

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Psalm 62:8; 1 John 5:14; John 16:23-24; 1 John 1:9; Psalm 103:1-5



You may have heard it said that prayer is merely talking to God. This is true, but there is no simpler definition of prayer. The Westminster Catechism offers us a more robust explanation of what prayer is. It defines prayer as **“an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies.”** This definition highlights (5) different aspects of prayer.

1. Offering up our desires unto God.

We see this beautifully described in **Psalm 62:8: “Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us” (ESV).** This is where David depicts prayer as pouring out his heart before God. Our desires include our wants, needs, aches, pains, and deepest longing. Our hearts are full to the brim with desires. Prayer is a place to tip our full hearts over and let them spill out to God’s listening ear. All desires welcome God’s presence, but not all desires are granted.

2. For things that are agreeable to His will.

Question... Can you imagine what the world would be like if God answered every single question with a yes? There will be chaos. This is why God does not answer our



prayers according to our desires but according to His will. When our prayers do not align with God's will, we can always expect Him to say no. No one likes to receive "no" as an answer to their prayers. We do not understand why His will does not align with our desires. Even in those moments, we can trust that His will is ultimately best for us.

When God's "no's" are hard to comprehend, we can be comforted by (2) things. First, God's "yes" and His "no" are given because He is who He says He is, and He does what He says He will do. Second, when we delight in the Lord and His way. He aligns our desires with His. **Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (ESV).** God does give us the desires of our hearts when our hearts are turned to the frequency of His will. **1 John 5:14 says, "And this the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hear us" (ESV).**

3. Prayer is in the name of Christ

To pray the name of Christ not only means to add "in Jesus' name" to our prayers. It is much more about the motive behind the words than the words themselves.

It is helpful to understand the cultural context behind Jesus' instruction to His disciples to pray in His name in **John 16:23-24. Jesus says, "In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, Truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (ESV).** To pray in the name of Christ means to pray in harmony with who Jesus is. In Jesus' name is a mold that shapes our prayers to be consistent with the character of Jesus.

4. Prayer with confession of sins.

The beauty in the confession part of prayer is that it is God's response to our initial confession of sin that leads to our salvation and unlimited access to God in prayer. Confession is something we should practice daily in prayer. As Believers of Jesus Christ, we confess our sin because God asks us to increasingly submit ourselves to Him so that He reigns over us and our sin does not. **Romans 6:12-13 says, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality" (ESV).** We should daily confess our sins, ask for forgiveness, and plead with God to strengthen us so we can resist the temptation to sin in the future. When we confess, God forgives, and all is right between Him and us. **1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (ESV).**

5. Prayer is thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.

We have to be moved to tell the Lord how thankful we are for all the loving-kindness He has lavished on us. Who is like the Lord? He forgives, heals, redeems, crowns us with His love, satisfies our souls, and renews us when we are weak. **Psalms 103:1-5 says, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagles" (ESV).**





Prayer

Write a prayer that pours out your heart's desires to the Lord. Where are some areas you see in your own life and heart? Write a prayer confessing to the Lord and asking for forgiveness. Write a prayer thanking God for the mercies He has granted you.
