

Why Pray? Why Not?
I Timothy 2:1-7
September 23, 2007

A businessman was late for an important meeting and couldn't find a parking space. As he frantically circled the block, the man got so desperate that he decided to pray.

Looking up toward heaven, he said, "Lord, take pity on me. If you find me a parking space, I'll go to church every Sunday for the rest of my life, and not only that, I'll give up drinking."

Miraculously, a parking space appeared.

The guy looked up again and said, "Never mind. I found one."

This is the approach many of us take with prayer. Some only pray when desperate. God is summoned for help only when everything else has been tried. Promises are made. For those who have served in the military, these are foxhole conversions. The real test of course is what happens after the war. Will the promises to follow God and serve him be kept?

If God does intervene the response might be much like the businessman's "Never mind, I found one." Or in other words, "God, I'll handle it from here."

But there are other issues with this approach to prayer. Certainly prayer is much more than pleading with God to rescue us. The problem is that a lot of people, even a number of Christians don't understand the role and purpose of prayer in their lives.

As Timothy's mentor, Paul gives his favorite son and all who read the letter some very important guidelines regarding prayer and worship.

Using the words "first of all" Paul is instructing Timothy that prayer should be of primary importance. In other words, whatever you do in worship, make sure that you pray. This makes sense doesn't it? How can one even begin to worship without acknowledging one's utter dependence upon God? God doesn't enter the picture then only during trial or duress, but on a daily, reoccurring basis.

What a difference it makes when a son or daughter in college calls Mom and Dad on a weekly basis rather than calling only they need money or are in trouble. Can you imagine how God must feel? Are we only calling out to him when we are in crisis or do we speak with the Almighty on a regular basis? Is Jesus only our rescuer or is he our friend?

Another significant difference is that there is more to prayer than asking God for help. Four different nouns are used by Paul in this passage for our English word "prayer."

The first use of the word is best translated as requests or supplications. The New International Version actually uses the very word “requests.” The businessman had a need or a deep desire to find a parking space quickly. Otherwise he would be late for his very important meeting. We may request help from God. Perhaps we need food, encouragement or strength.

The second use of the word is the most general word for prayer. The Greek word represents both private and public prayers.

The third meaning of our English word for prayer is found only here in I Timothy. It is best translated as intercession. The Greek word implies that first one converses with God and then petitions God. Almost every Monday morning, the Intercessory Prayer Group intercedes for those on our prayer list. We pray on behalf of those individuals and families who have requested prayer. When we pray for others, we are interceding for them.

The fourth Greek word used in this passage is “eucharistia.” It’s from this word that we derive the English word “Eucharist.” The Lord’s Supper should always be an occasion for thanksgiving. We give thanks that Christ died for our sins and forgives us. Thanking God for what he has done in the past strengthens our faith to believe that he will meet our needs in the future.

I have found an acronym to be very helpful when I pray. Using the acronym of ACTS really helps me to pray in a deeper way.

I try to begin every prayer with Adoration. I adore God for who he is and his graciousness towards me in life. I value the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, knowing what an important role they play in my life.

By acknowledging how special God is to me and in considering his sinless nature and love, I realize that I fall short of what God expects. Confession then follows.

Thankful for God’s faithfulness and his willingness to listen and forgive all who trusts in him, I thank God!

Now I am ready to intercede and make supplications or requests on behalf of myself and others. Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplications (ACTS) are important components of an effective and meaningful prayer life.

Why pray, because prayer is absolutely essential for a deep relationship with God. It grounds us so that we might be energized to experience and serve God.

Need another reason to pray? Paul indicates that we are justified in praying for those who govern us that we might experience their favor and live in peace and live lives of godliness and holiness. The word “godliness” means piety. The person living an

irreverent life is living an ungodly life. Holiness can also be translated as respectfulness and dignity

Billy Graham is a man of prayer. One day he walked into a barbershop to have his haircut. The barber, who had the privilege of cutting his hair, didn't recognize him. The other barbers did though, but didn't make a big deal of the fact that Billy Graham entered their barbershop. What impressed the unknowledgeable barber immediately was Billy Graham's holiness and dignity. The atmosphere of the barbershop changed immediately upon his arrival. It was only after Billy Graham left, that the barber who had cut his hair learned of Rev. Graham's identity.

If only we were so steeped in prayer that others would sense the very presence of God!

Why pray? We pray because it is essential. You and I pray in grateful response to a God who has saved us through Christ. We pray because God listens and cares. Our adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplications are offered because we trust and love God. We pray because we are changed and so are others.

Let us pray. ...