

# Why Do We Pray?



Basics of  
the Faith

S E R I E S

Stanley D. Gale



# Why Do We Pray?

## **Basics of the Faith**

*How Do We Glorify God?*

*How Our Children Come to  
Faith*

*What Are Election and  
Predestination?*

*What Are Spiritual Gifts?*

*What Is a Reformed Church?*

*What Is a True Calvinist?*

*What Is Biblical Preaching?*

*What Is Church Government?*

*What Is Discipleship?*

*What Is Faith?*

*What Is Grace?*

*What Is Hell?*

*What Is Justification by Faith  
Alone?*

*What Is Man?*

*What Is Perseverance of the  
Saints?*

*What Is Providence?*

*What Is Spiritual Warfare?*

*What Is the Atonement?*

*What Is the Christian Worldview?*

*What Is the Doctrine of Adoption?*

*What Is the Lord's Supper?*

*What Is the Trinity?*

*What Is True Conversion?*

*What Is Vocation?*

*What Is Worship Music?*

*Why Believe in God?*

*Why Do We Baptize Infants?*

*Why Do We Have Creeds?*

*Why Do We Pray?*

*Why God Gave Us a Book*

Sean Michael Lucas, Series Editor

# Why Do We Pray?

Stanley D. Gale



P U B L I S H I N G

P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

© 2012 by Stanley D. Gale

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, P&R Publishing Company, P.O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, New Jersey 08865-0817.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

ISBN: 978-1-59638-414-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-59638-552-8 (ePub)

ISBN: 978-1-59638-551-1 (Mobi)

*Page design by Tobias Design*

Printed in the United States of America

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Gale, Stanley D., 1953-

Why do we pray? / Stanley D. Gale.

p. cm. -- (Basics of the faith)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-59638-414-9 (pbk.)

1. Prayer--Christianity. I. Title.

BV210.3.G34 2012

248.3'2--dc23

2012012421

## ■ Why Do We Pray?

All of us have questions about prayer. Why pray if God already knows what we're going to say? Why pray if God has already ordained all that comes to pass? Wouldn't what we prayed for have happened anyway? Can prayer change the mind of God? Why do we need to pray for something more than once? These and other questions call for biblically informed answers in keeping with the whole counsel of God on the topic.

We need to hear from God on the subject of speaking to him. At its simplest, we just pray, talking to our God in the intimacy of relationship. But a grounded, balanced, and broad knowledge of scriptural teaching on prayer will serve to enrich our prayer lives, to embolden us in expectation through our faith-fueled utterances, and to establish us in the hand of our God for the advancement of his kingdom and glory of his name.

One caveat before we embark on our study of prayer: how in 32 pages do we deal with a subject that has filled tomes over the centuries? Thirty-two pages would not suffice for even a bibliography. This means our study is necessarily an overview, touching on various aspects. While that may be unsatisfying, we hope it will whet the appetite for further study.

## PRAYER DEFINED

Prayer is simply conversing with God, the privilege of a restored, reconciled relationship with the living God through Jesus Christ. It is the voice of a child to the Father, of a subject to the King. The golden scepter of access is extended to us through Christ, welcoming us into the very throne room of grace.

But prayer is more than a privilege. It comes to us also as a responsibility, something commanded by God, a requirement of discipleship.

Typically we think small in our prayers. Or we think parochially, praying about things just related to us and our own concerns. But prayer involves so much more.

This booklet suggests a definition for prayer, one that breaks the bounds of mere requests and reaches to the vast potential we hold by virtue of our access to the very presence of God. *Prayer is the divinely appointed means through which we commune with the living God and advance his kingdom.*

This definition captures something of the power and purpose of God remarkably invested in our prayer at his design. It conveys both the intimacy of relationship and the responsibility of seeking God for the work of his kingdom in our lives, in others, in the church, and in the world. Such prayer involves us in the ongoing redemptive work of Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:12–14).

Our survey of the Bible's teaching on prayer will follow the two aspects of our definition. We begin by looking at prayer in relationship with God: communing with him, enjoying him, growing in the knowledge of him. Next, we will explore prayer in the advancement of the kingdom of God. Finally, we'll look at some practical thoughts on the practice of prayer.

## PRAYER AND COMMUNION WITH GOD

The first part of our definition highlights prayer as the interaction of a restored, reconciled, redemptive relationship with the God we were created to glorify and enjoy. Here, the chief end of prayer is intimacy with our God.

Prayer flows from relationship with God in awareness of the love-wrought reality of that relationship. Friends of mine who live in Colorado insist they never tire of the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains. The rugged and lofty vista startles them each day. In the same way, awareness of ourselves as sinners saved by



grace, reconciled by Christ's becoming sin for us at the mercy of God set upon us, should infuse us with humility and awe as we turn to our God in prayer. We say incredulously with David, "Who am I that God should regard me?" (cf. Ps. 8:4).

We can address several features of prayer under the heading of our communion with God as reconciled sinners, dealing with our right of access, ability in prayer, and its expression.

### **Praying in Jesus' Name**

Sometimes I would ask my children to pray at the close of family devotions. After a meaningful prayer, it was not unusual to hear them say, "injesnameamen." Praying in Jesus' name became the prelude to an amen, like pressing the "send" button to launch an email into cyberspace.

Why do we pray "in Jesus' name"? Jesus himself gives us the idea. In his Upper Room discourse, he says, "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). Four other times Jesus speaks of prayer in his name (John 14:14; 16:23–24, 26).

Tracing the expression "in Jesus' name" through the New Testament, we note that the name of Jesus has to do with his person and work. Jesus is the Son given by the Father who would save his people from their sins. We are called to glorify the name of Jesus in our lives (2 Thess. 1:12) and do everything in the name of Jesus (Col. 3:17). The name of Jesus speaks to our status, our focus, and our service. Bearing the name of our Lord qualifies our entire lives in newness of life as children of the living God and servants of the Most High.

We do need to pray in Jesus' name, but we do not need to pray "in Jesus' name," as Jesus himself attests in the model prayer of Matthew 6. It is through Christ our Mediator that we come to the Father. His shed blood gives us access to the throne of grace. To come in the name of Christ is to recognize our right of access and reality of redemptive relationship achieved by

him in reconciling us to God. It is to align us with Jesus in relationship with God as our Father and submission to his will as modeled by Christ. Praying in Jesus' name is not some sort of incantation but looks to the incarnation of Jesus to reconcile us to God. Through Jesus we now have fellowship with the Father.

To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray as ones belonging to Christ and for the sake of Christ. It is the governor of all we pray, inherently qualified by "your will be done." It is to pray through Christ, for Christ, and in Christ.

### **Prayer and Faith**

James links prayer to faith. He opens his epistle with words that make us pause: "Let him ask in faith, with no doubting" (James 1:6). He closes his letter by speaking of elders praying over the infirm, asserting that "the prayer of faith" will save the one who is sick (James 5:13–15).

We read things like this and we get a little nervous. We know our hearts are full of doubts, mixed motives, and unbelief. Will God hear?

How does faith relate to prayer? Is a prayer of faith different from regular prayer? Does the strength of one's faith increase the probability of an affirmative answer to prayer? Are we to conclude that a person for whom we are praying is not healed because our faith is not strong enough?

We get our bearings by remembering that faith is a gift of God, reflective of a redemptive relationship with him. It is the ability of spiritual sight granted by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit to those dead in sin. The writer of Hebrews informs us that faith sees the unseen and acts in keeping with those realities (Heb. 11:1).

James's concern in his letter is not with big or little faith. His concern throughout is with genuine versus false faith, what true faith looks like and how it acts. The prayer of faith is not a different species of prayer but the prayer of the believer, the genuine Christian, one

whose righteousness is rooted in faith bound up in Jesus Christ as the object of that faith. The crux is not the size or strength of faith but the presence of faith. Even riddled with doubt, faith insists “it does believe” and asks God “to help it in its unbelief.”

Faith is the animating feature of prayer. Prayer is not just words that operate automatically by articulation. Prayer is an interaction of faith. In the knowledge of the living God, this Spirit-given ability rests, receives, believes, submits, trusts, waits, and defers. Praying in faith carries the conviction of God’s hearing, the expectation of God’s answering, and the confidence that God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or think. Through faith, we believe in God and we believe God.

Faith infuses prayer with great expectancy, because it knows God and knows that God has ordained prayer as his means to his ends. Such prayer identifies with the psalmist: “O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I direct my prayer to you and watch” (Ps. 5:3 [translation in footnote]). Governed by his wisdom, God will answer our prayers “yes,” “no,” “not now,” “in this way,” “in this time.” Faith expects God to work and so looks for his working, accepting his answers in submission to his purposes.

## **Praying in the Spirit**

Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints. (Eph. 6:18)

But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit. (Jude 20)

What does it mean to pray in the Spirit? Are we being informed of the need to enter some sort of prophetic trance and pray with ecstatic utterance?

“A clear trumpet call to prayer in the triumphant name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Full of light, warmth, and power, it dispels wrong ideas about prayer. This one booklet could be used far and wide to do wonders that our gracious God has planned from eternity, once Christians start doing what it clearly shows them they are enabled to do, and divinely called to do: ‘Ask, seek, and knock.’”

■ **Douglas F. Kelly**, Professor of Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary; Author of *If God Already Knows, Why Pray?*

**W**e all have questions about prayer. Why pray if God already knows what’s going to happen? Can prayer change the mind of God? Does it actually affect anything? What is the *purpose* of prayer?

There is only one wise source to answer our questions: we need to hear from God himself. Only through him and his Word can we have a grounded, balanced, and broad understanding of prayer. This booklet presents an overview of what Scripture says, defining prayer, exploring its roles, and teaching us how to practice it.

Basics of the Faith booklets introduce readers to basic Reformed doctrine and practice. On issues of church government and practice they reflect that framework—otherwise they are suitable for all church situations.

**Stanley D. Gale** serves as senior minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

[www.prpbooks.com](http://www.prpbooks.com)

COVER DESIGN BY TOBIAS' OUTERWEAR FOR BOOKS  
tobiasdesign.com

COVER PHOTO © ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/PAWEL GAUL



P U B L I S H I N G

EAN

CHRISTIAN LIVING / PRAYER  
ISBN: 978-1-59638-414-9

