

## The Relationship of Prayer

By Nathan Warner

*“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to **PRAY** for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”*

(Romans 8:26)

Proseuxōmetha - “I pray, pray for (Gr. properly, to exchange wishes; *pray* – literally, to *interact with the Lord by switching human wishes (ideas) for His wishes as He imparts faith (‘divine persuasion’)*”).”

– Helps Word Studies

Like Hannah, have you been “*deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly*” (1 Samuel 1:10)? And like her, have you also “*prayed and said, ‘My heart exults in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation’*” (1 Samuel 2:1)? In distress and tears, in exultation and rejoicing, Hannah prayed.

Throughout Scripture, men and women reached out to God in prayer to petition, thank, question, praise, demand, repent, complain, rejoice, despair, and revive. How can one word describe so many different things? What is this thing called prayer? Is it distressed requests, joyful rejoicing, thankfulness, or petitions? Well, yes and no. Yes, because prayer does often involve all these things, but no because this is not what prayer is in its essence—in its heart.

Prayer for the Believer is the act of “relating” in a deeply intimate relationship founded on love. The word “relate” comes from a Latin root meaning “brought back.” In our intimate human relationships, we need to be continually brought back to one another in love for the relationship to be anything but a formality, convention, or farce. No one feels intimate with a person who isn’t relating to them in love. Even though they go through the motions, we feel used, tolerated, or even abused, because we know it isn’t initiated in love.

### PRAYER – A SON IN FELLOWSHIP WITH HIS FATHER

If prayer is relating to someone in an intimate relationship created by love, who is this “someone”? Well, firstly, prayer in Scripture is often initiated as a child relating to a father—in the case of the Believer, God the Father is a Father to His Son Jesus and Jesus’ “*many brothers*” (Romans 8:29b), who have received “*adoption as sons*” (Romans 8:15b) to become “*children of God*” (Romans 8:16b). Thus, when we pray, we should imitate our “older” brother Jesus when “*He fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’*” (Matt-hew 26:39). We see here the quintessential essence behind the meaning of the Greek word “prayer.” Jesus, the Son of God, shared His desire with His Father, but instead of a petition, He shared it in exchange for His Father’s desire, for He knew that regardless of the short-term difficulties resulting from not having His desire, the eventual outcome would be the best possible thing that could ever happen. How did He know? Jesus knew the will of the Father was only ever GOOD, because He KNEW His Father intimately. “*O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me*” (John 17:25).

It seems obvious that if you boiled your relationship with your earthly father down to petitions, for example, you wouldn’t have much of a relationship, would you? It would be like

the proverbial son who only ever calls up his dad on the phone to ask for more money or to get bailed out of jail. He never calls his dad for any other reason than to ask for what he thinks he wants and needs in his life. Upon reflection, most fathers would feel manipulated or taken advantage of, and they might even be justified to wonder if their son really cares about them. It would be perfectly understandable for them to wonder if perhaps their son only sees them as an expedient means to get what he wants or to get out of some sort of trouble he's gotten himself into. We need to look no further than at how Jesus related to His Father to understand how we as adopted children need to relate in pray to our Heavenly Father. Consider that Jesus took great effort to make time every day to be alone with His Father in prayer, despite all the pressing needs and labor and work all around Him. He spent that time alone: *"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed"* (Mark 1:35).

The same spirit that communed between Jesus and His Father is in you—the Holy Spirit Himself, who dwells inside every Believer, is the Spirit of Christ: *"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"* (Galatians 4:6). This Spirit *"Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words"* (Romans 8:26b). What intimacy and what love!

#### PRAYER – A BRIDE IN FELLOWSHIP WITH HER HUSBAND

Secondly, prayer is also described as a bride relating in love to her betrothed. The Church is betrothed to the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is our spiritual husband, as Paul described: *"For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). What we pray, we pray to God, and Jesus also is God. Jesus tells His disciples, *"Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son"* (John 14:13). Therefore, we also pray to Him: *"To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours"* (1 Corinthians 1:2). *"For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance"* (Philippians 1:19). *"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church"* (Ephesians 5:29-32).

We should be prayerfully *"looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds"* (Titus 2:13-14), remembering that He promised us, *"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also"* (John 14:3). *"When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory"* (Colossians 3:4). May our prayer be John's prayer of desire and longing and hope, *"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus"* (Revelation 22:20b).

ALL PRAYER COMES BEFORE

## THE FATHER

Whether we pray to the Father or the Son, we are praying to God. Paul helped clear up any confusion by explaining that all our prayers (whether to Jesus, the Spirit, or the Father) are brought before the Father through Jesus by the Spirit, “*for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father*” (Eph-esians 2:18). “*For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hebrews 9:24). For “*Christ was faithful as a Son over His [God’s] house—whose house we are*” (Heb-rews 3:6a). As “*we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:14b-16).

## CONCLUSION

So, what have we learned about prayer? Prayer is intimate fellowship (communion, intimate familiarity) with God, for “*indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*” (1 John 1:3b). As such, prayer goes far beyond the tangible bureaucracies that require filling out forms correctly at the doctor’s office or filing your taxes—both of which require checking the right boxes and filling in all necessary steps to get a desired response. Just like you cannot boil down the intimate fellowship of marriage to calculated exchanges of petitions, praises, thanks, and requests to one another, we cannot turn prayer into a means to an end. That would be manipulative.

A healthy relationship of love goes far beyond the tangible as it is a profound “*mystery*” (Ephesians 5:32) created by God that can cause two people to become one. Through Jesus, by the Spirit, we have been made one, for “*he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him*” (1 Corinthians 6:17). Even so, Amen.