

WHY BAPTISTS BELIEVE WHAT BAPTISTS BELIEVE, PART 22

THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

So why do we pray? When do we pray? *[Question 4]* Which of the following is NOT a reason to pray? ALL the reasons listed are legitimate. So, **don't check any of them**. Let's look at each one...

To overcome temptation. In Mark 14:38 Jesus told His closest disciples Peter, James and John, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

To get through tough times. We need His strength, don't we?

For wisdom in making decisions.

To change our attitude toward someone or something.

To ask for physical healing. Our class has a prayer list and over half of the requests are for health-related issues.

To ask for protection.

To worship God. Do you ever pray, "God, help me to worship You"?

To clear up confusion. First Corinthians 14:33 (KJV) says that "God is not the author of confusion..."

To overcome worry; to conquer our fear or doubt. The Covid-19 experience that we went through back in 2020 and 2021 created a whole lot of fear in our society.

To keep from becoming discouraged; to keep from becoming angry; for seeking the right words to say to someone; to intercede on behalf of other people. You don't have to have a reason to pray!

The Bible tells us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:16). In other words, remain in a constant attitude of prayer.

When I taught this class there was discussion about, “Are there some things we should NOT pray about? No, you can pray about ANYTHING, yes even your own personal desires. But you must be honest and you need to have the right attitude and proper motives as you approach the LORD.

Let’s look now at Acts Chapter 4, a case study about prayer. The believers in the Jerusalem church are praying. This is their prayer: “For truly in this city [Jerusalem] there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place. And now, LORD, look upon their threats and grant to Your servants to continue to speak Your word with all boldness, while You stretch out Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of Your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:27-30). They recognize that God is using them as part of His plan.

[Question 5] In verses 27-28 the apostles prayed to the Lord about a problem that they faced. What was the problem?

External opposition. “Look upon their threats...” The religious leaders in Jerusalem opposed their preaching and threatened them if they didn’t stop.

[Question 6] In verses 29-30 the apostles asked the Lord for what? Not to remove the problem, but they asked to be able to **speak confidently**. They said, “grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.” It is interesting that didn’t pray for the problem to be removed.

[Question 7] In verse 31 it says, “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the

word of God with boldness.” So then, what was the end result of the apostles’ prayer? **They spoke boldly**. Their prayer was answered. They knew that it was God’s will that they preach. That was the Great Commission. They also knew from what Jesus had told them before He left that they were going to be persecuted. So, given those two facts, they prayed for the power to do His will. And that is what God did.

I don’t want anyone to get the idea that when we pray, even if all the conditions we talked about are met, that we will always receive the answer we want all the time. Paul is a classic example of this in the next case study.

Paul says, “So, to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). That is quite a prayer.

[Question 8] In this passage Paul prayed for what to be removed? What he called “a thorn in the flesh.” The truth is we are just **not certain** what this was. There are all kinds of speculation about it. I suppose it could possibly have been an enemy of Paul’s, or it could have been a physical affliction such as migraine headaches, epilepsy or eye trouble. It really isn’t that important or Paul would have told us. The important thing is that God knew what it was.

[Question 9] What was God’s answer to Paul’s prayer? **No**. Why was this? Was it because God is mean or that He was

punishing Paul? No. God was teaching Paul something very important – to depend on Him and to recognize his source of power and strength. I also believe that Paul was a person who battled with pride and that this “thorn in the flesh” was a means of God keeping him humble.

[Question 10] What was Paul’s response to God’s “NO” answer? Did he get mad or resentful toward God? Did he stop going to church because God didn’t bless him like he thought he deserved? Not hardly. Not Paul. In Philippians 4:11 Paul says, “I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” Paul’s response was **contentment**. Knowing that we are in God’s will and that He is working His will out in our life, using us for His greater glory is an awesome place to be, no matter the circumstances. Sometimes the circumstances can be really bad. Things are not always going to go our way!

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

Jesus is teaching His disciples how to pray and He says, “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name’” (Matthew 6:9).

[Question 11] To whom do we pray? To **God the Father**. Sometimes you will hear people begin their prayer, “Father” or “Lord.” Hold that thought and let’s look at another passage.

Here Jesus is speaking, answering Thomas, who is one of His disciples... “Jesus said to him [Thomas], ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).

[Question 12] Through whom do we pray? Through **Jesus**. So then, we pray to the Father and through Jesus. Look at the next passage from Ephesians.

“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...” (Ephesians 6:18)

[Question 13] In whom do we pray? In **the Holy Spirit**. So then, it is sound theology to say that when we pray, we pray TO THE FATHER, THROUGH THE SON, and IN THE HOLY SPIRIT.” The whole Trinity, the entire God-head is involved in our prayer lives.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God”
(Philippians 4:6).

[Question 14] So just fill in the blanks. “Do not be anxious about **anything**, but in **everything** by **prayer** and supplication (petition) with **thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to **God.**”

Anxiety (worry) is a sin because it indicates a lack of trust in God. Notice here in this verse that as we petition God. And we do it with an attitude of gratitude (with thanksgiving). We thank Him in advance for the fact that we know He will answer our prayer, EVEN IF it may not be the answer that we personally want. Jesus prayed in the garden just before He went to the cross: “Not as I will, but YOUR will be done...” (Matthew 26:39). That’s the way our prayer should be.

The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is “a great high priest” (Hebrews 4:14). That is why when we Baptists pray, we do not go through a human priest. We believe that Jesus is our priest, the “one mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5) – not an earthly priest, but Jesus. We go directly to Jesus.

[Question 15] So then, Jesus is our great high priest. What are His qualifications?

“Casting all your anxieties on Him [Jesus], because He cares for you”

(1 Peter 5:7). One of the qualifications of Jesus as our high priest is that He **Cares** for us.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). The qualification Jesus has from this passage is that He **Sympathizes** with us. In other words, Jesus has been in our shoes and He understands exactly how we feel.

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Another reason why Jesus is qualified to be our high priest is that He gives us **Mercy** and **Grace** abundantly.

“And being made perfect, He [Jesus] became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9). So, another of His qualifications for being our high priest is that He is the only source of our eternal **Salvation**.

“We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). His qualification is that He **Loves** us with a perfect love. His love for us is what allows us to love in return. The whole reason we can love in the first place is because HE LOVES. If He didn't love, we couldn't love.

“But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). We were dirty, rotten sinners who didn't care about God, going our own way, doing our own thing, not even giving God a thought, living life the way we wanted to, ignoring Him and what did He do in response? He died for us! So, another reason why He is qualified to be our high priest is that He **Died** for us. No human priest has those qualifications. Jesus took our place on the cross. That's where we should have gone but He died in our place.