

A lone tree stands on a grassy hill under a dramatic, orange and yellow sunset sky. The scene is dark and atmospheric, with the sun low on the horizon behind the tree.

The power of prayer

**Why
Pray?**

Video from scene out
of Fiddler on the
Roof.

[https://youtu.be/RBH
ZFYpQ6nc](https://youtu.be/RBH
ZFYpQ6nc)

- Many people approach prayer like Tevye in “Fiddler on the Roof.” He kept a running dialogue with God (a sort of lament). He credited God for good things and lamented things that went wrong or that he wished were different.
- In a well known lament, Tevye is feeding his horse, looking up at God saying, “You made many, many poor people. I realize, of course, it’s no shame to be poor. But it’s no great honor either. Ahh, so what would have been so terrible if I had a small fortune?”
- Then he launches into the song, “*If I Were a Rich Man.*” At one moment in the song he sings, “Lord who made even lion and the lamb, You decreed I should be what I am. Would it spoil some vast eternal plan if I were a wealthy man?!”
- In another scene, Tevye sits dejected by the side of the road with his lame horse and says to God, “I can understand it when you punish me when I am bad; or my wife when she talks too much; or my daughter when she wants to go off and marry a Gentile, but... What have you got against *my horse?!*”
- Many, like Tevye, approach prayer as a dialogue of lament which engages God in every activity of life, tracing His hand in the good and bad. The language of lament is not strange to the Bible. The Psalms include passages that are angry, whiny, petty, remorseful, almost what we would think of as irreverent.

- But is God really punishing talkative wives and responsible for lame horses?
- According to Jesus, if the birds are fed, it is the Father who feeds them; if the flowers grow, it is God who grows them. Jesus said, “not one sparrow will fall to the ground apart from your Father” (Matthew 10:29). Scripture invites us to cast our cares on God because He cares for us. Certainly a Christian cannot go off singing, “Que sera, sera – whatever will be, will be.” We recognize and honor God’s sovereignty. “The Lord does whatever pleases Him in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.” Psalms 135:6
- But is God really punishing talkative wives and horses? Does He help golfers who are teeing off? Does he distribute Sunny days for picnics and weddings? How should we view God’s involvement and how should it shape and guide our approach to prayer?
- God is not our spiritual GPS system telling us, “right turn ahead in one mile.” Maybe Tevye has it wrong when approaching prayer as a running dialogue.
- Yet surely God’s knowledge and care for us is deeply personal. With the psalmist, we can say to God, “your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:16).
- I am not trying to de-personalize God, but I am concerned that God has made a lot known to us that we are not consulting in how we understand who His is and how He works in the world.

There are different kinds of prayers

Five types of prayers

1. Adoration: Praising God.
2. Contrition: Asking for God's forgiveness.
3. Lament – Expressing grief to God
4. Petition: Asking God for something
5. Thanksgiving: Giving thanks

What use is it to pray?

- **Job 21:15** - “Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him? What would be gained by praying to Him?”
- **The man who said**, “I tried prayer and it doesn’t work.” Which means: “God didn’t do what I ask Him to do.”

Misapplied promises on prayer

- **John 14:13** – “I will do whatever you ask in my name...”
- **John 15:7** – “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”
- **Luke 11:10** – “For everyone who asks receives; those who seek find; and to those who knock, the door will be opened.”
- **Mark 11:23-24** – “I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Why pray since God is sovereign?

- **Psalms 135:6** - “The Lord does whatever pleases Him in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.”
- **Isaiah 46:9-11** - “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’ ... What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do.”

How could James 5:16 be true?

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

Three areas where teaching is needed

1. How people hear from God: revelation
 2. How people talk to God: prayer
 3. How people talk about God: testimony
- All three are closely related and based on our understanding of who God is and how God has chosen to work in the world and in our lives.

Remember that...

- “God formed an alliance based on the world as it is, full of flaws, whereas prayer calls God to account for the world as it should be.” (The “whys” and “how longs” of prayer do this). (Yancey)
- I prefer to say that prayer sometimes groans and laments the reality of a fallen world because God’s Spirit in us testifies to things as they were meant to be and ultimately will be.

Why Pray?

“If prayer is
the place where
God and man meet,
I must learn
about prayer.”
(Philip *Yancey*)

Ten Reasons

Because we have a

1. Mediator

- **1 Timothy 2:1-6** – “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.”

2. Advocate

- **1 John 2:1-2** – “But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

3. Intercessor

- **Hebrews 7:25** – “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” (cf. 10:19-22)
- **Romans 8:33-34** – “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”

4. Divine Invitation

- **Hebrews 4:14-16** – “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

5. Jesus practiced prayer

- **Mark 1:35** – “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”
- **Luke 6:12-13** - “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles”

6. Jesus commanded us to pray

- **Luke 18:1** – “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”
- **Matthew 6:9** – “This, then, is how you should pray....”
- **1 Thessalonians 5:17** – “pray continually,”
- **James 5:13** - Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray.

7. Realignment of everything

“Prayer has become for me much more than a shopping list of requests to present to God. It has become a realignment of everything.”

“I pray to restore the truth of the universe, to gain a glimpse of the world, and of me, through the eyes of God.”

“In prayer, I shift my point of view away from my own selfishness. I climb above the timberline and look down at the speck that is myself. I gaze at the stars and recall what role I, or any of us, play in a universe beyond comprehension.”

“Prayer is the act of seeing reality from God’s point of view.” (Philipp Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?*)

8. The glory of God - Jesus connected the glory of God and answered prayer.

- **John 14:13** – “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”
- **Ephesians 3:20-21** – “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably *more than all we ask or imagine*, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

9. Restoration of my soul

- **Psalm 62:8** - “Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.”
- **Philippians 4:6-7** – “ 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.

10. Participation in God's work

- **Colossians 4:12** - “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”
- **James 5:16** – “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” (cf. 1 Peter 3:12)

- **John 15:7-8** - “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Why Pray?

Because of....

- God's honor
- God's kingdom and will
- God's provision
- God's Pardon
- God's protection

- **Psalm 37:4** - Take delight in the Lord (His honor, kingdom and will), and he will give you the desires of your heart.

The winter of our discontent at our experience of prayer

“As young Christians, enthusiastic about our newfound faith, we burble before the Lord about our lives in the way in which young children burble to their parents about all the things they see going on around them. But later we become less certain that such burbling alone is the essence of prayer. As children growing in their relationship with their parents cannot happily revert to baby ways of communication, so we reach out for a more mature and reverent prayer style, and we become less and less happy about the way we actually pray.”

“We feel we are trudging along in a marsh, getting muddy and messed up while going nowhere. We make requests to God and then we wonder whether they made any difference. We ask ourselves, *Is God answering my prayers? If not, why not? If he is, how is he doing it, because what's happening isn't quite what I asked for? Did I ask wrongly then?* The winter of our discontent at our experience of prayer seems to go on forever.” (“Praying: Finding Our Way Through Duty to Delight,” J. I. Packer)