

# Is Prayer Really Necessary? (Part 3)

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As Dean of the Messianic Life Institute (which is Tikkun's online school of Messianic Jewish studies) I had been searching for a textbook to accompany Dr. Michael Brown's recorded course, "Foundations of Intercession." Although there are many books written on the subject, I was having difficulty finding one that I thought rose to the scholarly level of Dr. Brown's teaching. Dr. Brown is unique in his ability to teach on matters of faith, while supporting what he teaches with scholarly reason.

Over several weeks, I reviewed one book and then another, and the same two problems kept coming up. Either there was too much emphasis on formal prayer, or the author had too many "shoot from the hip" opinions that lacked documentation. In discussing my quest with Marinell, she suggested that I look at a book written by Dutch Sheets entitled "Intercessory Prayer: How God Can Use Your Prayers to Move Heaven and Earth." I did, and in short order I knew I had found what I was looking for.

This excellent book presents "intercessory prayer" in a way that is entertainingly folksy, so you don't realize that it is also scholarly. What I mean by scholarly is that it actually has supportive endnote references, and I can best explain what I mean by folksy by reading you a few excerpts:

"A Hollywood talent judge said of Fred Astaire, one of the top singers, dancers, and actors of all time: "Can't act. Can't sing. Can dance a little." I'm sure Satan has passed his judgment on me at times in my life: "Can't preach. Can't lead. Can pray a little." Thank God for His grace, patience and commitment to me. I've stumbled forward more than backwards in life."

Here's another one:

"Because I said so!" Don't you just hate it when that's the reason given for doing something? ... I remember having my knuckles rapped with a ruler for asking the simple question, "Why?" Whack! "Because I said so! Now be quiet and do it!" I still wish I could rap that teacher's knuckles with a yardstick and not tell her why! (Don't worry, we'll deal with forgiveness and inner healing another time.)"

I'll share one more and then stop, or I'll be having too much fun but doing nothing else:

"I've discovered that understanding the why of doing something can be a great motivating force. The opposite is also true. As a kid I wondered why the sign said "No diving" in the shallow end of the pool. Then one day I hit my head on the bottom. I don't do that anymore. I used to wonder why I shouldn't touch the pretty red glow on the stove. I found out. I wondered why a fellow in front of me in the woods said, "Duck." I thought, *I don't want to duck. I don't have to duck.* Then the branch whopped me upside the head. Now I duck."

I have to confess that, at the outset, I was a bit skeptical about looking for biblical scholarship in a book written by someone named "Dutch." The name reminded me of someone I might meet in a prison exercise yard, but that prejudice didn't last long as I got into the reading. Dutch – (See? I am on a first-name basis with him already) Dutch lists some intriguing questions that I know *I* have asked, and I am sure many of *you* have asked as well. (The following are quoted from Dutch Sheets' book):

- Is prayer really necessary? If so, why? Isn't God sovereign? Doesn't that mean He Accomplishes what He wants, when He wants? If so, why pray?
- Is God's will for a Christian automatically guaranteed or is it linked to prayer and other factors?
- Why does it often take so long to get a prayer answered? Why is persistence required? Jacob wrestled with God. Is that what we are to do in prayer? I don't like the thought of wrestling with God, do you?
- What about prayer for the lost? How can I be more effective? I get a little frustrated trying to think of new ways to ask God to save people, don't you? I thought He *wanted* to save them. Then why do I feel as though I'm trying to talk Him into it? Is there a better way? Do I ask for their salvation again and again or simply petition Him once and then just thank Him in faith?
- What about spiritual warfare? If Satan is defeated and Christ [Sheets hasn't learned to talk Messianic] has all authority, shouldn't we just forget about the devil? Does God bind the devil or do we?
- What exactly is intercessory prayer? And don't just tell me it's "standing in the gap." Enough religious quotes and spiritual jargon. I know the thought is taken from the Bible, but what does it mean?
- What about protection? Is everything that happens to me or my family simply allowed by God? Or is there something I need to do to procure our safety?
- How do we "bear one another's burdens"? ([Galatians 6:2](#)).
- Is there a right time for answers to prayer or does the timing depend on me?

And Sheets concludes his list this way:

"Are you getting tired of all these questions? I know I am – so I'll stop. You may even be tired of asking yourself some of them. I know I was. Many people stopped asking them long ago, and probably stopped praying, too. Please don't do that!"

Permit me to address the first item on Sheets' list:

*"Is prayer really necessary? If so, why? Isn't God sovereign? Doesn't that mean He Accomplishes what He wants, when He wants? If so, why pray?"*

I think these are some of the very questions that keep many of us from being motivated to pray. What indeed is the value are my prayers? If God wants to heal someone, won't he heal that person regardless of whether or not I ask Him to? And why does Paul say in Colossians 4:2: *"Keep persisting in prayer.."*? If I pray for the same thing or person more than once, am I not indicating a lack of faith that God did not hear me the first time?

Sheets seeks to answer the question by referring back to the time of creation. He suggests that the reason God created man in His image was so that He (God) could enjoy fellowship with beings somewhat similar to Himself, and God assigned stewardship of everything on earth to man, so that man could have dominion over *his* environment in the same way that God has dominion over all. Sheets quotes Psalms 8:4(3)-9(8) to remind us of that:

*"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place- what are mere mortals, that you concern yourself with them; humans, that you watch over them with such care? You made him but little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor, you had him rule what your hands made, you put everything under his feet- sheep and oxen, all of them, also the animals in the wilds, the birds in the air, the fish in the sea, whatever passes through the paths of the seas."*

[The New American Standard (1995) translates verse 6(5): *"Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty!"*]

I think Sheets is right to go to Genesis for an answer to why God acts through prayer, but I don't agree with his conclusion. I believe God has shown me that it has little to do with His desiring man's fellowship, and more to do with man's fall from grace and man's redemptive path back to God. Since I believe the substance of this message that follows was given to me by revelation, I offer it to the elders and members of Ohev Yisrael for discernment.

Man's original condition in the Garden of Eden was as Psalms 8 states. He was given stewardship and dominion over all of God's creation, both animate and inanimate. Adam freely and daily spoke with God as they walked together in the Garden, and there was no need for Adam to ask God's help in governing, because he already had all the authority he needed. If Adam wanted something accomplished in the Garden – perhaps some change - he didn't have to ask God for it – he could just do it himself. Remember Psalms 8:6-7: *"You made him but little lower than the angels, you crowned him with glory and honor, you had him rule what your hands made, you put everything under his feet .."* And as written in Genesis 1:26-28:

*"Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, in the likeness of ourselves; and let them rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the animals, and over all the earth, and over every crawling creature that crawls on the earth." So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. God blessed them: God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and every living creature that crawls on the earth."*

But then something happened. Adam disobeyed God by seeking knowledge that did not belong to him, even though God had warned him:

Genesis 2:16-17: *"You may freely eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You are not to eat from it, because on the day that you eat from it, it will become certain that you will die."*

But it was not Adam's mere disobedience that was so serious. Satan essentially called God a liar when he told Eve the opposite of what God said – that she would not die if she ate of the tree. She, in turn, planted that seed in Adam, so the seriousness of Adam's sin was that he believed Satan and not God.

Adam and Eve and their yet-to-be born descendants did die in a spiritual sense, in that they became separated from God; and they also died in a physical sense, in that they became susceptible to illnesses and other disabilities, and would eventually die a natural death, which was not in God's original plan. Also, as a consequence of his being driven out of the Garden of Eden, Adam lost his authority of dominion over God's creation; that was not in God's original plan either. And Adam and Eve were not the only ones to die; we who are his descendants and all of God's creation died as well. It is what theologians mean when they say we live in a "fallen world."

So where does prayer fit into this? Adam could no longer fellowship with God face to face and so, for the first time he had to "pray" to God – that is, speak to Him from a distance. That is why I contend that prayer, as we know it, originated with man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

God promised Adam that he would die if he disobeyed, and he did die. God could have started all over again with a new creation, but He chose not to do that and, instead, He formulated a plan of redemption by which mankind could repent and eventually return to a place of intimacy with Him. The redemption was to affect not only man, but all of creation. But, because God's sense of justice runs deep, His plan requires more than our just being sorry for our father Adam's sin; it requires that we make restitution for it because his sin attaches to us generationally. By Adam eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (after being told not to), he was both disobedient and mistrustful of God. Consequently, the restitution that we are called to is to do the opposite – to be obedient to God and trust Him completely. Also, Adam brought harm to God's creation instead of good stewardship. Again, our restitution requires the opposite – that we be good stewards of God's creation, both of its people and its things. With regard to its people, we are commanded thusly: *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* (Matthew 22:39b). It is as though God is calling mankind to act in such a way as to undo what Adam did that caused its fall.

But it is different for us than it was for Adam. Remember, before Adam committed his sin, his stewardship was in the Garden of Eden where he had direct and complete dominion over all of creation. Adam did not need God's moment-by-moment intervention to help him fulfill his responsibilities because God had given him the authority and ability to do it himself. We, however, are not in the Garden of Eden, and this fallen creation with which *we* must deal does

not naturally submit to us as Adam's did to him. Because we do not have Adam's authority, in order for *us* to fulfill *our* responsibility of stewardship (which is part of God's plan of redemption), *we* need to be continually going to God for help. And, unlike Adam who (while he was still in the Garden) did not have to pray because he was always within a conversational distance to God, we who reside in this fallen world, and in a state of semi-separation from God, have to communicate with God at a distance through prayer.

In the New Covenant, the distance between man and God has become less because the Holy Spirit who lives within us enhances the communication. Still, we are not in the Garden of Eden and walking with God as Adam was so, for us, prayer is still how we must converse with God.

Now we should be able to answer the questions that we asked earlier:

"Is prayer really necessary? If so, why? Isn't God sovereign? Doesn't that mean He Accomplishes what He wants, when He wants? If so, why pray?"

If what I have spoken today does not answer these questions for you, here are some Scriptures that should:

Matthew 7:7-11: *Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps asking receives; he who keeps seeking finds; and to him who keeps knocking, the door will be opened. Is there anyone here who, if his son asks him for a loaf of bread, will give him a stone? or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? So if you, even though you are bad, know how to give your children gifts that are good, how much more will your Father in heaven keep giving good things to those who keep asking him!*

Ephesians 6:17-18: *And take the helmet of deliverance; along with the sword given by the Spirit, that is, the Word of God; as you pray at all times, with all kinds of prayers and requests, in the Spirit, vigilantly and persistently, for all God's people.*

Philippians 4:6-7: *Don't worry about anything; on the contrary, make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Then God's shalom, passing all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with the Messiah Yeshua.*

1Thessalonians 5:17-18: *Pray regularly. In everything give thanks, for this is what God wants from you who are united with the Messiah Yeshua.*

James 5:16b: *The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

Yes, prayer is necessary because it is a component of God's plan of redemption, and the means by which we fulfill our responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation. And yes, God is sovereign, and thank God that He sovereignly put a plan in place by which we, the believing descendants of Adam, can contribute toward making restitution for Adam's sin by prayerfully caring for God's creation (and especially for the people of His creation) in a way that Adam did not. Yes, God sometimes intervenes sovereignly in the affairs of men, but mostly, he considers it

our responsibility, and expects us to do the job ourselves – not in our own power because we have none – but by tapping into His power through prayer. And as for the last question: "Why pray?" It is because, if we do not pray, we are not doing our part to cooperate with God's plan of redemption and, without prayer, He might not act in our behalf when we need him to do so.

To we who are believers in Yeshua I say this: Our personal redemption and salvation is in Him but, let us not be complacent, for He did not save us for ourselves alone. There is a global redemption and restoration of mankind that is yet to come and we, the disciples of Yeshua, are called to intercede in prayer for that to happen.

So now that I have laid out my case for why I think prayer is important, what do *you* think? Did God give it to me? Are you motivated to pray more as a result of what you have just heard? I hope so, because I am convicted that there is more eternally at stake than whether one or another of our prayers is answered. Of course, we should want what we pray for to come to pass, but our reward for the time we spend in prayer should not come from that, but rather from the satisfaction of knowing that our prayers contribute to God's great plan for the redemption and restoration of mankind.