



"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." (Martin Luther)

The Bible speaks volumes about prayer. It tells us that prayer should form the foundation of our spiritual lives. For example, Psalm 141:2 says: *"Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice."*

Scripture encourages us to pray all the time. The writer of the first letter to the Thessalonian Christians said, *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Even Jesus reminds us that God indeed answers prayers, and if we keep at it God will pay attention. He told a parable about a cranky old judge and a widow who kept pestering him for justice. Here it is:

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:1-8)

The Gospels contain examples of Jesus praying, like when he was overwhelmed with his work, he found a quiet place to pray, and when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane struggling to accept his fate. He even chastised his disciples for not being able to stay awake for one measly hour while he was off praying. Obviously, it was important. So much so that Jesus taught his followers what we call the Lord's Prayer, a model we can always use when words escape us.

But at the same time, the Bible intimates that sometimes God turns a deaf ear to our prayers. Or it seems that God waits a long time before answering some prayers, prompting us to reflect on what we were supposed to be learning during that anxious time. And, quite honestly, we're never really told just exactly how prayer works.

If we scour the internet for quips or memes about prayer there are plenty to be found, but each one is just one person's experience or opinion. The fact is that prayer remains a mystery to even the most ardent of spiritual leaders and guides.

Which is why I found this little reflection from *Humans* so curious, shared by a man who lives in Pakistan: *“My daughter had a hole in her heart. I prayed constantly because I never knew the moment that God would be listening. We were given medication from the doctor, and then God healed her.”* This man put a different twist on the biblical command to “pray without ceasing.” Maybe the reason is not because it makes us feel better, or sharpens our focus, or gets us in front of God all the time, or even makes God relent to our pressure as we might take away from the parable or the unjust judge. But maybe it’s because the more we pray the better chance we have of catching God at a time when God is listening. Maybe it helps us remember that God surely has a lot on his plate, while also causing us to keep our concerns in perspective. We can only hope that God will be mindful of us, which I think is both a humble and healthy way to think about prayer.

Pastor Chuck

And on that note, let us pray. Good and gracious God, we are thankful for the gift of prayer, even though we don’t always understand how it works. Stir us to pray without ceasing, with the hope that you will be listening. And when the time is right, may we be open to receiving an answer, trusting in your grace and mercy. Amen