crowds frequently to spend time alone with His Father. How much more do we need to seek out time alone with God to experience intimacy with Him! As we pray, He will draw near to us and allow us to experience His presence, and we will also begin to hear His voice more clearly (James 4:8). Time in prayer is never wasted because it will lead us into deeper relationship with our Father in heaven.

2. Prayer is consequential.

Prayer is powerful - it actually changes things! God hears our prayers, and He answers them. Paul York, formerly a bible college professor who now works for Chi Alpha, says, "...there are some things that the Bible says will happen only if we do pray." The enemy wants to do everything in his power to distract us from prayer because he knows that "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). Paul recognized the power of others' prayers for him: "On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers" (2 Corinthians 1:10-11). Paul knew that prayer was consequential, and that he was being sustained by the prayers of others while he endured hardship. Time in prayer is never wasted because prayer brings about powerful change in our lives and in the lives of others - now and for eternity!

3. Prayer transforms our hearts.

Prayer does not just change our external circumstances - it also transforms us inwardly. In prayer, we see the Holy Spirit convict us of sin, purify our hearts, align our desires with His, encourage us, deliver us from fear, and give us wisdom (Psalm 51:10, Psalm 34:4, Psalm 37:4). We see God grow the fruit of the Spirit in us so that we exhibit the character of God in increasing measure (Galatians 5:22-25). As we pray, God can remove bitterness and soften our hearts towards others so that we see those around us with the eyes of Christ. Time in prayer is never wasted because prayer conforms us into the image of Christ, changing our hearts from the inside out.

4. Prayer transforms our minds.

Prayer does not just transform the depths of our hearts – it also renews our minds so that we see and experience our world in a new way! As people of the Holy Spirit and prayer, “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). Abiding in Jesus gives us the power to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Him (2 Corinthians 10:4-6). Through prayer, our minds will become a place where the truth of Christ reigns and where we experience the peace of God (Romans 8:6). The lies of the enemy will no longer have power over our minds, and our perspective will begin to reflect that of the Kingdom. We will have an eternal mindset, seeing all circumstances as opportunities for God to be glorified and having greater faith for what God can do. Time in prayer is never wasted because it transforms our minds, enabling us to think and live in His freedom, peace, and power.

LIVING A LIFE OF PRAYER

In the Bible, we see God use many people who prioritized prayer daily - Daniel, Anna, Peter, Jesus. We are told to pray at ALL times with “all kinds of prayers and requests” (Ephesians 6:18). Designating a time in the morning to pray can set the tone and trajectory for your day, while helping you to remain in prayer as your schedule unfolds. Consider the following factors as you answer this question: How can you intentionally incorporate prayer into the rhythm of your day?

1. Place: Jesus tells us to pray in solitude, away from the eyes of others, and he models this for us in his own life. Where is a place that you can go to spend time in prayer daily? Maybe it is your bedroom or living room, a secluded place on Grounds, or even outside in nature. Consider a place where you will be least likely to become distracted so that you can focus on communion with God.

2. Posture: Our posture when we pray can speak volumes about the attitude with which we are approaching God. Kneeling before God can demonstrate our humility and dependence on God, while holding out our hands can be a sign of receiving from Him. What posture can you assume in prayer to show God the heart with which you are approaching Him?

3. Plan: Do you ever find it overwhelming when you think about all of the people and situations in your life and in the lives of others that you want to pray about? Praying over one area of your life each day of the week can give you the opportunity to cover multiple things comprehensively in prayer, while freeing you from the idea that you have to pray over everything every day. Try planning a week in prayer!

PRAY RIGHT NOW!

Prayer does not just consist of listing out our prayer requests – if that were the case, we wouldn’t experience all the benefits that God wants us to provide us with through prayer! Take some time right now to pray through the ACTS prayer plan, spending a few minutes in each section. See the ACTS Prayer Plan resource for additional explanation on each area of prayer.

Adoration - Praise God for who He is, and thank Him for His specific attributes. He is worthy of all of our praise (Revelation 5:11-13)!

Confession - Ask forgiveness for specific sins and faults in your own life, and ask that He would cleanse you and give you a pure heart (Psalm 51:10).

Thanksgiving - Thank God for how He has provided for you relationally, physically, and spiritually, and for how He has answered your prayers. “Enter His gates with thanksgiving” (Psalm 100:4)!

Supplication - Ask God for help for yourself, your friends and family, and other situations going on in your life. He is the God who daily bears our burdens (Psalm 68:18)!

The world may try to tell us that prayer is inconsequential, but Scripture reminds us and experience reveals the opposite. In *Prince Caspian* by C.S. Lewis, Aslan says to Lucy, "Every year you grow, you will find me bigger." As we grow in our prayer lives, we will continue to find God bigger and more glorious! We will experience the benefits He has in store for us – greater intimacy with Him, changes brought about by His power as He answers our prayers, and a transformed heart and mind. As we commit ourselves to spending time in prayer, may He bring about great fruitfulness in our lives and remind us of "his incomparably great power for us who believe" (Ephesians 1:19).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Does prayer feel unproductive or counterintuitive to you? What does Scripture say about this perspective on prayer?
- Which of these four benefits do you want to see more of in your life? Why?
- What hinders you from spending time in prayer? How can you combat this?
- How can you intentionally incorporate prayer into your daily schedule? What help do you need in order to do so (accountability, establishing a place/time, making a prayer plan, etc.)?

RELEVANT SCRIPTURES

Matthew 6:5-13 *And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites..*

Luke 18:1-8 *The Parable of the Persistent Widow*

Ephesians 6:18 *Pray in the Spirit at all times...*

1 Peter 3:12 *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous...*

James 5:13-16 *Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray...*

Ephesians 1:17-23 *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The Circle Maker by Mark Batterson

Prayer by Tim Keller

Prayer by Richard Foster