

Why pray?

ADDITIONAL STUDIES IN PRAYER

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STUDY FOUR: WHY PRAY?

A. BECAUSE GOD TELLS US TO

This is the simplest answer to the question 'why should we pray?' It is an answer which can counter all the possible objections to prayer and puzzles about prayer. God has told us that we should pray, so that is that. Below are the New Testament commands to pray.

New Testament commands to pray

Leaving aside the many Old Testament commands to pray, some of which we have considered under the headings of seeking and waiting on the Lord, and which we have seen demonstrated in the Psalms, the exercise below lists New Testament commands to pray.

For your study: Print the study. Read the verses in the table below. In the right hand column identify [1] the kinds of people we are instructed to pray for, and [2] the kinds of circumstances we are instructed to pray about.

Text	Content	Who/what to pray about
Matt 5:44	Pray for those who persecute you ... Luke 16:27	
Matt 7:7	Ask ... seek ... knock	
Matt 9:37	Ask the Lord of the harvest ... Luke 10:2	
Matt 24:20	Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath	
Matt 26:41	Watch and pray ... Luke 22:40,46	
Luke 18:1-8	Jesus told this parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up	
John 16:24	Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.	
Rom 12:12	Be ... faithful in prayer	
Rom 15:30	... join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued ... and that my service ... may be acceptable ...	
Eph 5:19	... always giving thanks to God the Father for everything ...	
Eph 6:18-20	And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. ... keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me ... pray that I may declare it fearlessly ...	

Phil 4:6 ... in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God

Col 3:16,17 ... sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ... giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Col 4:2-4 Devote yourselves to prayer ... pray for us ... pray that I may proclaim it clearly ...

1 Thess 5:17,18 Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances ...

1 Thess 5:25 Pray for us

2 Thess 3:1f Pray for us, that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured ... pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith

1 Tim 2:1ff I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved ...

1 Tim 2:8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer ...

Heb 13:18,19 Pray for us ... pray that I may be restored to you soon

Jam 5:13 Is anyone in trouble? He should pray.

Jam 5:14 Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him ...

Jam 5:16 Pray for each other

1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you

1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin ... he should pray ...

Jude 20 Pray in the Holy Spirit

B. BECAUSE JESUS PRAYED

The fact that Jesus prayed is significant on two counts: [1] that he is our example whom we are commanded to follow; and [2] that if he, the perfect, sinless man prayed, how much more need have we to pray who are neither perfect nor sinless?

B.1 Jesus Christ lived a life of perfect dependence on the Father:

While of some of the texts below obviously have reference to the deity of Christ and his essential unity with the Father, they still demonstrate for us the perfect life of dependence on God for which human beings were created.

John 4:34 My food is to do the will of him who sent me ... '

John 5:19	... the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.
John 5:30	By myself I can do nothing ... I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.
John 6:38	I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.
John 6:57	Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.
John 7:16	My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.
John 8:16	But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.
John 8:26	... what I have heard from him I tell to the world ...
John 8:28,29	... I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.
John 8:49	... I honour my Father ...
John 10:18	I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.
John 12:49	I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. ... So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.
John 15:10	I have obeyed my Father's commands
John 17:8	I gave them the words you gave me ...
John 18:11	Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?

B.2 Jesus prayed

In the texts below we see the kinds of things for which Jesus prayed:

Matthew 11:25	Jesus praises the Father for his sovereign purposes (Read also Luke 10:21)
Matthew 14:23	No content mentioned; the situation - by himself, after the feeding of the 5000.(Mk 6:46)
Matthew 26:36-42	Jesus prays for the removal of the cup of suffering, but commits to God's will . (Read also Mk 14:32ff; Luke 22:39ff).
Matthew 27:46	Prayer of anguish on the cross - why have you forsaken me? (He knew already, but still he cried out from the depth of his agony and suffering.) (Also Mk 15:34).
Mark 1:35	No content mentioned; by himself, early in the morning.
Mark 6:41; 8:6	Jesus gave thanks . (about to feed the 5000, and the 4000). (John 6:11).
Luke 3:21	Jesus prayed after his baptism. No content given. God spoke affirming his sonship.
Luke 5:16	'Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.' No content mentioned.
Luke 6:12	Jesus spent the night praying (before selecting 12 disciples as apostles).
Luke 9:18	Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him.
Luke 9:28	Jesus took Peter, John and James with him and went up a mountain to pray. God spoke, affirming his sonship.
Luke 11:1	Jesus was praying ...
Luke 22:32	Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail

Luke 23:34	Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of those who killed him
Luke 23:46	Jesus committed his spirit into his Father's hands
Luke 24:30	Jesus gave thanks for food
John 11:41	Jesus thanked the Father that he had heard him and expressed his knowledge that God always heard him.
John 12:27	Jesus prayed that God would glorify his name through 'this hour' rather than asking to be saved from it
John 17:1-25	Jesus' prayer includes: Concern for God's glory Prayer for his own restoration to the Father's glory Prayer for his disciples - their protection, joy, sanctification, unity, presence with him, seeing his glory, knowledge of God, mutual love, indwelling.

C. BECAUSE WE ARE HUMAN

Like the whole of creation man is dependent on God for his physical life and sustenance, as we have already seen. In addition, on a different level, the level of our human spirituality, our dependence consists of two further dominant aspects:

[1] That we are dependant creatures by virtue of creation , it is part of our God-created nature to commune and to communicate with him. This is part of the meaning of being bearers of God's image. We are not made for independent existence - without relationship/communion with God we are incomplete and adrift, disconnected from him who alone gives ultimate meaning, identity and purpose to us. In addition to the examples of the union/communion of Jesus Christ with the Father, consider the following where this concept is expressed:

Genesis 1:27	So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
Psalms 16:11	You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.
Psalms 17:15	And I - in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.
Psalms 25:1,15	To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God ... my eyes are ever on the Lord
Psalms 27:4	One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.
Psalms 31:22	In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" ...
Psalms 42:1,2	As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
Psalms 61:2	I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I ... I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.
Psalms 62:1	My soul finds rest in God alone ...
Psalms 63:8	My soul clings to you
Psalms 73:23,25,26	I am always with you ... Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you ... God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever
Psalms 84:2	My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.
Psalms 91:1	He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
Psalms 141:8	My eyes are fixed on you, O Sovereign Lord ...

Psalm 142:5	I cry to you, O Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."
Psalm 143:6,7	I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit.
John 1:1-4	... in him was life, and that life was the light of men.
Acts 17:28	In him we live and move and have our being.

For your study: think deeply about each of the above texts, specifically in relation to our intrinsic need to commune with God.

[2] That we are sinful creatures by virtue of the fall, and therefore totally dependent on the mercy of God to be reinstated into, and to live in, that relationship/communion with him which is called 'life' or 'eternal life'. Apart from this re-union with God in Christ, we are 'dead', we are 'powerless', we are nothing.

Genesis 3:22,24	(access to the tree of life denied)
Deut 8:3	... man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.
Psalm 36:9	... with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.
Amos 5:4,6	Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal ... Seek the Lord and live ...
John 4:14	Whoever drinks of the water that I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.
John 5:26, 40	For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself ... yet you refuse to come to me to have life.
John 6:33,35	The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world ... I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.
John 10:10	The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.
John 15:1-5	I am the true vine ... Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches ... apart from me you can do nothing.
John 17:3	Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.
John 20:31	... that by believing you may have life in his name ...
Romans 5:17	... those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ ..
Romans 6:11	... count yourselves ... alive to God in Christ Jesus ...
Galatians 2:20	... Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God ...
Ephesians 2:4,5	... because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions ...
Colossians 3:4	... Christ, who is your life ...
1 John 5:11,12	... this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life.

For your study: Study each of the above texts in context, and discuss or think about the significance of our dependence on God for spiritual life, and how this dependence necessitates prayer.