

The purpose of prayer

Study one:

Prayer is something we all know we should do, its something Jesus instructs and models for us, our churches hold prayer meetings and most Sunday services involve some sort of corporate prayer.

But, why pray? What is the point in prayer? Does it serve any particular purpose? In this study we will begin to look at these things in more detail and attempt to answer these questions.

Take some time to think about things you have prayed for recently, make a list if you are able too.

Do the things you have prayed for all have something in common? Are you able to spot any particular patterns? Is there no connection between your prayers?

Do you pray at a certain time of day? How are your prayers structured? Are they structured? Are your prayers mainly requests? Thanksgiving? Laments?



In order to understand the purpose of prayer, we need to look at the heart of God and his character. This helps us understand who we are praying too.

Throughout scripture we learn so much about God and his character, we learn about his heart, his goodness, mercy and gracious nature. We also learn that he never changes.

Try and think of some things you know about God that might influence your prayer life or shape the way you pray;

- God never changes
- God wants good things for his children.
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When thinking about these things, it can raise questions for us, for example- if God wants good things for his children- why do we need to ask for them? If God never changes, what is the point in praying? If God is sovereign, hasn't he already decided what will happen?

These questions are valid and important to ask.

The passages we are going to look at should help us to answer them.



Read through the following passage; Abraham pleads for Sodom; Genesis 18: 16-33.

In this passage, we see God about to cast judgement on Sodom, the people of Sodom were sinful and had committed many wrong things. We know that God is a just God and that his judgments are fair and holy. He has made his decision and it is a righteous one.

However, God stops to listen to Abraham- Abraham pleads with God for Sodom and eventually negotiates with God that if he can find ten righteous people, He will save Sodom.

Why did God change his mind? If He is a God that never changes? If He is sovereign?

1 Samuel 15:29 reads that God does not change his mind - as the humans do.

We can clearly see here that God has changed his mind- why? He was going to cast judgement on Sodom, but after Abraham pleaded with him, He agreed to spare Sodom if he could find 10 righteous people.

Based on what we have read so far, we need to ask the question; What is the difference between God changing his mind and humans changing their mind?

Another example is 2 Kings 20 1:-8, read through this passage.

Why does God extend Hezekiah's life?

Why does he go back on what he said?

Why does he change his mind?

Bringing it all together...

Lets go back to what we remembered about Gods character. We know that God is gracious and merciful *“The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.”* Psalm 145:8-9.

With both **Hezekiah** and **Sodom**, we see evidence of God being gracious and merciful. He agrees that if he can find 10 righteous people in Sodom He will save the city and he agrees to extend Hezekiah's life.

We also know that God is perfectly just, which means he needs to avenge Sin. Ultimately, he did this in Jesus (praise God!), but before Jesus he still needed to judge his people.

God's decision before he changed his mind was an act of judgment, he was acting out of perfect justice, but when Abraham and Hezekiah pleaded with God He chose mercy.

In Scripture, time and time again we see Mercy triumphs over judgement., He is perfectly just and perfectly gracious and these two things work in perfect tension together.

So to help us understand the purpose of prayer, we look at His character;

God is a god of justice- he acts out of righteous, just judgement.

God is sovereign- he is in control and knows what is going to happen.

God is gracious and merciful- his mercy always triumphs over judgement, he is moved by compassion.

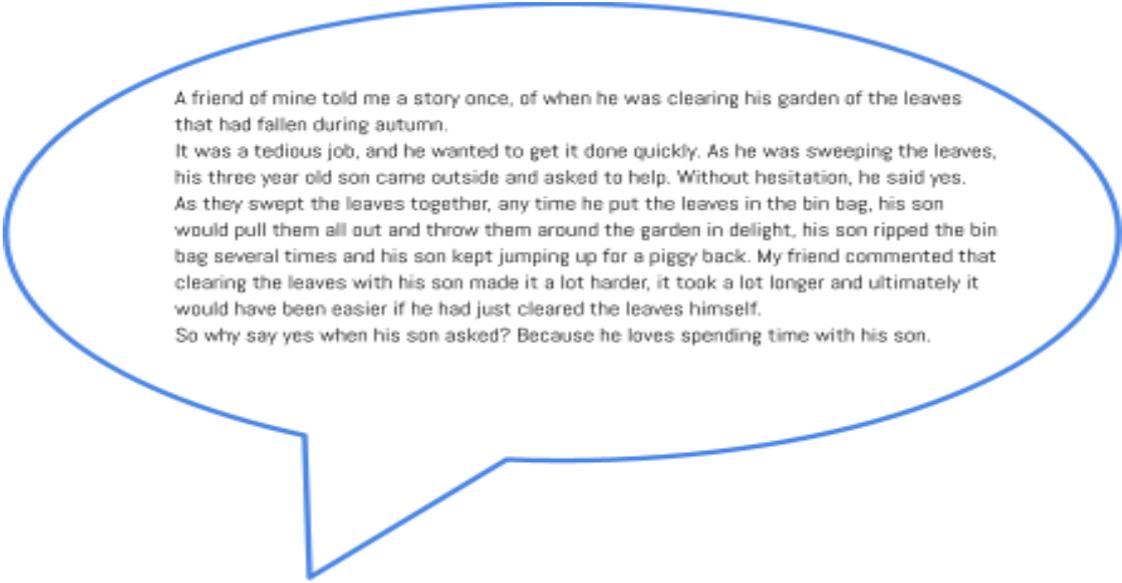
God makes us in His image- he wants us to fight for justice, understanding He is in control and that his mercy triumphs over judgement. He wants us to be moved by compassion.

THAT is why we pray.

We plead with God for his mercy to triumph over judgment, we remind Him who He is.

This begs another question; why do we need to remind God of who He is?

The answer is simple, because he wants to be in relationship with us, he wants to redeem the whole world (his big plan!) with us. God could do all of this on his own, but chooses to do it with his children.



A friend of mine told me a story once, of when he was clearing his garden of the leaves that had fallen during autumn. It was a tedious job, and he wanted to get it done quickly. As he was sweeping the leaves, his three year old son came outside and asked to help. Without hesitation, he said yes. As they swept the leaves together, any time he put the leaves in the bin bag, his son would pull them all out and throw them around the garden in delight, his son ripped the bin bag several times and his son kept jumping up for a piggy back. My friend commented that clearing the leaves with his son made it a lot harder, it took a lot longer and ultimately it would have been easier if he had just cleared the leaves himself. So why say yes when his son asked? Because he loves spending time with his son.

This is the fathers heart for us!

We probably slow down the purposes and plans of the Lord, God could definitely do all his plans and purposes without us, but chooses to do it with us so he can spend time with us. He loves being in relationship with us, this is why he asks us to pray, why he lets us move his heart.

So to sum this up:

In order to understand why we pray and the purpose of prayer, we need to look at the character of God. There are some beautiful parts of God's character that should drive us to pray, especially as we are made into his image.

God allows us to move his heart because he wants to be in relationship with us. He loves us speaking to him.