

Means of Grace, Lesson #11 - Prayer
Westminster Larger Catechism Questions 178-186

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Q. 88. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption? The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

- “Means” is the method which gets us our intended result.
- “benefits of redemption” include: assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

Westminster Larger Catechism

Q. 178. What is prayer? Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of his Spirit; with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.

Question 178 in many ways summarizes what the following 8 or so questions explain in further detail

- We pray to God the Father, in the name of Christ
- Prayer includes several aspects:
 1. Offering up our desires
 2. Confessing our sins
 3. Thankfully acknowledging God for his mercies
- The Holy Spirit will help us pray.

Q. 179. Are we to pray unto God only? God only being able to search the hearts, hear the requests, pardon the sins, and fulfill the desires of all; and only to be believed in, and worshiped with religious worship; prayer, which is a special part thereof, is to be made by all to him alone, and to none other.

Q. 180. What is it to pray in the name of Christ? To pray in the name of Christ is, in obedience to his command, and in confidence on his promises, to ask mercy for his sake; not by bare mentioning of his name, but by drawing our encouragement to pray, and our boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and his mediation.

Q. 181. Why are we to pray in the name of Christ? The sinfulness of man, and his distance from God by reason thereof, being so great, as that we can have no access into his presence without a mediator; and there being none in heaven or earth appointed to, or fit for, that glorious work but Christ alone, we are to pray in no other name but his only.

Heb 7:25-25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens;

Q. 182. How doth the Spirit help us to pray? We not knowing what to pray for as we ought, the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, by enabling us to understand both for whom, and what, and how prayer is to be made; and by working and quickening in our hearts (although not in all persons, nor at all times, in the same measure) those apprehensions, affections, and graces which are requisite for the right performance of that duty.

- Two struggles we face when coming to God in prayer:
 1. We don’t know what to pray for
 2. We don’t have the right attitude of prayer

Q. 183. For whom are we to pray? We are to pray for the whole church of Christ upon earth; for magistrates, and ministers; for ourselves, our brethren, yea, our enemies; and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead, nor for those that are known to have sinned the sin unto death.

Q. 184. For what things are we to pray? We are to pray for all things tending to the glory of God, the welfare of the church, our own or others' good; but not for anything that is unlawful.

1 John 5:14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

Q. 185. How are we to pray? We are to pray with an awful apprehension of the majesty of God, and deep sense of our own unworthiness, necessities, and sins; with penitent, thankful, and enlarged hearts; with understanding, faith, sincerity, fervency, love, and perseverance, waiting upon him, with humble submission to his will.

Q. 186. What rule hath God given for our direction in the duty of prayer? The whole Word of God is of use to direct us in the duty of prayer; but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which our Savior Christ taught his disciples, commonly called The Lord's prayer.

Practical helps in prayer

Three obstacles Christians face regarding prayer

- I don't have time to pray
 1. Schedule your prayer time
 2. Consistency more important than length of prayers
 3. Don't focus on eloquence or intricacy of prayers , focus on WLC 185
- I don't know how to pray
 1. Pray A.C.T.S. acronym
 - Adoration
 - Confession
 - Thanksgiving
 - Supplication
- I don't know what to pray for
 1. Make a list
 2. Use note cards, notebook, phone app
 3. Schedule prayers from list

"I think we might be able to see that the attitude into which the act of prayer brings the soul is one which especially softens the soul and lays it open to gracious influences...In its very nature, prayer is a confession of weakness, a confession of need, of dependence, a cry for help, a reaching out for something stronger, better, more stable and trustworthy than ourselves...Prayer is a means of grace because it is a direct appeal to God for grace. It is in its very innermost core a petition for help and that is—proportionately to its sphere—for grace. The means—the most direct and appropriate, the most prevailing and sure means of obtaining aid from a superior, is to ask for it." - B.B. Warfield