

**QUESTION #5: “IF GOD KNOWS ALL THINGS, WHY DO WE NEED TO PRAY?”**  
**(Philippians 4:6-7)**

6.9.19

**INTRODUCTION**

One of the great ways that we have to communicate with God is the gift of prayer. Just imagine: We get to talk with God. The Creator of the entire universe offers us his ear. And yet prayer sometimes can seem like such a silly religious exercise; I mean, we’re talking with Someone who claims to already know everything, so what’s the point — which is what we will be considering with today’s question: “If God knows all things, why do we need to pray?”

**TEXT**

***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 4:6-7.***

Now clearly the Bible teaches that God absolutely knows all things. He knows all things factually, he knows all things past, present and future, and he knows all things about us, about everybody, inside and out:

- 1) In the OT, as King David said to his son Solomon as he was being prepared to assume the throne of Israel: ***“[T]he Lord searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought” — David, I Chronicles 28:9b.***
- 2) As God himself said through the prophet Isaiah: ***“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come” — God speaking, Isaiah 46:10a.***
- 3) In the NT, as the writer of Hebrews explains: ***Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account — Hebrews 4:13.***
- 4) And as the apostle John said so simply in his first letter: ***[God] knows everything — I John 3:20b.***

So obviously, when it comes to knowledge, God is in a class by himself. Even as Jesus was setting the stage for what we know as The Lord’s Prayer, he prefaced it by saying: ***“[Y]our Father knows what you need before you ask him — Jesus Christ, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:8b.*** And yet, at the very same time, we are called to pray. Now since it seems pretty obvious that prayer is NOT about telling God something that he doesn’t already know, there must be something in prayer that God wants us to experience, something that enhances our walks and our lives with him.

So, if all that is true, then maybe what God wants us to come to understand is that prayer is so much more than us just asking God for something, or for him to be doing something. A lot of times we can create the impression that God is some sort of heavenly vending machine. We put our coins in the slot (“prayer”) and, presto, we get what we prayed for. That is such a limiting idea of what this tremendous gift of God truly is. For one thing, if we don’t get what we prayed for, the assumption can become that either God doesn’t answer prayer, or that he doesn’t even listen to us. As wrong as those ideas are, they’re easy to get to if we think of God as just hanging around waiting to answer the first prayer that comes his way. So, with the help of Paul’s words to the Philippian Christians as well as some occasional help from the family relationships with which many of us are familiar, we are going to look at prayer from the standpoint of: Why do we need to be talking to God?

Now first of all, these verses from Paul tell us that, regardless of God knowing all things, we are commanded to pray. But this needs to be understood in the context of relationship. As Christians, we are children of our Heavenly Father by the redemptive act of atonement performed by his Son, Jesus Christ. But Jesus isn't just our Savior: He's our Lord and Master, too. But this Lord and Master has shown more love for us than anybody ever: ***“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*** (That's what he did.) ***You are my friends if you do what I command*** — ***Jesus Christ, John 15:13-14.*** (That's what Christians do.) We are in a relationship based on love and, out of our love for Jesus, one of the ways we respond to him is with obedience. Obedience is love that Jesus has told us he absolutely recognizes: ***“If you love me, keep my commands”*** — ***Jesus Christ, John 14:15.*** Prayer is one of his commands. In the NT, commands are often presented in the “imperative tense” — meaning, “do this.” One of my professors in school called it the “achtung” (the German command to attention) tense. In other words, we are being commanded in the Scriptures to follow these commands as a loving response to our Savior's love for us. Because obedience gives us the opportunity to show and tell our love to Christ, we should be delighted, even excited, to obey whatever commands God has communicated through his prophets, his apostles and, most importantly, his Son. Obedience to God is where we find the blessings of God. As the psalmist wrote: ***I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. . . . I delight in your decrees*** — ***Psalms 119:14, 16a.*** So first of all, we pray to show OBEDIENCE to God.

Second, these verses tell us that prayer offers us the opportunity to not have to be anxious about anything, meaning that prayer extends to us the incredible possibility to personally know and live within the peace of God. Now let's be honest: How often doesn't worry and anxiety drive our lives? For some of us, that may mean sleepless nights. For some of us, that may mean distracted days. For some of us, that may mean reaching for the Alka-Seltzer to quiet our “heartburn, gas, that burning sensation.” It can affect our health, our relationships, and just generally our quality of life. But look what Paul is doing here: He's not just telling us to not be anxious, but he's actually commanding us to not be anxious, to not worry, about anything. How is that possible? Who in the world does this guy think he is anyway? How can somebody order us not to worry? Answer: By doing what comes next — in every situation, pray. Bring to God whatever it is that is trying to invade your life with anxiety. And notice there are no limitations on what we are invited to pray about — nothing too big, nothing too small, nothing too trivial, nothing too meaningless — there is absolutely nothing that we are NOT invited to bring to God in prayer. That's why Paul specifically says: ***“in every situation.”*** The Greek literally says: “Worry about nothing — pray about EVERYTHING.” Remember when Martha was trying to get “many things” ready for hosting Jesus? The Bible says that she ***“was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made”*** — ***Luke 10:40a.*** Jesus of course noticed this and pointed out her worry. In the Greek, the idea of being worried is to have a “distracted mind, a divided mind.” Paul is pointing out that worry divides us from the peace we can claim when everything is presented to God. I have had people tell me: “I don't bother God with the small stuff. I just pray about the big stuff, the important stuff.” What!?! No — that's incredibly wrong, not to mention spiritually “shooting ourselves in the foot” by depriving our lives of so much blessing. We don't need to somehow qualify our requests. Paul says that God says: Just bring it. We will neither wear out God's ears or God's patience. Instead Paul is cheerleading us in the other direction: Pray about anything and everything — “every situation!” Peter similarly told his audience: ***Cast all your anxiety on him [God] because he cares for you*** — ***I Peter 5:7.*** And you know what's really cool

about that? Paul is telling us that our lives, our concerns, our challenges are all a big deal to God. In fact, everything about us is a big deal to God. There are no small things as far as he is concerned. Is that amazing grace or what? That's why the writer of Hebrews reminds us that we can ***approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our times of need*** — ***Hebrews 4:16***. The Greek for "confidence" translates as "boldly," and it means literally "the speaking all one is thinking." In other words, we are invited by God to come to his throne of grace and speak freely and with complete frankness. We don't have to hold back — on anything! That attitude comes from the assurance we can know from God's graciousness that we will be given the mercy and grace we need for whatever the situation is that we are facing. And to make sure we're understanding how magnificent God is to us and what an awesome invitation this is, Paul even tells us how to bring those requests: ***"with prayer and petition, with thanksgiving."*** So what does that mean?

- 1) "With prayer" — simply speaking to God out of our relationship as his kids.
- 2) "With petition" — in the Greek, the word translates as "supplication," and it means prayer as the expression of need or desire.
- 3) "With thanksgiving" — the Greek translates this word as meaning, particularly in Paul's writings, the giving of thanks, the expression of gratitude to God. It is a placing of faith in God's grace, and therefore anticipating his best before we ever even see the answer.

When that is how we pray — expressing our needs while acknowledging our grateful hearts for what he is about to do — then Paul tells us the best part: that we will receive a peace that transcends, that goes beyond, that passes all our ability to understand. It is that peace that will keep our hearts and minds guarded as we revel in the grace that God's answer to our prayers will contain.

You see, we need to understand that, when we pray, what we are ultimately doing is transferring title to God concerning whatever our prayer requests are. In other words, he now owns whatever we bring to him in prayer. Now, the reality is, as Christ said so plainly to his disciples: ***"[A]part from me you can do nothing"*** — ***Jesus Christ, John 15:5b***. We are helpless on our own to make any difference with our problems or issues. If that's the truth, then why would we insist on holding on to those things? Through our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, Paul has pointed out a far, far better way: Let God have it, whatever it is. So, by praying to him, we are handing over to him something that, from that point on, belongs to him. It is his to do with — whatever and however he wants. The beauty of that is, because it is now God's "problem," it is not ours to deal with anymore. Because we have handed ownership over to God, we no longer have to concern ourselves with it. It is not ours to lose sleep over, to grab Alka-Seltzer over, to get wrinkles and grey hairs over — none of that. Instead we are trading our anxiety for the power of ***him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us*** — ***Paul, Ephesians 3:20***. So the second reason we pray is to show our TRUST in God.

Third, these verses serve as a testimony of God — his love, his accompaniment, his compassion, his concern for every "jot and tittle" of our lives — to all those around us. When we pray, we are testifying:

- 1) That God loves us: ***"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness"*** — ***God speaking, Jeremiah 31:3***.
- 2) That God accompanies us: ***"Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go"*** — ***God speaking, Joshua 1:9b***.

3) That God directs us:

- a) ***“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you” — God speaking to David, Psalm 32:8.***
- b) ***Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it” — Isaiah 30:21.***

And, as people see us praying, as we show that prayer is an absolute necessity in our lives, that becomes a wonderful opportunity to testify to all we have found through our relationship with Christ. The simple truth is that we cannot do life, we cannot do anything, without him (embracing the helplessness):

- 1) ***[The Lord] gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak — Isaiah 40:29.***
- 2) ***“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh” — God speaking, Jeremiah 17:5a.***
- 3) ***If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves — Paul, Galatians 6:3.***

But when we are surrendered to God through Jesus Christ, realizing the impossibility of our accomplishing anything apart from him, some wonderful possibilities open up — as promised by God:

- 1) ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me — Paul, Philippians 4:13 (NKJV).*** And how is that possible? Paul tells us: ***[M]y God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 4:19.*** So how will he meet our needs? Through his never-ending, eternal abundance.
- 2) As a result, as David famously wrote: ***The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing — David, Psalm 23:1.***

In other words, we pray as a reflection and outcome of our helplessness, even celebrating the fact that, as I acknowledge my helplessness, God is free to display all his power. As Paul famously wrote in his second letter to the church at Corinth describing what appeared to be an unanswered prayer request: ***“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong — Paul, II Corinthians 12:9-10.*** Why would I want to get in the way of that? So, the third reason we pray is to show our DEPENDENCE on God.

Now, for our purposes this morning, there are two more reasons we pray — and these may be the most fun reasons of all.

Remember on the front end of this message that we defined prayer as “talking with God.” We also mentioned that Christianity is not a religion; it’s a relationship. And, truth be told, it’s much more than even that: It is a love story. OK, all you happy married people: Take a look at your spouse. Do you remember when you were first head-over-heels puppy-dog in love? I do. I remember when Linda and I were first dating. I can remember calling her on my lunch, just to have those couple of seconds to hear her voice. I didn’t need to have anything specific to talk about. Just simply connecting with her made my day. And to this day, just talking — about anything — is what keeps us connected. That’s why Paul said at the end of his first letter to the Thessalonians: ***[P]ray continually (pray without ceasing — NKJV) — Paul, I Thessalonians 5:17.*** Don’t stop; don’t EVER stop! Keep growing your connection with God. Just talk with

him — about everything. The better you know him, the more you'll find you have to talk about — not asking him to do stuff, but just being in relationship with him, talking with him about everything, and just enjoying the picture of having that relationship with him. He welcomes that relationship with us. It keeps us growing in connection — and in love. Not a bad way to spend our lives.

I also remember when our two girls were little. Many times I remember them coming into our room on a Saturday morning, jumping up on our bed, and I certainly remember the knees and elbows that announced their arrival. And they'd start talking. They didn't really have anything monumental to say. They just wanted to be with Mom and Dad. Relationship — and talking was a part of that.

God wants the same kind of relationship with us. He wants us to talk to him — about everything and anything. We don't have to wait until we need something. Most of the time, in fact, almost all the time, my daughters didn't start talking with Linda and I because they needed or wanted something. They just wanted to be with us.

And that's the fourth reason we pray: to show our LOVE for God, to just revel in the relationship, to just enjoy the incredible blessing of simply being in his presence. And lest we forget, prayer is at its most basic a conversation — which means that, while we have things to say to God, he may be just as likely to have things to say to us.

Which brings us to the fifth (and last) reason we pray: to WORSHIP God. All of these reasons for prayer should bring us to a constantly growing awe of just who God is, and all the ways he continues to show us his love, his grace, his faithfulness, his forgiveness. How can obeying God, trusting God, depending on God and loving God not bring us to worshipping God? Down to its core, the idea of worship in its most common form in the Hebrew means, literally, to “bend over” or “bow down.” It is a picture of paying homage to Someone greater than ourselves. That is what worship is; that's why we often bow our heads when we pray — to signal the respect we have for God when we speak to him. And that is also a great picture of what our prayers can be — moments of worship, recognizing God for Who and What he is.

Y'all up for a challenge? As you go through this week, whenever you pray, before you ever ask God for something, praise him for something and thank him for something. Praise and thanksgiving are two huge parts of worship. And maybe after you have thought of one thing to praise him for, something else will come to mind, and then something else. And then will come the thanksgiving as you become more and more aware of the amazing grace which God pours out on us every moment of every day. What an incredible God we know. And the best part, as the apostle John wrote with such joy: ***See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! — I John 3:1a.*** Pray as blessed children of God!

## CONCLUSION

But there is a qualifier, one significant “have-to” for anybody to know, experience and claim all the wonderful consequences that are found in praying to God — and that qualifier is: relationship. And what makes for a relationship with God? What guarantees that God will indeed hear our prayers? David tells us in Psalm 4 (and I love how The Living Bible expresses it): ***Mark this well: The Lord has set apart the redeemed for himself. Therefore he will listen to me and answer when I call to him — David, Psalm 4:3 (TLB);*** other translations mention that

God has set apart “the godly” or “the faithful.” All these expressions boil down to the same thing in the Hebrew: that God has distinguished, has separated for himself, those who have put their trust in him. In other words, what is it that makes us godly or faithful in God’s eyes? Not our efforts, not our behaviors. We’re born sinners — we’re finished being able to be good before we even get started. The one and only thing that would make God distinguish us is that his Son is found in our lives — that we have surrendered our sinful lives to Christ’s perfect life given for us on the cross. Only then does God see us as he sees his own Son — as one who has no sin. That makes us his kids. That puts us in relationship. And then, we belong to a Father who has promised to listen to us.

God also makes clear in the Scriptures that, apart from relationship, he will not be listening. Certainly Israel received that message — that because their desires for living their own way had terminated their relationship with him, he would not listen to them when they were in trouble, when they called to him. As he said through the prophet Ezekiel: ***“Have you seen this, son of man? Is it a trivial matter for the people of Judah to do the detestable things they are doing here? Must they also fill the land with violence and continually arouse my anger? . . . Therefore I will deal with them in anger; I will not look on them with pity or spare them. Although they shout in my ears, I will not listen to them”*** — ***God speaking, Ezekiel 8:17a, 18.*** It’s all about relationship. Which brings me to this: Do you know him? Is he still just a god of religion, just some loosely defined “thing” that you go through some ceremonial, ritualistic motions with, or do you know him as father in a living, breathing, growing, ongoing relationship? Have you at a moment in conscious time surrendered your life, confessed your sins, and begged for his forgiveness? Baptism, confirmation, attending church, giving money — those things mean nothing if that’s us in our own efforts trying to look good. Folks, we will never be good enough. What Jesus did when he died on the cross for every one of our sins was to present us with the gift and opportunity to be seen by his Father as “perfect.” Not just good, but perfect. Let’s pray!