

# Prayer - 07\_09\_14

## Introduction

The largest radio receiver on earth is in New Mexico. Pilots call it “the mushroom patch.” Its real name is the Very Large Array - VLA. The “VLA” is a series of huge satellite disks on thirty-eight miles of railways. Together the discs mimic a single telescope the size of Washington, D.C. Astronomers come from all over the world to analyse the images of the heavens composed by the VLA from the radio signals it receives from space. The VLA is so large because the radio waves, often emitted from sources million of light years away, are very faint. The total energy of all radio waves ever recorded barely equals the force of a single snowflake hitting the ground. Straining through the eyes of telescopes and the electronic ear of the VLA, astronomers search the infinite darkness of the universe for information.

It's amazing what great lengths people will go to searching for a faint message from space when God has spoken so clearly through Jesus and his Word! But God hasn't only spoken powerfully to us through Jesus and the Bible, he also has, not a VLA, but a “VLE”. He has a Very Large Ear continuously open to us.

Most people would tell you that in any kind of relationship, communication is the most important step to having a healthy and open relationship and that communication requires talking and listening in equal parts. Prayer is no different, it's our means of communication with our heavenly father who wants to hear from us and speak to us. And because it's so important we should do it on a regular basis, not just when we have spare time or when it's convenient. To become like Jesus, which is the call for us as disciples, we must pray.

## Prayer is Expected

Prayer is expected of us, but please don't think of prayer as an impersonal requirement. Instead see that it's a person, Jesus, with all authority and with all love, who expects us to pray, as these excerpts from the Bible show us: [Matthew 6:5](#), “And when you pray ...”; [Matthew 6:6](#), “But when you pray ...”; [Matthew 6:7](#), “And when you pray ...”; [Luke 11:9](#), “So I say to you: ask ... seek ... knock.”; [Luke 18:1](#), “Then Jesus told his disciples ... they should always pray.” In addition to the words of Jesus, God has an expectation that we should pray: “Devote yourselves to prayer.” ([Colossians 4:2](#)); “Pray continually.” ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#))

Suppose Jesus appeared to us personally and said that he expected us to pray. Wouldn't we become more faithful in prayer, knowing specifically that Jesus expected that of us? Well, the words of Jesus I quoted are as much his will for us as if he spoke our name and said them to us face-to-face. We must see the expectation to pray not only as a “divine summons”, but also as a “royal invitation”. I'm sure none of us would turn down an invitation to a Royal Garden Party!

Why, then, do so many of us confess that we don't pray as much as we should? Sometimes the problem is a lack of discipline. We never plan prayer. Sometimes we don't pray because we doubt that anything will actually happen. Of course, we don't admit this publicly. But if we felt certain of visible results within sixty seconds of every prayer, there would be holes in the knees of every pair of Christian-owned trousers in the world! But the Bible never promises this, even though God does promise to answer prayer.

Sometimes a lack of sensing the nearness of God may also discourage prayer. While our praying should be governed by the truth of the Bible rather than our feelings, nevertheless the frailty of our emotions frequently erodes our desire to pray. Sometimes we don't see a real need to pray. Some circumstances drive us to our knees, but there are periods when life seems quite manageable. We may live for days as though prayer were needed only when something comes along that's too big for us to handle on our own. Another reason we can pray so little is because we haven't learned to pray.

## Prayer is Learned

If you're discouraged by the command to pray because you feel like you don't know how to pray well, the fact that prayer is learned should give us hope. That means that it's okay to start the Christian life without any knowledge or experience of prayer. No matter how weak or strong our prayer life is right now, we can learn to grow even stronger.

How do we learn to pray? If you've ever learned a foreign language you know that you learn it best when you actually have to speak it. There are many good resources for learning how to pray, but the best way to learn to pray, is to pray. Another way to learn how to pray is by praying with others. The disciples learned to pray not only by hearing Jesus teach about prayer, but also by being with him when he prayed. Let's not forget that the words, "[Lord, teach us to pray ...](#)" (Luke 11:1) didn't just come as a random idea. This request followed a time when the disciples accompanied Jesus in prayer. In a similar way, we can learn to pray by praying with other people who can model prayer for us. But we must remember that we pray with them to learn principles of prayer, not phrases for prayer.

Reading about prayer in addition to praying can be a valuable way to learn. Reading the books of wise men and women of prayer gives us the privilege of "walking" with them and learning the insights God gave them on how to pray. [My sabbatical and reading 'Kneeling With Giants.'](#) Let me add a word of encouragement. No matter how difficult prayer is for us now, if we will persevere in learning how to pray we will always have hope of an even stronger and more fruitful prayer life ahead of us.

## Prayer is Answered

Perhaps no principle of prayer is taken more for granted than this one - that prayer is answered. I want you to try to hear this promise of Jesus as though it was for the first time: "[Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.](#)" (Matthew 7:7-8) Andrew Murray commented on these verses: "*Everyone who asks receives ... Let ever learner in the school of Christ therefore take the Master's word in all simplicity ... Let us beware of weakening the Word with our human wisdom.*" C.H. Spurgeon said, "*Where God leads you to pray, he means you to receive.*" God doesn't mock us with his promises to answer prayer and he doesn't lead us to pray in order to frustrate us by slamming Heaven's door in our face.

Since God answers pray, when we ask and don't receive, we must consider the possibility that there is something amiss or wanting in our prayer. It may be that God has answered but not in a way that is obvious to us. And it's possible that nothing is amiss in our praying, but that we haven't yet seen the answer only because God intends for us to persevere in praying about the matter awhile longer. But we must also learn to examine our prayers. Are we asking for things that are outside of God's will? Are we praying with selfish motives? Are we failing to deal with the kind of blatant sin that causes God to put all our prayers on hold? Despite what we see in response to our prayers, however, let's not become so accustomed to our shortcomings that our faith in the force of Jesus' promise is diminished. Prayer is answered!

## Corporate Prayer

I just want to say a few words about corporate prayer. Corporate prayer is no different from private prayer except that we're praying with other people. So you might ask yourself, "Is corporate prayer important or is it necessary?" This is a good question. 1) Corporate prayer isn't only important, it's essential for the growth of a church. 2) Corporate prayer is much more than just praying together, it's being in agreement with each other in what we pray for. 3) The power of our prayer is increased as we come together. 4) We're better able to discover God's will when we pray together.

The corporate prayer meeting is arguably the most neglected function in the Church today. The prayer meeting usually has the smallest attendance of all the church functions. However, the prayer meeting should be the most attended because it's the most important. The enemy has attacked this function because he knows the power that will be released through Christians praying together. We should also remember that God commanded it; Jesus and Paul modelled it; and the early church practiced it, ["They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."](#) (Acts 1:14)

## **Challenge**

What I hope most of all today is that we won't feel guilty about our lack of a prayer life. My hope is that we will feel hungry for a greater prayer life so that we can be disciples giving God glory in everything that we do. My hope is that we will come to see prayer and discipleship not as a duty but as a privilege. My hope is that we will go from here being warriors in prayer, praying on all occasions and praying without ceasing! And God will hear every prayer, even when our prayers are weaker than a snowflake.