

Why is Prayer So Important?

Luke 6:1-19

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In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles - Luke 6:12-13, ESV

Does it surprise you that Jesus was such a man of prayer? Or does it surprise you that I'm even asking that question? Think about it: Jesus was fully God. He and His Father are one, so why did He need to pray so much? Why labor all night in prayer? Why seek to be alone to pray so often? If we understand why Jesus needed to pray, it can help us understand why we need to pray, too.

Jesus is fully God but He is also fully man - true God and true man, two distinct natures in one person forever. In His humanity, Jesus was and is our Christ, the Anointed One. He was and is our covenant head, our representative, our prophet, priest and king. In His baptism, He was anointed by the Holy Spirit and He was sustained by the Spirit in the desert wilderness, where He fasted for forty days and was tempted by Satan.

In other words, Jesus didn't get off easy in life just because He is God. He faced the same temptations, trials and hardships that we do. Here's how Hebrews 2 puts it:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Heb, 2:14-18, ESV - emphasis added)

So, why did Jesus pray? Because He needed strength in the face of temptation, wisdom in the face of decision, help in the face of opposition, encouragement in the face of suffering and discouragement, resolve in the face of trial, etc. In short, He needed communion with His Heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit, just like we do.

Strength in the Face of Temptation: When we face temptation, we need to pray. Jesus told His disciples to "watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation." (Matt. 26:41 & Mark 14:38) When Jesus faced temptation in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry and in the garden at the end of His ministry, He prayed.

Wisdom in the Face of Decision: In today's passage, we see that Jesus spent all night in prayer before He chose the twelve apostles. He needed wisdom and God tells us that if anyone lacks wisdom, he should ask of God, who gives generously to all without reproach (James 1:5). But we need to be forewarned: Sometimes we ask the Lord for wisdom in decision-making because we think that will guarantee that we make "the right choice," which usually means an easy path or a fruitful ministry, etc. Jesus prayed all night and then chose Judas Iscariot, a thief and a traitor, as one of the twelve. He didn't make a mistake, though the world would probably say He did. God was in control.

Help in the Face of Opposition: Jesus faced great opposition at the cross. Satan and death sought to end Him. He sought the Lord in prayer in the face of such opposition. Hebrews 5:7 says "In the days of his flesh,

Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence."

Encouragement in the Face of Suffering: Jesus' prayer at the tomb of Lazarus comes to mind here. Jesus wept at the death of His friend and at the grief of Mary and Martha. He prayed, seeking God's favor, and He did so out loud, that those who were suffering might believe and be strengthened and saved.

Resolve in the Face of Trial: Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane right before He was betrayed by Judas: "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done (Matt. 26:39)." This is a wonderful model of prayer in the face of trial. When resolve weakens, we can pray honestly and then submit ourselves to our Father's will.

If Jesus needed to pray at all these times and in all these ways, how much more should we? And we can do so knowing that our Great High Priest ever lives to make intercession for us, and He understands our needs personally.