



SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Session Three | Prayer
Dr. Barry Stricker

READ

Luke 18:1-14; Acts 12:5-17; Matthew 6:25-32

WHY DO WE PRAY?

To help us grow in our understanding of prayer, let's consider several Bible passages.

First, look at **Luke 18:1-8**. This is what we call "a parable of contrast." (Often, we read a story and we conclude, "Hey, God is just like the character in that story." That would be a parable of comparison. But here, we discover an unjust judge who is very UNLIKE God. This is a parable of contrast.) Read the story and try to figure out what Jesus is teaching us about prayer. Jesus, in fact, tells us in the text exactly what the point of the story is – but, still, it's a **challenging story**.

Consider what Eugene Peterson says about this story:

"We are used to being ignored, especially if we find ourselves at the low end of the influence ladder. A lifetime of experience tells us that "if you know someone important," you are more likely to be listened to. We feel certain that we need letters of recommendation, letters of reference, endorsements, awards – to give our words credibility and guarantee an audience. And that viewpoint seeps into our practice of prayer – and into our walk with God. If we are used to being ignored, we **internalize** that diminishment – and find it almost impossible to be bold in prayer like this widow."

For people who are accustomed to being ignored, imagine the wonder of discovering that God will listen!

Second, study **Luke 18:9-14**. This is the story that Jesus tells about two men who prayed in very different ways. Contrast the two prayers in the story – and reflect on your own prayers. As you reflect, consider the personal attitudes that show up most often in your praying.

How much of your praying is fueled by desperate need – and by the certainty that only God can meet that need?

Third, explore **Acts 12:5-17**, and think about how and why God answers our prayers. In this story, believers are praying for Peter's release from jail – and they seem quite amazed when Peter is actually released from jail! Instead of expecting God to answer their prayers, they seem quite surprised.

Do you find that you are surprised when God answers your prayers?

Finally, consider Jesus' words in Matthew 6:25-32. Here, Jesus suggests that prayer is the opposite of worry. As you read these words, reflect on both prayer and worry in your own life.

In light of all four passages, what do you believe about prayer?



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is humility so important for all of the spiritual practices – and why is it especially important for prayer?
2. What is your reaction to the story of the two prayers that we encounter in Luke 18:1-8? What do the two prayers tell us about the two people who were praying?
3. What do you focus on most in your praying? As you pray, what items or concerns hold most of your attention and occupy most of your prayer time?
4. Do you believe that God answers your prayers? Can you identify how exactly he does that?
5. The video mentioned a comment from C.S. Lewis. He said that prayer is not intended to change God; instead, prayer is intended to change us. What do you think that statement means? Do you agree with it? When you pray, do you find yourself being changed?

NEXT STEPS

1. Ask God to help you grow in your understanding of prayer – and in your desire to be a person of prayer.
2. Take time each day to pray. Take the counsel of the Apostle Paul to heart and “let your requests be made known to God.”
3. Find a friend or a small group of friends and devote time to pray together with them.
4. For the next few weeks, keep a prayer list or a prayer journal. Write down the items and concerns that you are praying about. Then, make notes about how God responds to your prayers.