



# Priorities in Prayer

Feb 4, 2007

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. - Psalm 17:6

*What would your life look like if God answered everything in your typical prayer?*

- Most people would be healthy, wealthy, and wise
- Would you be holy? Would you be closer to God? Would you trust Him more?

*Would you have more physical blessings or spiritual blessings?*

Our prayer priorities are the things we pray about the most. Randy Harris said “If you listened to our prayers you would think the most important thing to Christians was physical health.” Praying for the physical health of our loved ones is a legitimate prayer. But when you look at prayers in scripture they rarely include physical health. This week we are going to talk about how well our prayer priorities match up with God’s priorities.

## **James 5:13-16**

*What kind of prayer is powerful and effective?*

- The prayer offered in faith
- The prayer of a righteous man

*Does James think that praying for physical health is important? Why?*

- He clearly thinks it is important.
- Our health is part of who we are and how God has made us. God wants us to be whole but not at the expense of our soul.

*What else does James say our prayers should address in addition to physical health?*

- Making our relationship with God healthy through confessing our sins and forgiveness from God.

When Jesus healed the paralyzed man in Mark 2 He emphasized the priority of forgiving sins even over healing his paralyzed body. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus emphasizes the importance of going to heaven over keeping our bodies intact. (Matthew 5:29-30). God is concerned for our whole life (body, mind, and spirit) but the spiritual takes precedence.

## **John 11:41-42**

## Praying for the Spiritual

In the story about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead Jesus prays before raising Lazarus. *What did Jesus say was the reason for all He was doing?*

- Not just that Lazarus be raised but that the people might believe.

Jesus healed the sick and had compassion on the afflicted. It was part of His mission. But that was not his primary objective. God has a bigger plan in this world than making sure everyone is physically healthy.

*What was Jesus' primary objective?*

- To save the world from the power of sin and death.

*Why is it important that our prayer priorities match Jesus' priorities?*

- We are His people and carry on His mission.
- His agenda becomes our agenda.

There is a great need to transform our prayers to better reflect God's priorities. Let's get some clues about how to do that from Jesus' model prayer. Listen to the number of physical requests and spiritual requests in the Lord's prayer

### Matthew 6:9-15

*Which things in this prayer are spiritual in nature and which are physical?*

- Spiritual—Praying for the kingdom, Praying God's will be done, Forgiveness, Resisting temptation
- Physical—Daily bread

Jesus does mention physical needs but they don't take the priority that the spiritual needs take. If we have a friend who is not a Christian and has cancer, most people's first thought is to pray for the cancer to be healed. When we have spiritual priorities, cancer comes second to sin.

*What does Jesus start with and why is that a good starting place in prayer?*

- Jesus' prayer starts with God.

*What does Jesus recognize about God as he starts this prayer?*

- His relationship with us—Father
- His holiness and awesomeness—hallowed be your name.

God is our first priority in prayer. We recognize who He is and appreciate what He has done. We don't dive in with our wish list but start by respecting God.

*What is the second thing Jesus prays for?*

- The kingdom.

The kingdom is about the reign of God and works together with God's will being done. When God reigns, His will is done. Jesus is showing us that we are

to seek out God's priorities over our own—"your will be done..."

*What is difficult in praying for God's will to happen in our lives over our own will?*

- He may not always do things the way we like Him to.

*How would our prayers be different if we started praying more for God's will to be done and less for our own will?*

*How can we better reflect a kingdom agenda in our prayers as Jesus did?*

- We need to spend more time praying for purity and moral character
- We need more confession in our prayers and relationships
- We need to pray that God would use us to spread His message of redemption.

In the middle of the prayer is a request for our "daily bread." *How does asking for bread reflect a spiritual priority?*

- It is trusting God for everything—even our food. He doesn't ask for a pantry full of food so that He can feel self-reliant. He asks for enough to make it through the day.

Jesus concludes the prayer with two requests that are spiritual in nature.

- Forgiveness
- Deliverance

*How does Jesus say our relationships with others affect our prayers?*

- If we haven't forgiven others we cannot expect to be forgiven.

We live in a world that has problems. We are surrounded by death and disease. We are aware of crime and hatred. There is a great need for God in our world. As His ambassadors in the world, we have a word from God to tell the world but we also have a word to tell God about what is happening in our world. There is a need to express our deepest concerns to God because He is the only one who can really do anything about them (1 Peter 5:7). In prayer we bring our concerns into contact with God's concerns and the first is changed by the second. His priorities become our priorities. His will becomes our will.

### **Application**

*What is the hardest part for you in putting your spiritual needs ahead of your physical needs?*

*How would praying for people's souls have a bigger impact than only praying for their physical healing?*

### **Put it into Practice**

This week, pray that God would open your eyes to see the world around you more like He sees it. Pray to see beyond people's physical health to what is under the surface and try to meet them there and help meet those needs.