

## WHAT SHOULD I PRAY FOR?

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When we pray in the name of Jesus Christ we are praying to the One who created us, who loves us, who restores us to fellowship with Him, who desires the best for us. We are also praying to the One who answers our prayers not according to our wishes, but according to His great purpose for us. But what should we pray for? What is such a God likely to respond to, and what does He desire to hear from us?

Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, theologian, and author, has written, “A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening.”

Lily Tomlin, known for her comedic talents, put it more succinctly. “Why is it when we talk to God, we’re said to be praying—but when God talks to us, we’re schizophrenic?”

Both have identified a key element of the “what” of prayer – prayer is as much seeking God’s direction and will for us as it is talking with Him about what is on our hearts and minds.

Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision, wrote in the flyleaf of his Bible, “Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.” That is both a prayer and a commitment – a prayer that God would reveal to Bob what breaks His heart, a prayer that Bob’s heart would be touched the way God’s heart is, and a commitment to live out the consequences of that kind of intense emotion, to participate in the healing of the world and in so doing, to participate in the healing of God’s heart.

We need not look far to find out what breaks the heart of God. From the opening pages of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, to the closing pages of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, God wears His heart on His sleeve. He is clear, unequivocal, and very open about the things and actions that cause Him grief and sorrow and agony. To look at the world and our fellow human beings through God's eyes is to be open to intense suffering and pain.

To be willing to stand with others who are in pain requires greater strength and fortitude than most of us can bring on our own. It requires drawing on the grace of God, the strength of God, the salvation of God, if we are to really help others and not yield to our own sense of despair. It requires that we focus on God much more than on ourselves, that we seek Him out in the ways He is present in every situation rather than try to impose Him on situations through our own efforts.

We need also to allow our own hearts to be broken as God's heart is. For many of us that it much more difficult than knowing what breaks God's heart. It requires that we be vulnerable, open to really see other people, and not just look past them to the things that interest us. It requires that we be willing to experience pain and hopelessness and despair, precisely because we cannot respond at the human level to the full depth of human need and we do not have all of the resources that are necessary to alleviate suffering.

But more than that, we must be willing to let our own hearts be touched by God, as He fills us with that sense of hope that comes from confidence that through Christ, all things are possible, and as He puts in our hands His resources to respond to human need in the way He would have us respond.

Only then can we become instruments in the hand of God to participate with Him in the healing of the world, and in the healing of His broken heart.

Prayer is a tremendously humbling experience. We may start out by bringing our anxieties and concerns and wants and needs to God, but, as Kierkegaard found, if we stay at it (both in individual times of prayer and in our overall prayer life), we find out that we are listening much more than talking.

We find that we are conversing with God who wants to be in relationship with us, and who wants to use us as His instruments in the world. Far from being a self-centered, self-focused activity, far even from being a crutch to get us through our own challenges, prayer becomes the vehicle through which we focus on God and on others, and allow God to do whatever He wills in our lives and to do whatever He chooses through us.

Susan starts each day with a simple statement that is really a prayer: “Servant Susan, reporting for duty.” It serves to remind her of the purpose of her life (to serve), and to open communication with the One she serves. It creates an expectation in her that God will indeed use her. And it leaves open what service will look like that particular day. As someone else has said, “Don’t bother giving God instructions; just report for duty.”

What a difference it makes to our lives when we seek to serve God more than we seek to have God serve us; when our focus is on bringing God’s message of salvation, redemption, and hope, through word and action, rather on being beneficiaries of God’s grace.

For what should I pray? That I will be open to hearing God’s voice, and to being used by Him whenever, wherever, however, and with whomever He chooses.