

## The Prayer Factor!

Scripture used: Ephesians 1:15-17 (NIV)

### OVERVIEW

We are starting a new sermon series this week. The Big Idea is that prayer is a big deal. Pastor Hurmon kicked off the series by identifying our motivation for prayer as human beings, outlining hurdles and misconceptions to living a prayerful life, and highlighting the main difference between Christian prayer and other practices around the world.

Paul tells us that the ultimate goal of prayer is knowing God, not the answer we receive. In his letter to the Ephesians, he clearly describes the true process and benefits of prayer: “giving thanks for [God], remembering [God]” and also asking for a “Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that [we] can know Him better.” Ephesians 1:16-17 (NIV). This is the essence of prayer, and the subject of the sermon series.

### KEY POINTS

- 1) **We have an instinctual desire for prayer.** No matter the time, place, or culture, people around the world feel a deep-seated need to converse with the Almighty. That includes non-religious people, and it even includes atheists! We are built to desire a relationship with God.
- 2) **Prayer should be a priority, but we let other things get in the way.** We create excuses for not praying on a consistent basis, which keeps us from developing an authentic relationship with God. Many of us also choose to view prayer in selfish ways, rather than focusing on God. We may see it as a way to reduce stress, or to use it as a “slot machine” where God exists only to answer our requests for material things. Finally, we can turn away from prayer because we tell ourselves that it doesn’t work, or that there are no guarantees of God saying yes.
- 3) **Christian prayer is different than any other form.** Let’s take a step back. Prayer is not about us. In fact, prayer only works when we focus on God and deepening our relationship with Him. That is the goal!
  - a. God is always the “other” in our prayers. Many traditions and newer spiritual practices talk about merging or “becoming one with” God. This is a mistake! We are created in God’s image, but we cannot become Him. Our goal is *intimacy* with God through Jesus. [I Corinthians 8:6 (NLT)]
  - b. Prayer includes silence. Silence is hard, especially in our modern hyper-connected world. But these periods of silence are the opportunity for God to answer us! Sometimes we have to wait upon the Lord and listen for his voice.
  - c. Prayer also leans toward emotions and words. Life is full of traumas, and we must be able to turn to God in our moments of despair and doubt. To fully embrace Him, we must be aware of how blessed we truly are. Many people rely on a “Thanksgiving list”, a collection of stories describing times when God was present in our lives. We can make it through tough times by reflecting on His goodness. [Hebrews 5:7 (NLT)] Eventually we learn to praise Him, even while we grieve.
  - d. Prayer is conversational, and first word belongs to God. Don’t wait to begin to speak with God. He already started talking. That’s the Bible! Read the scriptures, come to know Him, and learn to recognize the times when you hear His “still, small voice” trying to guide you.

### DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** Paul says the purpose of prayer is to come to know God better. Is this what I think about prayer? Or do I focus more on my own needs and whether God is giving me what I ask for?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** The devil will always try to keep us from God. Sometimes these are huge roadblocks. Other times they are tiny distractions. What gets in your way when you try to pray?
- 3) **DO** This sermon laid the foundation for a richer prayer life. We are each being prepared for an encounter with God, leading to a relationship where we come to understand Him more deeply. But let’s start small. Pick a place where you will pray, and set aside a time when you will pray. Write them down and tell others.