

Why Pray?

I suspect that every seeker or believer, if he or she is honest with him or herself, has asked about the value of prayer. Your thoughts probably go something like this: “Why do I pray? What difference does it make? I have prayed for things to happen, and they don’t. It seems silly and superstitious. I feel like I am talking to the wall.” I have certainly had those thoughts myself. And when I have those thoughts, or find prayer slipping away from my spiritual disciplines, I remind myself of why I pray. I thought I would share those with you; perhaps they will be helpful.

1. **Because Scripture tells me to do so.** The witness of Scripture is overwhelming that prayer is an integral part of our relationship with God. I suppose that should be enough.
2. **Because Jesus did, and I want to be like Jesus.** “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed”—(Luke 5:16). The disciples called Jesus “rabbi,” which meant that they would follow him and do what they could to conform their patterns and rhythms of life to his. Prayer seemed to be that which sustained and empowered Jesus, and I long for that same strength in my life.
3. **Because the primary purpose of prayer is intimacy with God, and I want to share my heart and life with God regularly.** The primary purpose of prayer is not to get done what we want to get done. The purpose is intimacy, partnership with God. It is as simple as conversation. When my wife Dee and I don’t make time to talk, we don’t feel as close. When we talk regularly, and share our thoughts and feelings and lives with one another, we find that we are closer to one another. The purpose of my conversation with her isn’t to make something happen, or to get her to do what I want. (She is going to do what she wants anyway!) The purpose of our conversation is for her to know my heart and me to know hers. I want God to know my heart, and I long to know the heart of God.
4. **Because prayer is a leading edge in my life, and it aligns me with God’s purposes for my life and the world.** The more I pray to be a good friend or husband or father, the more I am willing to act like a good friend or husband or father. The more I pray for others, the more I find myself focused on the needs of others. The more I pray for peace in the world, the more I find myself willing to do the “things that make for peace.” (Romans 14:19) The psalmist says “Delight yourself in the Lord, and God will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4) I don’t think this means God will give us what we want (“O Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz.”) Rather, it means God will place the right desires into our hearts.
5. **Because prayer positions me correctly with God.** In prayer, I am acknowledging my own limits, my own finitude, and that I can’t control everything. In humility I acknowledge my own smallness. And yet, at the same time, prayer directs me to work harder to be a part of God’s purpose and direction, knowing that it isn’t really me working but God working through me. Sid Davis, our Director of Music and Fine Arts, pointed me to a marvelous saying attributed to John Bunyan: “You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray

until you have prayed.” And throughout all of my “resigning as king of the world” and working harder nonetheless, prayer reminds me of how significant I am to God, and that God cares about every little thing in my life and heart.

6. **Because in a way we don't quite understand, God uses our prayers to change things.** It isn't that we pray and God does what we want, somehow answering our summons. God is already at work to bring about God's ultimate will. Rather, it is that in prayer, we join with all the other forces in creation seeking to bring about God's purposes. For example, God is always working to bring healing in the world. When we pray for healing, we are joining the doctors and the antibiotics and all the other forces in nature as part of God's healing work. Sometimes, it is the only thing we can do, and we want to join in.
7. **Because prayer, as a spiritual discipline, is part of a backbone of faith practices onto which I can hang the substance of my faith.** Sometimes, I feel on fire for Christ. Sometimes, my faith is pretty dry. Sometimes, it is “well with my soul.” Sometimes my soul struggles. But throughout all of those times, the spiritual disciplines of prayer and worship and study are the consistent structure that upholds me. And I have found that like all disciplines, doing it every once and awhile, with a halfway effort, doesn't seem to help as much. Instead, it is the persistence and consistency and fervency of my prayer that seems to uphold me the most.
8. **Because prayer together as a community unites us with one another, and aligns us as a church family with God's purposes for us.** We pray together because we want, together, to be formed by God to resemble together God's kingdom. If we humble ourselves before God as a community, then we are each aligned with God's purpose for each of us, and as a result, we are all aligned with one another. The church is like an orchestra, in which each member is tuning to Concert A, the A above Middle C, so that they are all tuned to one another. Corporate prayer is the way we all tune to God's concert A.
9. **Because of the evidence provided by many witnesses.** Every one of the people I consider to be “spiritual giants,” the people whose lives I find inspiring and challenging, have taken prayer very seriously. Every church I know that is really transformative and life changing for both congregants and the city and world around takes prayer very seriously. It is one of the ways we open a portal for the Holy Spirit to work within us as a church family and as individuals. If it is has proven to be that significant for these Christians and churches, then I want some of that.

These are my reasons. I hope they help you, if there are days when you wonder if your prayer is making any difference at all.