PRAYER

What's the point of prayer?
Prayer is about building a relationship. It is a conversation; a dialogue between you and God. We tend to approach prayer as a task list of things we want God to do, but that misses the point of what it is really about.

If you only talked to an individual when you wanted something from them, you would essentially be using that person for your own purposes. This type of prayer is not so much about a relationship with God, as much as it is viewing God as a resource to be tapped into and used when you need him, yet surprisingly, this is often how we tend to approach our prayer life with God. We spend the vast majority of our time giving him our list of all that we want him to do for us, then we say Amen and go about the rest of our day. This is not an effective way to approach any relationship, let alone our relationship with God.

Consider your best friend or any other person you spend a great deal of your leisure time talking with.
Why do you talk with that person and what does a typical conversation consist of?
- You talk to that person because you enjoy sharing the events of your life with that person and he listens with interest.
- You share the exciting times and they get excited with you.
- You share the bad times and he cries with you.
- You share your dreams and aspirations and he encourages you.
- You share some of the wrong decisions you’ve made and he rebukes you.
- At times you make requests of him and he eagerly helps you out.
- He is interested in your life and you are interested in his.
- You talk with him simply because you enjoy his presence and his company.

If God is in control and does whatever he deems best, does prayer actually change anything?

James 4:2 (NIV)
You do not have, because you do not ask God.

James’ bold statement is - prayer does change things!
By asking God for something, we actually get something we would not normally have received if we had kept quiet. Those who do not bring their hearts’ desires before God miss out on the blessings God wants to bestow upon them.

As we come to God in prayer we are affirming our relationship as well as seeking his will and direction in our lives. His purposes become our purposes and our prayers become expressions of what God has already placed on our hearts. To not pray is to rob ourselves of both the blessing of relationship and the changed life God wants to generate in us.
People who feel unworthy to ask God for anything are actually living independent of God, relying on themselves to make it through life. This is exactly opposite of what God desires for us. He wants us to bring every concern and desire before him and to rely on him for life.

What are some keys to effective prayers?

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NIV)
…if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Key: HUMBLE YOURSELF, SEEK GOD, REPENT

Mark 11:22-24 (NIV)
22“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. 23“I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. 24Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Key: FAITH IN GOD

John 14:13-14 (NIV)
13And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Key: ASK IN JESUS’ NAME, IT MUST GLORIFY GOD

Using Jesus’ name is not a secret formula that evokes a positive answer from God. When we ask for something in Jesus’ name it means that we are coming as a Representative of Jesus asking for that which will help accomplish Jesus’ purposes here on earth.

Everything Jesus accomplishes ultimately brings glory to the Father. This means we need to think carefully about what we are praying for. Does it advance the purposes of God, does it bring glory to God, or is it purely selfishly motivated?

Psalm 37:4 (NIV)
Delight yourself in the L ORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Key: ENJOY GOD
What are some things that might hinder your prayers from being answered?

Psalm 66:18 (NLT)
If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, my Lord would not have listened.

Hindrance: **SIN**

It only makes sense that if I am determined to live against God's holiness and go my own way, my prayers will not reflect a desire for God's purposes to be fulfilled, but will instead represent my own purposes and desires. Prayer is not so much about accomplishing things as it is about building intimacy with God, thus allowing him to fulfill his purposes through our lives and prayers. To come to God with requests apart from a submission to his will and Lordship, is to treat him like a Genie in a Bottle who grants our wishes, while we still maintain control.

Unfortunately, that is often how we live. We choose to live independently of God and his purposes and then, when we find ourselves in trouble, we send out an SOS, expecting him to respond immediately. We are then "god" and he is serving us. Fortunately, God does not respond to us under those conditions.

However, if we repent and turn back, reentering into a proper relationship with God, he will forgive us and he is especially eager to hear the concerns of his children.

James 4:3 (NLT)
And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

Hindrance: **WRONG MOTIVES** Not glorifying to God

What are some examples of wrong motives in your prayer life?

James 1:6 (NLT)
But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

Hindrance: **LACK OF FAITH**
What are some of the answers that God gives to prayers?

1) **NO**
   Though the request seems to make sense to us, God knows the big picture of what he is accomplishing and understands this request is not the best course of action.

2) **GO**
   We are in sync with what God wants to accomplish and we are fulfilling his purposes for our lives.

3) **SLOW**
   Right prayer request - wrong timing. Sometimes God is far more patient than we are, waiting for the perfect time to arrive. In our quick-serve, drive-thru society we often become very impatient, wanting immediate relief, immediate blessing and immediate answers. God says to simply trust him and rely on him for all you need – he will take care of you.

   Sometimes the answer to prayer takes time to develop. Start praying now and it may begin a chain of events that bring about the desired outcome sometime, somewhere down the road.

   Sometimes God wants you to demonstrate just how important the prayer is to you by praying for it frequently and consistently over time. If you drop the prayer request after the first little while, it may be an indicator that you weren’t that serious about it. God tells us to be persistent in prayer.

   **Prayer is not ultimately about getting things done.**
   **It is about building an intimate relationship with God.**

*Luke 11:1 (NLT)*

> Once when Jesus had been out praying, one of his disciples came to him as he finished and said, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

Why do you think Jesus’ disciple asked him how to pray?

Jesus responded by giving what we call “The Lord’s Prayer”.

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Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV)

13 This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us today our daily bread.
12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

How is this prayer an instruction on how to pray?

Was this intended to be a prayer that just gets recited over and over?

If this is a model prayer, what are the concepts that Jesus is modeling for us?
What does each phrase teach us? Have students discuss what they think each phrase models for us.

Our Father in heaven:  
Reflect on the relationship

This expression of God as our Father emphasizes his desire for intimate relationship with us, but it also keeps in perspective the nature of that relationship – he is the Father, we are his children.

There must be a healthy balance between the fact that God is the Holy King of Kings, Author of Life and Creation, and that he invites us into friendly intimacy with himself. He does this through the imagery connected to the word “Father”. It evidences a level of respect, an awareness that he is greater than us, and a knowledge that he is the one to whom we are accountable.

Other religions keep God very distant. Christianity embraces a relationship with God as a loving Father.

How does the idea of God as “Father” resonate with you?
For those who have not had a good representation of fatherhood in their own lives, this imagery may stir up some painful emotions. The problem is that their father did not accurately represent the character and love of the true Father and as a result, we get a distorted picture of God. The key is not to abandon the idea of God as Father, but instead to understand that we do have a perfect Father in Heaven who will meet our needs of love and security.
hallowed be your name:  

Desire for all people to honour God

This is not so much a statement of praise in the original language as it is a request: Father…sanctify your name. “To paraphrase, 'Father, lift up, single out, exalt, manifest, and reveal your name to the people of earth. Become famous for who you really are. Cause the people of earth to know and adore you!’”

Hawthorne, The Story of His Glory.

God desires that his name be embraced as holy and held in awe by all peoples but he has given us the responsibility of declaring his name to the nations. His name will only be embraced as holy when we do our task of promoting it. If we are going to pray this prayer then we must also be willing to fulfill our role in its answer by proclaiming God’s glory to the entire world.

your kingdom come:  

Desire for God’s kingdom to be fully established

When Jesus came he said that the Kingdom of God had also arrived. God’s kingdom is not about controlling a piece of land, but rather, it is an expression of his right and authority to rule wherever he goes.

Jesus expressed the coming of the kingdom as having two different stages. The first stage is when he came to earth, as we have recorded in the gospels. The second and final stage of the kingdom’s coming will occur when Jesus returns to earth with power and glory. Jesus stated, however, that this day would not come until all the peoples of the earth have had an opportunity to hear and to respond to the message regarding his kingdom.

In expressing our desire to see his kingdom come we must realize that God calls us to take his message to the unreached peoples of the world. You cannot sincerely pray this prayer without having a passion for the world to know about this kingdom.

your will be done on earth as it is in heaven:  

Understand the need for submission

How is God’s will carried out in heaven? Perfectly! Jesus is saying that we should desire God’s will be carried out by his servants on earth in a similar manner. This statement is a humble submission to the purposes of God and a denial of self. If we desire that God be completely obeyed and faithfully responded to, then that prayer has to first find its fulfillment in our own lives. Are we truly willing to submit perfectly to God by allowing him to rule our lives in the ways he deems best? Are we willing to surrender our own agendas so that he will ultimately be glorified?
**Give us today our daily bread:**

*Express dependence on God for everything*

This request is a confession that everything we need for life comes from God as a gift. It focuses on bread because it is symbolic of the most basic need we have in life.

We have a strong sinful tendency to want to be self-sufficient and independent of God. We don’t want to have to rely on anyone, including God. This prayer is a statement of our daily commitment to trust God to provide us with everything we need for life. We don't have to worry about anything because God will sustain us in every way.

Jesus elaborates on this point in Matthew 6:25-34. It is interesting to note that later in his ministry Jesus even defines himself as the Bread of Life (John 7:35).

**Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors:**

*Understand Grace*

This may not be a safe verse to pray because it is requesting God to forgive us in the same manner that we have forgiven others. This is such a critical issue that Jesus gives explanation to it after the prayer is finished.

Matthew 6:14-15. *“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

When we refuse to forgive others, yet are willing to accept God’s forgiveness, we are really saying that we view the sin of the other person against us to be much greater than our own sin against God. This approach reveals that we don’t truly understand the severity of our own sinfulness, it devalues Christ’s death on the cross, and it limits the fullness of God’s grace.

Jesus seems to imply that this degree of spiritual blindness may be an indicator of a person’s eternal standing before God. *(Parable: Matthew 18:23-34)*

**lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one:**

*Long for purity*

The word for temptation here means: period or process of testing, trial, test, temptation, or enticement. *(Newman, Greek Dictionary)*

This is a call out to God to protect us from wandering into a situation where we might succumb to Satan’s deception. It is not asking that we never have to go through trials, for we know that we will. It is not so much concerned with having to endure pain or sorrow as much as it is avoiding spiritual failure and sin. It is an ongoing request that God protect us from the wiles and deadly darts of the evil one.
What is a common theme that runs through the following verses?

**Acts 1:14 (NLT)**
They all met together continually for prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

**Acts 2:42 (NLT)**
They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.

**Acts 4:24 (NLT)**
Then all the believers were united as they lifted their voices in prayer: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them…

The Believers prayed __________ TOGETHER __________

Why is praying together so important? Why do we ask others to pray for us? Is it because the more people we can get on our side, the more God will pay attention and perhaps answer our prayer?

No! It all comes back to the fact that God is our Father, meaning we as his children are family. God wants us to come together as his children and be united about what is important to us and Him. Sometimes God holds off answering a prayer until his children come together in unity, desiring a common outcome.

**HOME STUDY:**

Read: Continue reading Exodus through to 2 Kings.
The goal is to gain an overview of the story of the Bible. When you come to passages detailing the tabernacle structures, laws, or rites, simply scan them for now and proceed to the next narrative section to pick up the continuation of the story.