

## The Priority of Prayer

The priority of prayer in worship is something very easily overlooked. How many times have we lacked in prayer due to a "lack of time?" How many times have we omitted prayer as we go to bed tired, weary, and defeated by the day lost to sin when the one thing that *we can do* to salvage it is prayer? How many times have we asked people for prayer or have been asked for prayer and forgotten about it? The answer should be (shamefully) many, many times.

## What is Prayer?

- *Prayer is a personal communication with God. Wayne Grudam*
- *Prayer is an act of love*
  - "If we don't pray for those in our church, we'll lack power, grace, & love as we lead them." -Bob Kauflin
- *Prayer is an act of faith*
  - *If we pray little, it is probably because we do not really believe that prayer accomplishes much at all. Grudam 377*
  - *Matt 21:22, Mark 11:24 "Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith"*
- *Prayer is a petition of need*
  - But "Prayer is not made so that God can *find out* what we need." WG (emph added)
  - Matt 6:8 "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him"
    - Remember that one of God's attributes is that he's omniscient.
  - *"Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing." Piper*
- Prayer highlights what we *cannot* do.
  - It *can* open our eyes to see the power & hope of the gospel
  - It *will* show us God's power
  - It *can* open our eyes to God's purpose
    - Not ours. What we want is often times not what God wants for us.
  - It *will* cultivate care for others
    - "Leading & teaching are the activities; loving & serving are the motivation" (might apply to leaders only in this case)
  - Prayer centers the attention on God & the love towards Him & the congregation
    - It realigns ourselves so we *don't* focus on ourselves

## Four attributes of prayer that are related to worship

- **Prayer is not made separate from our hearts.**
  - **This is the first quality of prayer that is related to worship.**
  - Prayer, like worship, is to be done genuinely.
    - Genuineness implies: faith. If we truly believe that God answers prayers then our prayers are genuine. Hebrews 11:1 "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."
      - *Mark 11:24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."*
      - Faith is not characterized by wishful thinking.
      - It is characterized by confidence.  
*Hebrews 4:14-16: Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with*

*confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

- **Prayer is not made from unclean hearts.**
  - **This is the second quality of prayer that is related to worship.**
  - This is not to say that we need to be perfectly sinless before coming to God in prayer. Otherwise, no one's prayers would have been answered except Jesus'.
  - We come to God, through his grace, cleansed by the blood of Christ.
  - *Romans 3:23-25: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.*
  - *1 John 3:21-22: If our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him"*
  - This does imply that we are to lead holy lives. Wayne Grudem emphasizes: *"Yet we must not neglect the biblical emphasis on personal holiness of life. Prayer and holy living go together."*
  - Praying with a clean heart can also mean that you must pray with a heart that is clean from malice.
    - *Matthew 6:14: "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*
- **Prayer is not made separate from humble hearts.**
  - **This is the third quality of prayer that is related to worship.**
  - Prayer, like worship, has no place for pride. *James 4:6: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*
  - A good illustration is the parable of the Pharisee & the Tax Collector (Luke 18).
    - *Luke 18:14: "for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."*
  - Another attribute of God is his jealousy. Prayer and worship have no place for the proud that compete with God's glory and honor. *"True humility before God, which will also be reflected in genuine humility before others, is necessary for effective prayer." WG 386*
- **Prayer can be done corporately.**
  - **This is the fourth quality of prayer that is related to worship.**
  - *Matthew 18:19-20: "Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*
  - While there is no other verse that explicitly commands corporate prayer, there are examples: Acts 4:23 when believers prayed for boldness.
  - The Lord's prayer (Matt 6) uses plural pronouns so this can be implied that corporate prayer is encouraged as well.
- Prayer life and worship are intricately intertwined. If our hearts are 1) into prayer 2) clean from prayer 3) humble from prayer and 4) together in prayer, we are one step closer to worshiping God in spirit & truth. The foundations of both worship and prayer are a direct communication with God only possible through our mediator, Jesus Christ. *1 Tim 2:5 "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*

## **Practically and purposefully putting prayer as a priority**

- Practically speaking: How do we improve our prayer lives and make prayer a priority?

- Schedule prayer in advance. Ask for prayer requests. Give prayer requests (don't be shy). Leaders, you can make prayer requests mandatory (er highly encouraged).
  - A worship team that prays together plays together
- Have a solid prayer life outside of worship team
  - Again, get a discipler
  - Participate in church prayer meetings
  - Pray with your small group, lead them in prayer
  - Pray for people in your times with God
  - Pray before you go to sleep.
  - Pray in the shower, pray in the morning, pray when you eat, etc.
  - Pray without ceasing. (1 Thess 5:17)
  - Pray with faith (James 5:13)
- Take a look at Jesus' example on prayer. He was in constant communication with the Father.
- How should we pray? Consult Systematic Theology, look at the Lord's prayer, see when, how people like Paul prayed.
  - Pray with humility.
  - Pray with purity.
  - Pray with expectancy.

*You will certainly carry out God's purpose however you act but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John. CS Lewis*

Biblical prayer is an excellent model to show us how to worship musically. Prayer is a form of worship. By communicating with Him personally, we are acknowledging that we believe of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his superior priesthood over us. We acknowledge that God is good by coming to him with petition of need knowing that He will provide good things to us (Luke 11:13: If you then, though are evil, know how to give good gifts to children, how much more will your father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"). We pray for people loving them like we love our heavenly Father. All these things glorify and magnify God. That is an act of worship. Through musical worship we should take on the same traits. We need to worship with humility, worship with purity, and worship in faith. Our worship depends on our communication with God and prayer is the fundamental way to talk to Him.