

# January 2004: The Purpose of Prayer

by Aaron Greenway

I can see it now! The alarm goes off. I jump out of bed! I rush into the shower, brush my teeth, comb my hair, grab my books, rush out the door. As I go to school, I turn on the radio to hear the late breaking news, say a quick prayer for God's protection, and when I arrive, I teach for four hours straight. This has been my schedule in the morning for the past year and a half.

It just so happens that at the place where I work, there is another teacher there named Ms. Horn. Both of us come into an environment where attitudes fly with the leadership, and things get very difficult at times. It has been a major stress in my own life. But the interesting part is what Ms. Horn had to say to me one day. She said, "Mr. Greenway, with all the attitudes and things going on here, I have to get on my knees for at least a half hour a day before I ever step foot in this school, or I couldn't handle it." How convicting! Had I honestly become so immune to the difficulties of that environment that I forgot to pray?

Sometimes, if we are not careful, we leave out the most important element of our lives: prayer. A friend of mine once said, "The thing we need more than anything in this country is prayer." It is as if we have become so calloused to the evil around us, and so self-sufficient, we don't bend the knee. And then, we go through the day (and life) struggling, hurting, and out of fellowship with our Creator. It is as if we have lost God's protective covering. By the time we get to the middle of the day, we realize that we have not talked to God yet, and so we start praying. Almost too

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A few years ago, I had the opportunity to record a rendition of the song “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”. The last line goes like this, “Oh what peace we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.” I think it is more than that. We have not only surrendered our protection, we have taken from God any opportunity that He could have to work in the difficult situations.

When we look at Jesus, we look at the Son of God, who would often get away from the crowd, go somewhere quiet, and pray (Matthew 14:23). This was how Jesus kept fellowship with his Father, and it was probably the only way Jesus was able to go to the cross for us. Yes, Jesus was (and is) the Son of God, but He was also human. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he asked His Father to take “the cup” from Him (Matthew 26:39). Do you think Jesus wanted to die? Absolutely not! Jesus didn’t want to suffer, to bear the weight of our sin. But His love was greater than his desire to live. How did Jesus make it to the end? He prayed. He spent time with His Father, so that He would never forget His mission, so that He would have strength for the journey.

When we pray, we are not just praying for ourselves, we are praying for others too. How many times has someone asked you to pray for them, you said you would, and then you didn’t? In those cases, it is good to carry a notebook only used for prayer requests. Our growth group for the past several months has used small notebooks so that people can be praying over those requests throughout the week. Jesus also said, “Pray for your enemies” (Luke 6:28). If someone has a strong prayer life, it is hard for him to hate his persecutor.

Prayer is really where the rubber meets the road. It is believing before seeing. It is trusting God in private what you know He will do in public. It is intimacy with the Creator. It is something that most of us (including me) can do more of. We go through life stumbling at times, not understanding why things are the way they are. Sometimes, our lives are even out of control. We don’t even know where God wants us to go, or what He wants us to do. Sometimes, God is

silent on the issue. But, sometimes, it is because we have not asked Him. Or we are so busy that we never stick around to hear His answer.

What is prayer to us? Is it nothing more than saying “grace” before eating? Is it just a few words we throw up when we are in a bad situation? Obviously, it is that! But it is much, much more. God wants intimacy with us. We have rendered ourselves completely defenseless in the war against the Enemy, if we have not let our Commander in Chief adequately prepare us. It may be just a matter of committing a few more minutes every day, not just going through with an obligation, but actually engaging the throne of God. There is a huge difference. We are meeting God, so that He can touch us deeper than ever before, use us more than ever before, and we reflect Him like Moses did when he came off the mountain. Has anyone ever said about you, “That person has been with Jesus”? We must pray without ceasing! (I Thessalonians 5:17).