

# Why Should We Pray?

by Jerry Bridges

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*Jerry Bridges emphasizes the importance of prayer as a means to acknowledge our dependence on God, recognize His power, and intercede for others.*

**Duration:** 38:05

**Scripture:** Genesis 18:14, Matthew 6:33, Luke 1:37, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, Hebrews 9:6-7, Hebrews 10:19

**Topics:** "Prayer Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal anecdote about coming home from a trip and the importance of prayer. He mentions having two notebooks, one for speaking and one for prayer. He talks about the story of Jeremiah in the Bible, where God tells him to buy a field despite the impending destruction of Jerusalem. The speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing our dependency on God and how He can work through providential circumstances rather than miracles.

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## Transcript

Well, it is indeed a delight to be here this morning. As Joshua said, this is my ninth year to be here at the Pastors College, and I think every year I've also had the opportunity to speak here at Covenant Life Church, and I want to say to you that this is always a highlight of my year. When I make out my calendar of speaking engagements for the year at the beginning of every year, and I put down the Pastors College, I always look forward to that.

And so the week has arrived. I'm here and delighted to be here with you, and delighted to share with you from the Word of God this morning. Would you turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 1, 2 Corinthians chapter 1, and I'm going to read verses 8 through 11.

For we do not want you to be ignorant brothers of the affliction we experienced in Asia, for we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death, but this was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us.

On Him we have set our hope that He will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted to us through the prayers of many. Why should we pray? If God from all eternity did in fact ordain whatsoever will come to pass, then we might ask the question, why pray? If in a similar vein, Paul says in Ephesians 1, 11, that God works all things after the

counsel of His own will, and if that is true, then we could ask the question, why pray? That is, if God has already determined whatever is going to come to pass, then what advantage, what good is our prayers? Or if, according to Jesus, our Father knows our needs before we ask, then why bother to ask? Or, and if this question probably gets close to home for many of us, if so many of our prayers seem to go unanswered, then why pray? What good does it do? Our text this morning gives us three reasons why we should pray.

Now, there are many reasons that we could go into in the scriptures, and I want to say just parenthetically, and it really isn't so parenthetical, but it doesn't fit into my message, but I want to say it anyway, and that I'm so delighted to be here on this International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Believers. Probably the number one passion of my heart is the gospel, but the second passion is the communication of the gospel worldwide. God did indeed make His promise to Abraham that in your seed, that is, the seed being Christ Jesus, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

Each week I make it a practice to pray around the world, and I look at those nations that, as far as I can tell, have not yet been blessed. Nations like India, where the vast majority of people are Hindus. The Muslim world, where our son and daughter-in-law are currently serving as missionaries.

Southeast Asia, the Buddhist area, which has hardly been touched by the gospel. And my prayer and my passion is that all of us would begin to pray earnestly for the work of the Holy Spirit in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Well, that's just a messiah, that won't cost you anything.

But back to the subject, why pray? I mean, 2,000 years has gone by, and yet we have these vast areas of the world that, as far as we can tell, are for the most part untouched by the gospel. And so oftentimes, we look at these situations, these circumstances, and we're tempted to ask, why bother? And our text this morning gives us three. But before we get into that, I want to take another important side road.

This is a part of the message. And that is to call our attention to the fact that every time we pray, we can only pray effectively through the name and the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 10, verse 19, the Lord, through the writer of the book of Hebrews, invites us to come with confidence into the very presence of God, into the most holy place, through the blood of Jesus.

In the chapter before that, in Hebrews 9, verses 6 and 7, the writer says that in the old days, that is, in the Old Testament days, the days of the tabernacle and the temple and the high priest and the sacrifices and so forth, he says that into the most holy place, where God symbolically dwelt over the Ark of the Covenant between the cherub, that only the high priest could go into that little room. And he could go into it only once a year on the Day of Atonement. And then he could only go in with the blood of the sacrificial animal, which he sprinkled on the mercy seat and against the Ark.

Three restrictions. Only the high priest, only once a year, only with the blood. Now, the writer, in contrast, tells us in chapter 10, verse 19, the verse that I quoted to earlier, that now we all can come.

He says, having confidence, brothers and sisters, all of us, not just the high priest, but all of us have access. And though he does not explicitly say every day, when it's inferred there, it's obvious that that's what he means. He says we have access to enter into the most holy place.

So, two of the restrictions have been removed. It's not just the high priest, now it's all of us. It's not just one day a year, it's now continual access that we have.

But there's one restriction that has not been removed, and that is the restriction of the blood. Only now it's not the blood of a sacrificial animal, it's the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And the writer there says, having confidence to enter into the most holy place by the blood of Jesus.

Never try to come into the presence of God in prayer, except through the blood of Jesus, through his name, and through his merit. Now having established that, let's go back to this question, why pray? And our text here gives us three reasons why. First of all, we should pray because prayer is the acknowledgement of our dependence and our helplessness.

Prayer is first of all an acknowledgement of our dependence and our helplessness. Notice in the text here that Paul says, for we were utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Paul was in the situation where he thought, this is the end, I'm going to die.

He said indeed we felt that we had received the sentence of death. This is an expression of dependence and helplessness. Now I've used these two words, dependence and helplessness.

In our city, where I live in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the utilities are owned by the city, the Colorado Springs Utilities Department. Our house happens to be one of these all-electric houses, except for the hot water heater. I don't think there's anything else in the house that will function apart from electricity.

Even the furnace, you know, has an electric starter. The thermostat is powered by electricity. So everything in the house, except for that hot water heater, is dependent upon the utility department to supply our electricity.

So we are dependent on them. There are occasions, for one reason or another, when the electricity goes out. And when that happens, we are helpless.

We can't do anything. We can't heat the house, we can't wash the clothes, we can't cook the food, we can't turn on the lights. We're helpless.

And the Apostle Paul was not only dependent upon the Lord, but he acknowledged his helplessness. He said, we despaired even of life itself. When you're in that position, you are helpless.

In our day, it's difficult for us to realize our dependency and our helplessness. You remember that the children of Israel out in the wilderness had no place that they could raise food. They couldn't go to the supermarket to buy food.

They were dependent upon God to supply that manna day after day after day. They were dependent, and they were helpless unless God supplied their needs. On a couple of occasions, they were in a situation where they had no water.

And you remember that God, through the rock, supplied the water to them. They were dependent upon God, not only for their food, but more importantly for their water. And when the water was not there, they were helpless unless God provided for them.

Now in our day, where our refrigerators have the food, where we can go to the supermarket, where we have a whole agricultural system and a food supply system that provides our food, when we have the utilities companies or departments that supply the energy that we need, where we have all of these things, it is difficult for us to realize that ultimately we are dependent upon God. I think one of the things that God

showed us in these hurricanes that we've had, this series of hurricanes down south in Louisiana and Mississippi and Alabama and Florida, that ultimately we are dependent upon God. And when we come to God in prayer, we are acknowledging our helplessness and our dependency upon him.

And God oftentimes brings us circumstances into our lives that cause us to realize our dependency and our absolute helplessness unless he works. Let's move that into the spiritual realm. I know that here at Covenant Life Church that evangelism is a very high priority.

And I assume you still have your alpha ministry or whatever you might have at this time for evangelism. And it would be so easy to depend upon those programs, to say, well, we have our alpha dinners, these things, we have our international dinner, and all of these things, and you should have those. But the reality, dear friends, is that those who are without Christ are dead in trespasses and sins.

One thing that you and I cannot do is raise the dead. And those people without Christ are spiritually dead. And ultimately, with your best programs, and I do not want to denigrate those programs in the least, I affirm them.

But to remind us that even with the very best programs that we can have, that ultimately we are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to give life to the dead. And in our prayers, we acknowledge that dependency. And in our prayers, we acknowledge that helplessness.

And this is one of the reasons that God wants us to pray, because He wants us to realize that we are not in control, that we are not self-sufficient. We are dependent individuals. In fact, He gives us even our life and our breath.

Everything that we have is a gift from Him. And as we come and as we pray, we acknowledge that. Oftentimes, my wife and I are praying, and we have kind of, you might call it a laundry list of things that we would like to see God to do.

I'm sure that most of you have a kind of a prayer list. And as I'm praying, I say something like this to the Father, Lord, we come to you not because you are the divine bellhop, so to speak, God, would you do this and this and this and this and this, but we come to you to acknowledge our helplessness and your power. That's why we bring these prayers to God, because we're acknowledging to Him that we cannot do these things, but He can.

And this brings us to the second reason for praying, to acknowledge His power. Notice here again in the text, the second half of verse 9, but this was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us.

He did deliver us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us. On Him, we have set our hope that He will deliver us again. The Apostle Paul said, we know that we can't, but He can.

And so our prayers not only acknowledge our helplessness and our dependency, but in our prayers we acknowledge that God absolutely can do, that He has the power to do whatever He wills to do. You recall that when God came to Abraham in Genesis chapter 14, and God had promised Abraham that he was going to have a son, and then years had gone by and that promise had not been fulfilled, and basically Abraham was on the point of giving up. And God said to Abraham, this time next year you're going to have a son.

And his wife Sarah, who was barren, she heard this and she laughed. And God said, why are you laughing? And then he said these words, is anything too hard for God? That's of course a rhetorical question. God is saying, is there anything that I cannot do? Fast forward 1,500 years or so to the time when the angel visited the Virgin Mary and announced to her that she was going to be the mother of the Messiah.

And so she asked, how can this be, seeing that I am a virgin? And then he explained to her how the Holy Spirit was going to come upon her, and that the baby that she was going to have was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And then he said these words, for nothing will be impossible with God. Now obviously there were two miracles.

First of all, the miracle that Sarah would have a child when she was 90 years of age. An even greater miracle, that a young woman who had never known man would have a child. Quite apart from the natural process of a man and woman coming together.

And in both of these instances, God worked a miracle. Now a miracle, by a simple definition of a miracle, would be God's working outside of his ordinary laws which he has created. In every physical law that we have today, we have because God established it in the beginning.

But God who established those laws obviously has the power to operate outside of them and over and above them. And that's a miracle. When God does something that is completely contrary to the natural laws that he's established, we would say that's a miracle.

The turning of water into wine, the feeding of 5,000 with a few pieces of bread and a couple of fish. Those are obviously miracles. God operating outside of his normal laws.

But there are also many instances in the Bible where God works according to his providence. Now let me define that word providence for you. Simply put, God's providence is his orchestrating ordinary events to accomplish his purposes.

You and I experience the providence of God every day. Not a sparrow can fall to the ground apart from his will. God does that by his providential rule in the universe.

Now there are a number of instances of God's providential working that are cited for us in the Bible. But one of them that I want to call your attention to because in this particular passage, God uses almost the same words that he used with Sarah and with the Virgin Mary. In Jeremiah chapter 32, the prophet had prophesied that the city of Jerusalem was going to be taken, the people were going to be taken captive and exiled into Babylon.

And then right after Jeremiah makes his prophecy, God speaks to him and says, Jeremiah, I want you to buy a field. I want you to buy a piece of real estate. Now in order to appreciate what God was saying to Jeremiah and how Jeremiah might have responded, think of this.

Let's suppose for a moment that our national government would decide to move the capital from Washington, D.C. to Omaha, Nebraska. And that this has been announced and it's going to happen. You know, over the next few years, we're going to move the capital and all of the infrastructure and all of the businesses that exist to support the government and so forth.

We're going to move all of that from the Washington, D.C. area out to the heartland. And we're going to make Omaha, Nebraska, the capital of the United States. And then I would come to you and I would say, I've got a good deal for you.

I've got a piece of real estate right here in Washington that you ought to buy. And you look at me and you say, you've got to be kidding. Haven't you heard? They're going to move the capital.

This is going to be a ghost town in five years. And you want me to buy a piece of real estate? Now, that's exactly what God said to Jeremiah. He said, Jeremiah, the city is going to be razed.

It's going to be destroyed. The people are going to be taken captive. But I want you to buy a field.

And so Jeremiah's faith faltered. And he said, Lord, you've told me to prophesy all of this destruction. And at the same time now you've told me to buy a field.

And here are the words of God to him. Jeremiah, is anything too hard for the Lord? Now, the answer to that, and actually in history we don't find this, but we do know that 70 years later, the people came back. Jeremiah, of course, was no longer alive at that point.

But what I want you to see here is there was no miracle involved. It was rather God working his providential circumstances. Just a few days ago, I went to see my dermatologist because I, you know, the sun can shine on my head a bit too much.

And so, but also I had another problem. And I went to see him. And so as he was examining my back and so forth, I said, oh, by the way, would you take a look at this little bump on right here where you can see? And he said, oh, we've got to take that out.

That's a skin cancer. And I thought, you know, when I came in here today, I had no idea that I had a skin cancer. I knew I had this little bump because, you know, you're feeling your face and feel that little bump there.

And so it hadn't even occurred to me to have him look at it. The thought just came to my mind. Oh, would you take a look at this little bump? So he did his minor surgery, took it out.

That's why the scab is there. And as I walked out, I said, God's providence. You see, God, in the ordinary course of events.

Just caused me to say, oh, by the way, would you take a look at this little bump? And he said to me, we caught it just at the right time. God is at work. God has power to do whatever he wants to do to accomplish his purposes.

So when we pray, we should keep this in mind that nothing is too hard for God. I don't know about you, but my tendency when I pray and I ask God to do something, then immediately I begin to think, well, now, let's see, how can God answer this prayer? And my tendency is to let my faith be in proportion to my ability to think of how God might answer the prayer. Let me say to you, God has an infinite number of ways, very creative ways to answer.

And usually he answers in ways that we do not anticipate. Don't bother trying to figure out how God might answer your prayer. We have a situation in our family right now.

Our daughter, who lives up in the Boston area with her family, has thyroid cancer and she's due to have surgery on the 30th of this month. Now, ordinarily that's just kind of a routine thing. But there are consequences, there are after effects of having the thyroid gland removed.

And so we have been praying that God might heal her apart from the surgery. And then I thought, you know, that's a miracle, that God would heal her apart from the surgery. But the even greater miracle to me would be that when the surgeon goes in and he would be able to determine, hey, there's no cancer here, we don't need to take this thyroid out.

Now, I don't know what God will do. But what I'm saying to you is I pray, I have to think not what the surgeon might think. Because my wife said, oh, she said if he went in and he decided not to take the thyroid out, then he's opening himself up for a medical liability claim if there is indeed cancer there.

And so, humanly speaking, the prospect of his not removing the thyroid gland is almost nil, humanly speaking. And again, we have no idea what God will do. But the point I want to make from that illustration is I cannot limit the power of God to the surgeon's fear of a medical liability claim.

Is there anything too hard for God? And the answer is no. And so this is the second reason God wants us to pray is because it causes us to acknowledge his power. And then the third reason in the text is found for us in verse 11.

You also must help us by prayer so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. Have you ever wondered how many people must pray about a particular request before God will answer? I mean, is prayer like getting a political petition signed? You know that you've got to get so many thousand signatures on these petitions before it's a valid petition? Is God counting numbers and, you know, he has a certain number in mind and says, OK, when this number of people are praying, then I will answer. Well, obviously not.

God is not like that. Prayer is not like a political petition. We have numerous instances in the Bible where God heard the prayers of one person.

Matthew 15, beginning with verse 21 and following, we have the story of the Canaanite woman, a Gentile, not a Jewish woman, but her daughter was oppressed by a demon. And she came to Jesus and she asked him to heal her daughter. And you remember at first Jesus said, it's not fit to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs.

And then she said, but Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Before she went, did she get together with her small group and say, you know, I'm going to go and ask this man, Jesus, to heal my daughter. Would you join me in prayer? No, she didn't do that.

She went alone. Jesus heard the prayer of one person. So why then should we pray? Why should we as a church pray for the persecuted Christians around the world? Why should we ask people to pray for this, that and the other? Why would I be appreciative if you would pray for our daughter? I mean, does God need so many people to pray? And the answer here is given for us in verse 11.

You also must help us by prayer so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. Notice here, many pray, and then when the prayer is answered, many give thanks. This is one of the purposes of prayer, so that as God answers, we recognize God's answer to prayer and we give him thanks.

And so Paul said, I want lots of people to pray so that lots of people will give thanks when the prayer is answered. God doesn't need a lot of people to pray to answer, but we have the privilege of giving thanks, and God wants to involve a lot of people so that a lot of people will give thanks to him. When we pray, we bring God into our situation.

And then when the answer comes, we know that God has answered, and so we give him thanks, or at least we should give him thanks. I've had the experience on a number of occasions of God just surprising me and just doing something completely out of the ordinary, something that I was not even expecting. And sometimes I say, well, I wish I'd have prayed about that, because then I could say God answered my prayer.

He didn't need my prayers. But when we pray, we bring God into our situation. When we pray, we acknowledge our helplessness.

When we pray, we see God answer, and then we give God thanks. Just a very trivial situation that happened in my life just a few days ago. It really is trivial, but at the time that it happened, it was not trivial.

I came home late Wednesday night from being gone for a week, teaching at our collegiate staff conference, and realizing I had two days to sort of get things, you know, recover from being gone a week and get ready to come here. And I have two notebooks. I have this one that I'm using this morning, and I have another one just like it, different color, that I call my prayer notebook.

And when I'm gone for several days, it's my habit to take some of my prayer pages out of my prayer notebook and put them in the back of my speaking notebook, which is what I've done. And so I had that on this last trip, and when I came home Wednesday night or early Thursday morning, as I was getting ready to have my time with God, I just went and got this notebook and used it in my time with God. And then I put it down where I had used it, in the normal place where I had my time alone with God.

On Friday, I was looking for this notebook. Where is it? My wife was out, and she called on the cell phone about something. And so I said at the end of the conversation, would you pray? And I explained the situation that I had put this notebook down someplace and could not remember where I put it.

So she prayed, and then after she prayed, she said, do you think it could be on the dining room table, which is where I have my time with God? I have my books there and so forth, particularly my coffee cup. That's very important. So I remember that time with God.

And the minute she said that, or the moment she said that, I thought, there's where it is. Now, that's a trivial incident. I mean, that's not life and death, although it seemed like it at the time.

But you see, we pray, God answered, and then we thanked God. In 1972, I think it was, the Apollo 13 mission and some of you are old enough to remember that, that it turned out to be almost a catastrophe because some things went wrong with the systems. And so they had to, you know, they couldn't land the lunar module, but they just sent the whole thing around the moon and back.

And the President of the United States came on radio and television and to the whole nation he asked for prayer for the safe return of the astronauts. And God did, in fact, answer that prayer. Back in those days, those capsules landed in the Pacific Ocean.

They hadn't developed the technology that they have today where they can land on a runway. They landed in the Pacific Ocean and then they were fished out of the ocean and put on an aircraft carrier. And when those astronauts were safely aboard that aircraft carrier, the President of the United States praised American space technology for the safe return of our astronauts.

He asked for prayer, but then he did not thank God. He asked us to pray. And then when God answered that prayer, he praised human technology, human skill.

Not too long afterward, that President resigned in disgrace. Why do we pray? Not only to acknowledge our dependence and our helplessness, not only to acknowledge God's ability to answer our prayers, but we pray so that as he does answer, we can give him thanks. We can acknowledge that he is at work in our lives.

And dear friends, of the three reasons why I pray that we've gone over this morning, I believe that this last one is the most important of all. That as we involve God in our situation, as we involve God in our need, as we recognize our helplessness, our dependency upon him, and we see him answer, that it gives us an opportunity to give him the glory, the praise, the thanksgiving for the answers of our prayers. And that's probably the bottom line to the whole question, why pray? And that is so that God will be glorified.

Let's pray. Our Father, as we come to you this morning, we do acknowledge our dependency and our helplessness. And Father, even as I have given this message, I acknowledge that only you can make it effective in each of our hearts today.

Father, we hear so much truth. We hear so many messages. And we are dependent upon you to drive home to our hearts the truths that you want us to understand and to appropriate.

And I pray this morning that you would help each of us here to learn how to pray that we might give you the glory. And we pray even this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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