



Q&A with Catalyst's Debbie Stackhouse

Is praying to God a waste of time?

If prayer is a waste of time, didn't matter or make a difference, why did Jesus pray all the time?
If prayer is easy, why did the disciples ask Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray?"



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Debbie Stackhouse, Director of Renewal (www.Catalystweb.org), answers prayer questions for Catalyst Communication Coordinator, Lynn Dahlstrom. In addition to Debbie's work with Catalyst, she is Minister of Spiritual Development at Sign of the Dove Church in Waukegan, IL.

A licensed Minister for 20 years, Debbie holds a Bachelor of Theology Degree from Trinity College of the Bible. Debbie has ministered as Music Director at Trinity Christian Center in Zion for 18 years where she served on staff for 11 years as Assistant Pastor and Christian Education Pastor. Debbie Stackhouse is the mother of five grown children and grandmother of seven. She and her husband Michael have been married for 37 years.

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Catalyst: From a Biblical perspective, what is prayer? Please explain it in a way that someone who is unfamiliar with prayer would know what prayer is?

Debbie: *Prayer is a conversation with God -- communication with God. It's also listening. Just like conversation with your spouse -- words and listening.*

Catalyst: How do you hear God?

Debbie: *Through His Word, the Bible. And just impressions in your spirit. You get subtle impressions from God. He doesn't yell. He has a gentle voice. When there are specific prayers, God gives specific answers.*

Catalyst: To whom do you pray?

Debbie: *Jesus says to pray to God the Father, in His name. We're to pray in the name of Jesus to God the Father. In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am THE Way, I am THE Truth, I am THE LIFE, no one comes to the Father except by me. Jesus emphasizes that he is THE Way. Not a way or one of the ways. I am THE Way, Jesus said.*

Catalyst: Why do you pray?

Debbie: *I pray because it's in all of us. We wonder, "Who is this creator? Why am I here? What is my purpose? Who put me here? Who is this God who created all this? Why is he so interested in me?" Prayer is building a relationship with God. I get to know and have personal relationship with the one who created me and brought me into existence and do His will. I pray because I want to know the God I've been working for. He's made us co-laborers with Him.*

I pray for God's will to be done on earth – "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven," as Jesus prayed. God has used prayer as a vehicle to initiate and implement and enforce His will on earth. We pray His heart. God answers His own prayer. If we ask anything according to His will – He hears us. If I pray because I have a burden, it's because He has put it there. He's sovereign and unlimited. We are

co-laborers and workers in this time to bring forth the Body of Christ and souls into the Kingdom of God. His will is that not anyone would perish. Communities and nations can be transformed through prayer.

Catalyst: How do you pray?

Debbie: *The disciples asked Jesus to pray. He answered, “Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy Kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive the trespasses of others. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”*

Jesus started with “Our Father.” We’re to worship and adore God. We’re to look at his attributes. He’s merciful, gracious, loving; God gets bigger and world smaller. “Hallowed be name. Thy will be done.” Ask God, “What’s on your heart?” He just wants someone to ask His will and I’ll do it. Then ask for personal petitions. Then ask for daily sustenance. And forgive me my sins. Then it ends with praise, worship and thanksgiving.

The most important thing is confidence in prayer. Knowing who I am as a believer in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:6 says, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” So I pray from above. Believers in Christ are raised from above and seated with Him in heavenly places. He has given authority and power to speak. I’ve been blessed with every spiritual blessing.

When I pray in the name of Jesus, it’s in His nature in character. It’s not, “I want that pink Cadillac and million dollars.” I need to humble myself and pray His agenda and not mine. He reveals our motives and areas we need to clean up. He’ll impress upon me, “That was about you, not me.” Some back away when they sense God is speaking. They don’t want to do what He’s telling them to do. I need to say, “God, I want you to deal with it to draw you closer. I want to go deeper with you,” and then obey. I pray with confidence because I know who I am in Christ. He has given us shared authority and power to do His will on earth.

Catalyst: Do you have to use “Thees and Thous”? Do you have to be on your knees or close your eyes or be in a house of worship?

Debbie: *No. Just be honest with God. Don’t be religious. He knows you and me. Psalm 139:16 talks about “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” He knows me. Talk to God like you would with a spouse or friend. For instance, say, “Yes, I’m dealing with gossip or greed or hatred and I don’t want to do that. Help me.” Be honest. Be real with God. God is always real. Don’t be fake or religious. We’re to come to Him with a broken spirit and contrite heart, with honesty and humility.*

Catalyst: Some think prayer is about getting from God. What do you think?

Debbie: *It’s about changing things in our lives. Not so much prayer changes things, but it changes me and I, through God, change things.*

Catalyst: 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray continually.” How can this be done? How can you pray all the time?

Debbie: *There’s a time to give God your best. Sometimes morning is best. If it’s 11 at night it’s easy to fall asleep. I’ve done that. I need to give Him my solitude and alone time. Out of 24 hours in a day, I can give Jesus time to pray. Praying continually is an attitude throughout the day. I may be quoting a Bible*

verse. Or I may say, "God I think that's a beautiful garden." If someone comes to mind – pray for him or her. If you're driving by a church, "God help that church. Help them to do your work in their neighborhood." Psalm 139:17-18 talks about "How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand..." God is constantly thinking about us. Some people say, "I pray while drive," Or "I pray every once in a while." But imagine a married couple. If the wife is talking to husband as she's walking out the door, or distracted by washing dishes, the husband may ask, "Can you just stop and listen and look at me?" It's the same with God. We need to give Him our undivided attention. Then throughout day – pray.

Catalyst: How do we mess up prayer? And what can we do differently?

Debbie: *Prayerlessness is sin. It's a sin not to pray.*

When we do pray, we're not supposed to pray like the hypocrites – phony prayers to try to impress God or others. God won't listen to that. Be yourself. Be humble.

If I gloss over or disregard iniquity in my heart and life, the Lord doesn't hear. If I foster unforgiveness or a relationship isn't right, the Bible says to lay your gift on the altar, go and straighten out the relationship – then come back and give your offering.

There was a worldwide survey recently. They found that not praying is a worldwide problem -- a pandemic. Numerous believers in Jesus are too busy to pray. Believers are busy and distracted. Many confessed, "I don't have time to pray." And 61% of pastors said the same. That's sad and wrong. There is no silence or solitude. The enemy tempts us to always be working and busy and to be caught up and distracted by our culture. Rather than being "transformed by renewing our minds" as Romans 12:2 says, we're unfortunately being transformed by the culture around us.

We can also get too busy working at the church and in ministry. In America, we're so action oriented. We may be "Working" for the Lord yet how can we when we don't know what he wants because we're not communicating with him in prayer? It's like with Martha in the Bible. She was so busy and distracted. Her sister Mary found the good part – sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to Him and learning from Him.

You and I won't find time to pray. We have to MAKE time. To say we don't have time is insincere. We can watch TV 20-30 hours per week. Instead of watching Law and Order at 9:00 p.m., turn off the TV and spend time with God. Or pray early in the morning. Theologian Martin Luther said, "I have a busy day today instead of praying for 2 hours, I'm going to pray 3 hrs."

Begin with 15 minutes when you get up. Increase it to 20-25 minutes. Keep increasing until you get a good hour of prayer. When you give God your time, God redeems it. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Take care of God's business. He'll take care of yours

Catalyst: What does your prayer time look like?

Debbie: *Sometimes it's hard to get out of a warm bed. In the winter, we keep thermostat on 63 – it's cold in the house. But I just begin mediating on God's word and who He is even though my mind and body are saying, "Back to bed."*

Sometimes it seems like I've got so much to do. But I take time to pray to God. The rest gets done. I follow the pattern of prayer in Matthew – The Lord's Prayer. I may spend 5 minutes listening to a musical worship c.d. I may mediate and sing. I play piano. I give God a private concert -- in an attitude of

worship. I just play hymns. That may go on 15-20 minutes. Then I thank the Father God for His goodness and His attributes. I ask, "What's on your heart, God?" and listen to Him. Keeping a list is fine, but sometimes a list can be a bondage. Some days it's just, "No list today. I want to worship you and follow your direction." Then I wrap up with praise and worship.

Love is not a feeling. It's a choice. An action. You act your way into the feeling. You have to start to pray and feelings will come. There's a lot of stuff at risk. We have to pray. There are lost souls going to hell. There's too much at stake to not pray.

To have that dynamic passion in prayer, you have to understand, believe and implant His passion for you, not so much my passion for Him. I've been chosen before foundation of world. I'm beloved child of God. I have an inheritance. His thoughts towards me are so numerous. David asked in Psalm 8:4, "What are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" David knew God's passion for him. God is not mad at you. He's mad about you. "God you feel like that about me? You've placed for such a time as this? You sacrificed your life for me? We then want to give our life to him.

I believe that I will have to stand before Christ and give an account for what I do here. I want to please Him. I believe Jesus is coming back soon. He said he would. Then it hits me, "Wow, what will that be like? What will I see? Lord, I want to see you." He'll come back for those who are looking for Him.

Catalyst: How have you seen God work through personal prayer? Family prayer? Church prayer? Community wide prayer?

Debbie: Some people mistakenly think God does not answer prayer. He does. In my life on a daily basis, if it's a normal routine – "Lord take care of this" – He does. I've watched Him work in my children's lives. I've seen Him heal me. I've been praying for Lake County for nine years. Pastors didn't know each other well. But with God working through Catalyst, pastors are getting to know each other and churches are working together. I'm seeing what God did and is doing. There's a bond that's taking place among pastors and churches. Answers to prayer have been literally taking place before me.

Catalyst: Some have said that prayer is hard work. Why?

Debbie: We're flesh and blood. Romans 8:7 says, "The sinful mind (or the mind set on the flesh), is hostile to God..." We don't want God. Prayer is "God, I have to break through flesh. The spirit is willing but flesh is weak." It's like the Space Shuttle, which is a flying bomb. It takes all its rocket fuel to get past gravitational pull. Through prayer, we have to push against the gravitational pull, which is our flesh. We're in this body and this world and we have an enemy of our soul who wants to try and keep us from knowing who we are in Christ Jesus and the power God gives us through prayer. Prayer is work.

Catalyst: Who are some Biblical prayer heroes of yours? Why?

Debbie: David. You know David's heart through the Psalms. He's a man after God's heart. He's not ashamed of God. He's very honest with God. He's not religious or phony with God. David shares his weaknesses, sins, frustrations and his anger. I've prayed, "Let me have a heart like David had." David knew his God. I want to know God too.

"...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 I will hear from Heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14

