



DEAN WELCH – TEACHER

Why Pray?

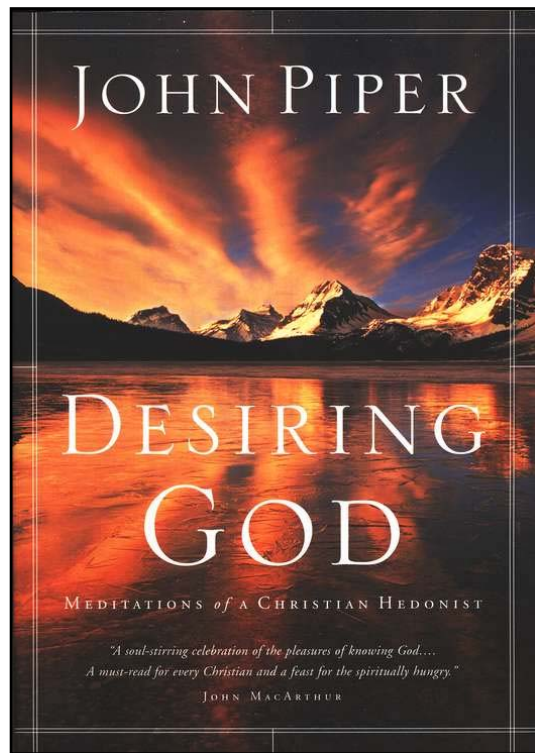
JOHN 14:13

JOHN 16:24

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

MAY 9, 2010

LESSON #6 FROM THE **MASTERWORK** SERIES STUDY OF:



Why Pray?



Why pray? Do you pray every day? More than once a day? For what or whom do you generally pray? Tough questions, aren't they? Most of us have struggled at times with our prayer life and sometimes wonder just what to say. *A woman invited some people to dinner. At the table, she turned to her six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing, Mary?" "I don't know what to say," the little girl replied. "Just say what you hear Mommy say," the woman said. The daughter bowed her head and said, "Dear Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?"*

Today we wrap up Week Six of our nine-week study from Dr. John Piper's book, *Desiring God*, and this week we focused on praying and delighting in God through our prayers. I want to remind you again of our memory verse for this series from **PSALM 37:4 (NIV)**: *"Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."* I pray that you have done that this week and that this series has helped you in accomplishing that day in and day out more regularly. As we've done each week, let's begin with a couple of questions about delighting in and finding joy in the LORD. **Would someone share a moment when you found JOY in God this week—true delight?** Now, let's reverse it: **What is the one thing that KEPT YOU FROM joy in God this week?**

Max Lucado, in his book *He Still Moves Stones*, tells this story about prayer: *The husband came home cranky because a deadline got moved up. The wife came home grumpy because the day care forgot to give their five-year-old her throat medicine. Each of them wanted a little sympathy from the other, but neither got any. So there they sat at the dinner table—cranky and grumpy—with little Emily. Emily folds her hands to pray (as she has been taught), and the two adults bow their heads (but not their hearts) and listen. From where this prayer comes, God only knows. "God, it's Emily."*

How are you? I'm fine, thank you. Mom and Dad are mad. I don't know why. We've got birds and toys and mash potatoes and each other. Maybe you can get them to stop being mad? Please do, or it's just gonna be you and me having any fun tonight. Amen." The prayer is answered before it's finished; both parents up in the middle and laugh at the end and shake your heads and say they're sorry. And they both thank God for the little voice who reminded them about what matters.

Look at the title of today's lesson on the board again. (*Why Pray?*) As you think about that, I want you to watch this short video clip. Some of you may see prayer simply as an open door to God. Others may value it as a conversation with Him. While both are true, it is also much more. This video is a collection of quotes from some of the most respected heroes of our faith and should inspire and challenge each of us as believers on the full nature of prayer—our most essential discipline. As you think about this lesson, see if any of these quotes strike you and then let's talk about them.

PLAY VIDEO CLIP [HTTP://WWW.SERMONSPICE.COM/PRODUCT/32295/PRAYER-INSPIRATION](http://www.sermonspice.com/product/32295/prayer-inspiration)

OK, did any of the quotes strike you for any particular reason? What about the one by Abraham Lincoln: *"I have been driven ... to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go."* WOW!

Now, back to my initial question: **WHY PRAY?** What's the answer after spending a week digging through Scripture on this? Let's look at a few scriptures to reinforce what God tells us about prayer. Turn to **1 THESSALONIANS 5:17** and someone read that I-o-n-g verse: *"Pray continually."* Now, listen to the words of **HEBREWS 13:15** as I read: *"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise."* How is it possible to pray continually? [**BECAUSE PRAYER IS A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, IT CAN BE CONTINUAL.**]

Do we pray to God to **get** something from God or to **give** something to Him? As you think about that, look at Page 124

and tell me what you think about the statement in the opening paragraph of Day Three: **“We do not glorify God by providing His needs, but by praying that He would provide ours—and trusting Him to answer.”** [TO BE SURE, WE ARE CALLED SERVANTS—AND THAT NO DOUBT MEANS WE ARE TO DO EXACTLY AS WE ARE TOLD. BUT THE WONDER OF THIS PICTURE IS THAT THE “MASTER” INSISTS ON “SERVING.”]

It’s all about delighting in God so we can glorify Him. As John Piper pointed out this week in our study, the pursuit of our joy and the pursuit of God’s glory are meant to be one and the same thing. This is clearly evidenced by the teaching of Jesus on prayer in the gospel of John, so let’s look at the two key passages we studied this week.

First, turn to **JOHN 14:13 (ESV)** and hear what Jesus says to His disciples and to us: *“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”* And now, turn over a couple of chapters to **JOHN 16:24 (ESV)** and follow along: *“Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”*

According to these two verses prayer is the pursuit of God’s glory and at the same time prayer is the pursuit of our joy. The unity of these two goals—the glory of God and the joy of His children—is clearly preserved in the act of *prayer*. I hope you could visualize the concept better when John Piper pointed out in our lesson, *“just as the thirsty deer kneels down to drink at the brook (Ps 41:1), so the characteristic posture of the Christian ... is on his knees.”* Is that a picture of you each day? Do you begin and end your day on your knees? Watch this music video by Jaci Velasquez and follow along with the words I handed out about the importance of getting on our knees. [PLAY VIDEO OF JACI VELASQUEZ SINGING ON MY KNEES – HAND OUT LYRICS TO SONG.]

Now, let’s turn to **JOHN 15:5 (NLT)** and follow along as I read some very familiar words of Christ: *“Yes, I am the vine; you are*

the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."

True or False: We can accomplish very little of lasting spiritual value unless we abide in Christ. False. We can accomplish **nothing** of true lasting spiritual value unless we abide in Christ. It is not that we would be slightly more effective if we abide in Him. The text says without Him we can accomplish **nothing**.

Without Christ we are capable of no good thing (Rom. 7:18). But as we just read in John 15:5, God wills that we bear fruit — that we love people into the kingdom—so he promises to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. And, in turn, we glorify him. Look at what Jesus says in **JOHN 15: 7 (ESV)**, "*If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you.*" We pray. We ask God to do for us through Christ what we can't do for ourselves—to make us bear fruit. Then **verse 8** gives the result we're after: "*By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit.*"

How is God glorified by prayer? **Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the turning away from ourselves to God in the confidence that he will provide the help we need. Prayer humbles us as needy and exalts God as wealthy.**

Look again at **verse 7** of **JOHN 15** and tell me what exactly does it mean to "*abide in Christ?*" [LIFE APPLICATION COMMENTARY-JOHN: MANY PEOPLE TRY TO BE GOOD, HONEST PEOPLE WHO DO WHAT IS RIGHT. BUT JESUS SAYS THAT THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE A TRULY GOOD LIFE IS TO STAY CLOSE TO HIM, LIKE A BRANCH ATTACHED TO A VINE. APART FROM CHRIST OUR EFFORTS ARE UNFRUITFUL.]

Do you believe that prayer gets results? Let me personalize this a little more. Do your prayers get results? Can you look at your prayer life, and see God at work answering your prayers? If you can't look back on your prayer life, and see direct answers to prayer, it could be that you are not praying to get results. Many

people pray, but it's just a ritual—a routine! Remember that Jesus condemned the Pharisees for vain repetitious prayers. When we pray, why are we praying? Are we simply just throwing up words? Or are we praying for results? If I ever doubt that God hears and responds to my prayers, I pull out my prayer journal. Do you do that? Do you know how to pray with power? Do you really expect God to answer and give clear guidance to you as you pray? Or do you just go through the motions?

Did you hear the story of the little boy who had a tough day at school and his mother overheard him praying this: *“Please God, make Boulder the capital of Colorado.”* When he said *“Amen”*, his mother walked in and asked *“Why did you ask that?”* *“Because that’s what I put down on my test today.”*

There’s a great and powerful verse that we’ve used as a memory verse on many occasions that is applicable here. Turn to **PSALM 50:15 (NLT)** and listen to what the psalmist tells us: *“Then call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory.”* Based on this passage, why does God deliver us? Why does God answer prayer? What is the ultimate result? [**AND YOU WILL GIVE ME GLORY**]. When He delivers us, we should praise Him; and as He is sure to do it, let us begin to glorify Him immediately.

Not only are we to enjoy and glorify God forever, but the other part of this is the pursuit of our own joy and delight. It almost sounds wrong—but as you’ve learned throughout this study by Piper, the pursuit of joy in Him, and Him alone, is what He desires. Listen again to Jesus’ words from **JOHN 16:24** about this: *“Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”* So, in order to pursue the fullness of your joy, PRAY! From this principle of John Piper, can we conclude for Christians that **prayerlessness always produces joylessness**? Why? Why is it that a deep life of prayer leads to fullness of joy and a shallow life of prayerlessness produces joylessness?

Listen to what Billy Graham says is the true meaning of prayer: "Prayer is a simple two-way conversation between you and God. It is not the body's posture but the heart's attitude that counts when we pray. Prayer is not our using of God; it is more often putting us in a position where God can use us."

Think back about what we just read in **JOHN 15: 5** about abiding in Him — that no Christian can have fullness of joy without a vital fellowship and relationship with Jesus Christ. Knowledge about him will not do and work for him will not do. We must have a personal, vital fellowship with him; otherwise Christianity becomes a joyless burden. Fellowship with Jesus shared with others is essential to fullness of joy.

The first reason then why prayer leads to fullness of joy is that prayer is at the heart of our fellowship with Jesus. He is not here physically for us to see. But in prayer, we speak to him just as though he were here. The other reason prayer produces fullness of joy is that prayer provides the power to do what we love to do, but can't do without God's help. The passage says, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." Fellowship with Jesus is essential to joy but there is something about it that drives us to share his life with others. A Christian can't be happy and stingy, because it is more blessed to give than to receive. Therefore, the second reason a life of prayer leads to fullness of joy is that it gives us the power to love. As John Piper says, "*If the pump of love runs dry it is because the pipe of prayer isn't deep enough.*"

His name was Victor, but he felt like a loser. He didn't do very well in school a when he was 16 years old, a teacher advised him to drop out of high school and get a job. He didn't do much better in the working world so that, by the time he was 32, he had failed at 76 different jobs. But applying for job number 77 was to change Victor's life. As a part of the interview process, he was required to take an I.Q. test - a test designed to measure his intelligence. A score of 100 was considered to be normal. Victor scored 161. He

had never before realized it, but Victor was a genius. The knowledge of that fact was transforming in his life. Victor Serienko went on to become famous for his research in laser surgery and to become president of MENSA, an organization for geniuses - all because a test said that he was special.

God has said some tremendous things about YOU in His Word including that we are to stay connected to Him through prayer—our power source! Remember the verse we read earlier from **1 Thessalonians 5:17**, *“pray continually.”* The Bible plainly teaches that the goal of all we do should be to glorify God. But it also teaches that in all we do we should pursue the fullness of our joy. What we have seen from John's gospel is that prayer, perhaps more clearly than anything else, embodies the unity of these two pursuits. Prayer pursues joy in fellowship with Jesus and in the power to share his life with others. And prayer pursues God's glory by treating him as the reservoir of hope. In prayer we admit our poverty and God's prosperity, our bankruptcy and his bounty, our misery and his mercy. Therefore, prayer highly exalts and glorifies God precisely by pursuing everything we long for in him and not in ourselves. “Ask and you will receive, that the Father may be glorified in the Son and that your joy may be full.”

Prayer does make a difference when you apply God's promises to it. But you must have FAITH and be diligent and not give up. I love the words of Paul in **Philippians 4:6-7**: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God, and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”*

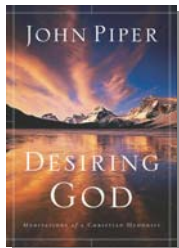
I hope that through your prayers you are delighting in the LORD and as a result have an overwhelming peace and joy that God promises. May I encourage you to take your notes from this week and begin to practice a time of daily prayer? But set up a plan—or you won't find the time to devote to your relationship with God.

Someone once said that if you fail to plan, then you have simply planned to fail.

I overheard an interesting conversation recently at a health club that goes to the heart of this issue about the lengths some men go to for planning what's important. You know there is always a muscle-bound attendant present at these places. I heard someone ask him, 'How much time do you spend working out?' He quickly answered, '5 hours a day'. I have a daily plan and stick to it. Wow, I thought! What people will do for physical life and not for the spiritual life. What they will do for time and not for eternity. And the old devil just loves it.

Please set up a prayer schedule today. God wants to hear from you so He can be glorified and so you can be filled with His joy. I close with our memory verse today from **JOHN 15: 7 (NLT)** which is a powerful reminder that God is ready to hear and answer our prayers: *"But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask anything you want, and it will be granted."*

Let's Pray.

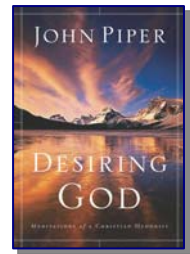


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1. Some of you may see prayer simply as an _____ to God. Others may value it as a _____ with Him. While both are true, it is also MUCH MORE..
2. Because prayer is a _____ with God, it can be _____.
3. According to John 15:5, we can accomplish _____ of true lasting spiritual value unless we abide in Christ. It is not that we would be slightly more effective if we abide in Him. The text says without Him we can accomplish _____.
4. **JOHN 15: 7 (ESV)**, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, _____ whatever you will and it shall be _____ for you."
5. **PSALM 50:15 (NLT)** says: "*Then call on me when you are in trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will _____.*"
6. _____ Him will not do and _____ Him will not do. We must have a personal, vital fellowship with Him; otherwise Christianity becomes a joyless burden.
7. **PHILIPPIANS 4: 6-7** says, "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by _____ and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God, and the _____ of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*"

"But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask anything you want, and it will be granted." (John 15:7 NLT)