

# Why Do You Pray?

- I. In December 2018 I went to Malta for a missions conference → God moving everywhere
  - A. Stories from all kinds of church backgrounds from SBC to Pentecostal
  - B. “Acts-Like” things happening around the world
    1. Dreams and visions of Jesus; Miraculous healings; Demonic oppression being undone by Christ’s authority; Breakthrough into UPGs
    2. I heard these stories and it was like I had no “canister” to put it into
  - C. When I left Malta I found myself praying for clarity: Was this all real? If it was, why wasn’t it happening in Cape May or places I’d been?
  - D. Immediately after that we began giving 100% of December to UPG work beyond our normal giving January through November
    1. This too is miraculous and we shouldn’t undercut it
    2. The unity of the elders to be so generous - God moving
  - E. A month later, in January 2019, I went to McDonald’s with Mikee Whiteshoes
    1. He had the biggest Bible I’d ever seen
    2. I asked him what his hopes were for 2019.
    3. He told me it was to grow in holiness
    4. I told him I wanted to experience the Holy Spirit
      - a) You would have thought I told him I wanted to break in a casino and do an Oceans 11 heist
      - b) He started talking to me about how I shouldn’t ask if I wasn’t serious and I needed to be ready to be woken up, linger in prayer
  - F. So I started to ask the Lord, daily, to fill me with his Spirit
  - G. I fasted for about three weeks, eating only fruit & veggies, drinking only water. I spent time praying, extra time in the word, rooting out sin in my life and revolve
    1. On January 27th, it was like there was a change in the atmosphere
    2. For the four or five weeks we were in Haggai many times we ended the service with 12 or 20 people in prayer on their faces in repentance
    3. Random people were having dreams they thought were from God and sharing them with me
    4. This was all new to most of us - things we didn’t know how to deal with
    5. And just as quickly as it came, it was gone
  - H. Now God continued to work, we were invited to Greece for ministry, then into partnership with various organizations and churches → all a mighty work of HS
  - I. But that tangible experience over those 5 weeks never really came back
  - J. And for years I have tried to reproduce it... tried to claw my way back...
  - K. Problem with my reasoning: You probably already know. **God isn’t a formula.**
    1. That’s paganism, actually → the idea that if you do X & Y, God will do Z
    2. *Psalm 115:3, Our God is in heaven; He does as He pleases.*
    3. Just b/c I do X and pray Y doesn’t mean God will do Z
  - L. So all of this begs the question: Why do we pray? Why do you pray?
    1. What is the reward for our prayers, fasting, desperate requests?

2. Is it a revival? The Great Commission fulfilled? Success in ministry? Power in the Spirit? To experience God emotionally, tangibly? To see God give you an answer to something you want? Different political leadership? None of these things are wrong, but... is it why we pray?
  3. Why do YOU pray? What's your motivation?
- II. Matthew 6 → It's interesting that in Matthew 6, the chapter of the Lord's prayer, the most repeated word is "REWARD."
- A. Jesus gives a list of spiritual things (fasting, giving alms, prayer, etc). The reason people do these things, according to Jesus, is b/c of some "reward."
  - B. In these verses he draws a comparison between the reward people actually want vs. the reward from heaven or from the Father
  - C. *1 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. 2 "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*
    1. Jesus warns people of doing good so that others see them
    2. The motivation here might be good, to honor God, but it is tarnished
      - a) They want to others to SEE them honoring God
    3. In this way they have deceived themselves
      - a) They may think the reward they seek is recognition from God, but God isn't impressed, and the only reward they will get is recognition from man
    4. Jesus' antidote? If you really want to impress God, do these things in secret. This will keep your motives in check and your heavenly Father will reward you... But with what? What's the reward? Answers to prayer? Blessing and honor? What's the reward?
    5. Still, we don't know what the "reward from God" actually is
  - D. *5 "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*
    1. Now we move on to corporate prayer
    2. These are people who want to honor God with their corporate prayer lives
    3. But, once again, their motives are tarnished
    4. They want people to SEE them worshiping and praising the Lord
    5. Jesus says they may think that they are seeking God's attention, but they are actually seeking human recognition
    6. For us we can relate to this - we like big crowds, large numbers of fans, huge instagram hits, X (formerly known as twitter) reposts

- a) Impressive by the world's standard
- 7. But this isn't a reward from the Father
  - a) The Father doesn't reward the way the world does
- 8. We see someone who is successful and we think, "God's hand of blessing is upon them"
- 9. Maybe, but God would say, "That's not my reward. I want to give you the Father's reward, heaven's reward"
- 10. Again, we don't know what the reward from the Father that they aren't getting actually is!

*E. 7 "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

- 1. Here we have people who are seeking the reward of an answered prayer (which seems reasonable)
- 2. But the means in which they seek the prayer is by nagging God with repetition → Maybe we can just wear him down... impress him with our perseverance and devotion... show him how many hours, how many words we are willing to pray. THEN he will reward us by HEARING us and ANSWERING us
- 3. Now, perseverance in prayer is admirable
  - a) Until God says, "stop asking" like he did to Paul
- 4. But is God impressed? No. He says, "Why are you doing this? I already know what you need."
- 5. You want the Father's reward? That's not how to get it. (Still don't know what it is).

*F. 9 Pray then **like** this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*

- 1. Jesus gives us some insight into the purpose of prayer. Maybe now we can more fully see the "reward" the Father actually wants to give
- 2. We pray for God's kingdom to be made manifest in the world...
  - a) Kingdom alignment
- 3. We pray for God's power to make us more into his image (someone who forgives, pursues holiness, is delivered from evil, obeys)
  - a) Kingdom transformation
- 4. We pray for God's glory to be revealed (for his his the power, the glory forever amen; c.f. Added later)
  - a) Kingdom expansion and glory
- 5. If this is the reward that Jesus has been hinting at (God's kingdom, God's power in us, God's glory), you start to get the idea that maybe we've been misunderstanding the reward all along...

*G. 16 "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have*

received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

1. Here they fast so people will notice their sacrifice and talk about how pious they are... Maybe then God will reward them?
  2. The reward they will receive is, once again, attention
  3. But they will not receive a reward from the Father.
  4. Again, what is the reward we should be pursuing from the Father? What is the treasure which we should pursue?
- H. 19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

1. What is the reward? Not the one we seek.
  2. Do you realize that almost all of the rewards we think about in prayer are earthly?
    - a) The reward is not, primarily, an answer to prayer (which will fade)
    - b) The reward is not, primarily, success (which will disappear)
    - c) The reward is not, primarily, health (which will diminish)
    - d) The reward is not, primarily, attention (which is fleeting)
  3. The reward the father offers is in heaven, a treasure in heaven
    - a) It is a treasure that cannot be stolen, and does not wear out
  4. What is the treasure? Where does God want our heart to be?
- 5. What is our reward from the Father? Himself.**

### III. Conclusion

- A. Summary: The rewards we think we want, the ones we try to earn with our sacrifice, our diligence, and our show are rewards that fade away
1. But there is a greater reward, the reward from the Father
  2. That reward is the Father himself, intimacy with our Creator, our Maker, our Husband
  3. Why do we pray? Because, ultimately, we want God
    - a) He is our greater portion
    - b) He is our heart's desire
    - c) He is our one thing
    - d) He is our beautiful inheritance
  4. Back to my story. What did I do the first time around?
    - a) Fasted → Not because I was trying to manipulate God but b/c I kept meditating on this reality: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be satisfied...
    - b) Prayed → Not publicly, not even always with people, but lingering in my living room in the middle of the day on my face
      - (1) Gina would come home and I would be praying on the carpet in tears, seeking the better portion
      - (2) Why? Because I wanted more of God!

- c) Only drank water → Not b/c Jesus hates wine, coffee, or soda, but because I wanted to drink from the Living Water of the HS
- 5. The difference THEN versus all the times I tried to “claw back” was the first time I was pursuing CHRIST... the other times, I was pursuing the experience of what happened
  - a) Do you see the difference?
  - b) The first time I pursued the giver.
    - (1) The other times, I pursued the gift.
  - c) The first time I was concerned about my heart.
    - (1) The others? My actions.
  - d) The Giver is *always* > The Gift
  - e) The heart is > the action
  - f) The one who gives grace > grace
  - g) The one who gives mercy > mercy
  - h) God, the Lover of My Soul, my Beloved → I am his and he is mine
- B. Why do we pray? What is the reward? Intimacy with our Creator God
  - 1. Prayer is about intimacy, it's about sitting at his feet and embracing him
    - a) Not his gifts... himself...
    - b) And he is always better. His presence is always greater.
    - c) Greater than a successful ministry, the bigger house, financial security, even health
    - d) He is better
    - e) And he loves to give good gifts... but he's the ultimate gift
- C. Here is my question for you: Why do YOU pray?
  - 1. When you consider your prayers, what is your focus?
  - 2. Do you primarily pray because you want something FROM God or because you want God himself?
- D. We: I wonder how different Revolve would be if we all - individually and collectively - pursued the true aim of prayer: intimacy with the Father
  - 1. What if our heart's cry was intimacy with God above all else
  - 2. What if our heart's desire was to know him more
  - 3. What if the one thing we craved was him
  - 4. *Psalm 27:4, One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.*