

10. PRAYER IS NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS

Who God is to you affects the way you pray

When we pray, we pray to God. Therefore, underlying the question of “What is prayer?” is the bigger and more important question of “Who is God to you?” What you believe in will determine how you pray.

The Woes of Unanswered Prayers

Life is rarely a bed of roses. Setbacks and difficulties are inevitable. When a person has difficulties, especially when he feels at wits' end, he will naturally turn to God for help. He who pleads with God wishes for a miracle to avert a suffering. However, the answers to his prayers may not always be what he desires.

Is it possible to experience a miracle immediately after praying? Certainly, but it is rare. This fact is mind-boggling. How can there be an almighty God who would not lend a helping hand to a person in trouble? Or why does He help this person and not the other? Does God even exist? Does He care for us? Does He have the power to help us?

Consider this: if God were to answer every single prayer, would that make everyone happy? Would the world become a better place? Would everyone's life be more fulfilling and meaningful? The fact is that many people are self-centred and do not give a thought for the world at large or even for people around them. Although their prayers may appear to be for something good, it might not actually be good. People do not have the overall view

of a situation. What someone think is good may not necessarily be so.

Imagine a million people wishing to win the million-dollar lottery prize. When everyone's wish is granted, each would only win the prize money of one dollar. Would this count as their prayers being answered? A person rushing for time may pray that he could pass through all the junctions with green traffic lights. If his prayer was answered, would that not inconvenience other drivers? Some people pray for their elderly sick parents to be completely healed of their ailments; would it not result in a world full of the aged? How will that impact the whole society? In addition, if the prayers of a gang of robbers were to be granted, would it not cause more people to suffer? A world with a God who says "yes" to all prayers would not be a better one. Instead, it would be extremely chaotic and give rise to more severe problems.

There are some who say that God should not be bothered with unreasonable and unkind petitions. He should only listen to the prayers of "good" people. Indeed, such people only pray for good things, just as a farmer may pray for good weather and harvest, and a kind person may pray for peace between countries. Citizens of a certain region may pray for an end to an epidemic. Certainly, these people think that their requests are appropriate. Therefore, if God does not answer their prayers, does He seem unkind or incapable? Then there are others who are more patient and do not seek instant results. They continue to pray even when their prayers are not answered, hoping for the day in a near future when their unfavourable situation will change for the

better. When that day comes, they believe that all who see their answered prayers will know that God is great. The problem is how many among them would already have stopped praying due to disappointment and the loss of hope before they see the light at the end of the tunnel?

Who is God to You?

One can experience disappointment when there is first an expectation. What expectations do you have of God? What is the basis of your expectations? Is it based on your own speculation? Or does it align with the true nature and ways of God? How much do you understand about God's purpose for you and the world?

These questions are crucial. If you have difficulty answering them, it could mean that you have not known God and the world He has created. As such, you will have unrealistic and impractical expectations of Him. In this way, you will be disappointed with unfulfilled prayers. Many who claim to believe in God only believe in their own distorted image of God.

Let us look at some examples that illustrate the importance of truly understanding before acting appropriately. At work, we need to understand the mechanics of cars before we can carry out its maintenance to avoid possible breakdowns. In our social life, we need to understand the dynamics of interpersonal relationships to know how certain attitudes or behaviours may enhance or hinder good rapport. Likewise, when relating with God, if we appreciate God for who He is, we can communicate with Him better and avoid making delusional prayers.

As revealed by Jesus, we come to know the living God, our heavenly Father who is all knowing, all powerful, all loving, holy and pure, merciful and just. He is the creator and ruler of all things. When we believe in Him, we are willing to act and pray in accordance to His will.

What is Prayer?

Prayer is an expression of the relationship between man and God. What the relationship is like will affect how prayer is being expressed. It is a relationship built on faith, hope, and love. "Should Christians pray?" is a redundant question. If we believe that God is our heavenly Father and we are His children, without a doubt we want to interact with Him.

Prayers demonstrate our trust and love in God and our relationship with Him. In ancient times, people had various distorted ideas about God. At times, they saw Him as a harsh judge who rewarded the good and punished the evil. In their prayers, they often asked for Him to save their kind and hurt their enemy. At other times, they viewed Him as a king who had authority over life and death and the power to bestow blessings. As such, they tried to flatter God in exchange for His favours. There were also those who saw Him as a military general who fought with them. They pleaded with Him to lead their armies to victory and save His people.

The opening verse of the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught his disciples goes, "Our Father who art in Heaven", signifying a father and child relationship between God and us. With this basis, any form of prayer is feasible.

Prayer can be very simple. When we open our hearts to God, we can pray anytime, anywhere, anyhow.

Praying is a heart to heart communication with God, which may include seeking God's help for our daily needs, thanking Him for His blessings, asking for wisdom when faced with difficulties, or pleading for His forgiveness when we sin. All these prayers show how we can confide in God lovingly and trustingly. In short, any experience of joys or sorrows, anger or happiness, success or failure can all be the motive and content for a prayer.

We confide in our close friends. We are willing to spend our time and share our thoughts, feelings, and needs with people close to us. The relationship with our loving Father is like this. We know that He cares, and we are open to Him. We care more about our relationship with Him than the problems we have. We share our joy, anger, unhappiness, hope, and fear.

In prayers, we are not pre-occupied with the gifts we can get from God. We seek God who is the giver of all gifts.