

Why Do I Need Prayer?

If God Knows, What's the Point?

By Dan Crawford



The introduction was over and I was setting my notes on the speaker's stand, preparing to speak about prayer to a group of missionaries in a West African nation. Looking up from my notes for the first time, I saw a hand raised. Having taught for many years at both university and seminary levels, I was accustomed to hands being raised. But seldom had I seen one raised before I began to speak.

The missionary said, "Dr. Crawford, before you begin, I have a question. If God's called me to this country and to this people, and if God knows I am here, and if I am happy here, and if significant things are happening here, why do I need prayer?"

In my many years of classroom teaching, I had become fairly accurate in determining whether a question was designed to get information, to show how much the student knew, or to throw the professor off in his thoughts.

My answer was brief and to the point. "The Apostle Paul was a

God-called missionary, and a pretty good one at that," I replied. "Yet in every letter he wrote, he asked for prayer. If Paul needed prayer, I suppose you do also."

I don't think he appreciated my answer, but I felt frustrated at the timing of his question. However, it was a good question. Have you ever wondered the same thing? Let me elaborate on my earlier answer with four reasons why you and I need prayer.

1. The Bible teaches prayer.

The first verbal interaction between God and mankind is recorded in Genesis 3:1–19, when God seeks out Adam and Eve and asks why they are hiding from Him. The first reference to prayer in the Bible is Genesis 4:26, "Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord."

The Bible's first use of the word pray is in Genesis 20:7: "Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live." The last use of the word prayer in the Bible is in Revelation 8:4: "The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand." The next to the last verse in the Bible, Revelation 22:20, contains the last prayer in the Bible: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

All the way between Genesis and Revelation, the Bible teaches prayer. According to Herbert Lockyer in *All the Prayers of the Bible*, Scripture records no fewer than 650 definite prayers, of which 450 have recorded answers. (This is exclusive of the Psalms, which is itself a book of prayer.) So, from cover to cover, the Bible is about prayer.

2. Jesus modeled prayer.

Jesus was known for His great intercession, praying early in the morning and late into the night, seeking His Father in

solitude, and modeling prayer for His followers.

- The Gospels contain 24 references to Jesus praying, and Hebrews adds two more.
- The most used verb in the ministry of Jesus was not to preach, to teach, to heal, or to counsel. It was the verb to pray.
- The disciples discovered prayer's priority for Jesus. After observing Him heal the sick, restore the fallen, multiply the food, raise the dead, teach in parables, still the storm, and silence the critics, the disciples' ultimate request of Him was, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

3. Christian history records prayer.

Ever since the disciples spent ten days praying before the Day of Pentecost, Christian history has been dotted with great examples of prayer. Time and space permit the sharing of only two examples:

Moravian revival of 1727. When Pastor Rothe finished his morning sermon one August Sunday at Herrnhut, Germany, he fell to his knees and began praying. Various members of the small Moravian Brethren church quickly followed. When they finished, much to their amazement, it was midnight. Thus began what history records as the "Hourly Intercession," wherein 24 teams of at least two men and two women were assigned to pray for one hour each, covering the clock with hourly prayer. History records that the prayer effort lasted for 100 years without interruption.

In 1732, as they were praying, a young man named Conrad stood to announce that he had felt God's call to take the gospel to the Virgin Islands. Another young man admitted to the same call, and thus began a movement of church planting that exceeded the total of all churches started in the previous 200 years. So committed were these new missionaries that,

reportedly, they packed all their belongings in their caskets, assuming they would not return alive.

During the 100 years that the Moravians were praying for “the heathen of the world,” numerous significant events took place. Although there is no way of proving their connection, it is easy to think of God responding to the prayers of this small denomination of believers with global results such as these:

- the First Great Awakening (1734)
- the conversion of John Wesley, incidentally at a Moravian prayer meeting (1738)
- the Methodist Revivals in England (1739)
- the Seven-year Concert of Prayer in Boston (1747)
- the Baptist First Monday Prayer Meetings (1783)
- the Second Great Awakening (1792)
- the sailing of William Carey to India, citing the example of Moravian missions to his resistant Baptist Missionary Society (1792)
- the Haystack Prayer Meeting, resulting in the Student Volunteer Missions Movement, which was the beginning of the modern missionary movement from within the U.S. (1806).

One wonders what God would do if believers once again prayed with such purpose and intent, and for such a length of time.

Prayer revival of 1857. Thirty years after the ending of the Moravian “Hourly Intercession,” once again a mighty movement of prayer saw an awesome response from God. On the corner of Fulton and William streets in the lower Manhattan area of New York City, stood the North Dutch Reformed Church. It had been declining in membership and budget because of members moving to the suburbs. The church hired a Presbyterian businessman, Jeremiah Lanphier, to manage the affairs of the dying church. Knowing little else to do, he announced a businessman’s prayer meeting to begin at noon on Wednesday, September 23, 1857. On that day, six men arrived to pray. The next Wednesday there

were 13, and the next, 24. The group grew until it had spread, not only to every room in the church but to every other church building in lower Manhattan.

A young reporter, sent to the churches to count the number of men in attendance, could only make it to 12 churches, where he counted 6,000 praying men. By February, the prayer meetings were resulting in a reported 10,000 new converts per week. Then the revival left New York City and spread across to Brooklyn, then down the eastern seaboard, and across the mountain range. After eight months, more than 250,000 conversions were reported, even on ships entering New York harbor.

Again, one wonders what God might do if people once more gathered to pray with such intensity and passion.

4. Our lives require prayer.

Finally, not only does the Bible teach prayer, not only did Jesus model it, and not only does Christian history record it, but our lives require it.

First, the nature of our prayer relationship with God causes us to deeply desire God's presence in our lives. When you love someone, you want to be in his or her presence. When that physical presence is impossible, you desire to communicate with that person by whatever means is available.

When I was traveling globally, I made a commitment to try to communicate with my wife at least once every 24 hours. I remember standing in the only phone booth in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and finally getting an international operator to make a connection to my wife in the U.S. It was challenging, but I made the effort because of love.

One wonders what life would be like if we made similar efforts to communicate with the God we love on a regular basis.

Second, the purpose of prayer is not to receive gifts, for God knows what we need before we ask. The purpose is to get to know God. The more you communicate with people, the better you know them, and the easier it is to please them.

Prayer is communication with God. This two-way communication allows us to talk with God about people before we talk to people about God. After all, we have no worthy, eternal message for people unless it comes to us from God. Thus, our lives require a prayer relationship with God.

So why do I need prayer? Given the answers above, we may ask a more appropriate question: Why wouldn't I?

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