

Why Do We Pray If God Knows Everything?

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We're going to finish a brief series that we've done on the omniscience of God here this evening and answer this question, "Why do we pray if God already knows everything?" And we want to be able to just give you some biblical way to think about that and I think that by the time that we are done, it's going to be something that actually greatly refreshes you in your prayer life as we consider what Scripture has to say about it. It's actually been three weeks, I think, since we were together on a Tuesday evening, and the last two Tuesdays we considered the doctrine of the omniscience of God, that God knows everything. He knows everything real and potential. He knows the future. He knows himself. He knows his creation. He knows us inside and out. So God is omniscient. He knows everything. And the following week, we saw that there are life attitudes that should flow from God's omniscience for the Christian and actually for every man who would ever consider the doctrine of omniscience. Omniscience produces reverence for God because you see how high and great and lofty he is. No one knows everything except for God. It produces a love for his kingdom and a settled mindset of obedience and dependence on him. We realize that sin and disobedience is futile because God sees everything, he knows everything, and because he knows everything and because he loves us, we can depend upon him for our needs; in Christ, we can depend on him to wash away our sins. And so just a consideration of the fullness of God's omniscience drives our lives into a particular mindset that serves us all of the days of our lives and what I would have you notice is that there is a certain way, there is a certain method of thinking about these things that drive you into the right direction spiritually. Your starting point is God and his attributes and you start your thinking, your understanding, with who God is and what his attributes are and once you start there, then certain things start to flow from that. If God is holy, then we must be holy. If God is gracious, then we can appeal to him in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. If God is great, then we would be humble before him rather than self-centered and self-seeking in our lives. Where you start your thinking determines the trajectory of everything else in life and having started with his omniscience and saying, "Okay, there are life attitudes that come from that," it narrows you into a particular realm of right thinking. Then we come tonight to go one more step specific to a particular practical application of those truths. If God knows everything and we are humble before him and we're loving him and obedient and dependent upon him, then that's going to have, it's going to work its way out in the way that we think about prayer as well and that's what we want to consider briefly tonight. I don't expect this study to go very, very long.

So the question is: why do we pray if God knows everything? Why do we pray if God knows everything? Here's how I would want you to frame your thinking about that question: that question, why do we pray if God knows everything, that question shows an undeveloped view of God and of prayer. The very fact that that question would be asked shows that someone is missing the big picture on a number of things. And that's okay, it's okay to, you know, one of the reasons that we teach and we study together is so that we could grow but what I want you to see is that that very question shows a very flawed and missing view of the doctrine of omniscience. Let's ask the question this way in light of omniscience: does God need us to pray so that he can get information from us? Do we need to pray in order to inform God about our situation? Well, that couldn't possibly be the case because God is omniscient. He knows everything. Jesus said, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him." So we can't be praying for the purpose of conveying information to God that he is lacking, that would contradict omniscience. Let's frame it a different way, ask a different question and this gets a little bit closer to the nerve center of your heart, maybe, and perhaps as we touch this nerve, it can liberate you from some bad thinking that gives your spiritual life a bad trajectory. Ask the question this way: does God need your counsel in order to know the best course of action for the things that you're praying about? Does God need your advice so he can incline himself in the right direction? And obviously the answer is no. God already knows the best course of action because God is omniscient. He knows everything. God doesn't need new information and so we're not praying in order to inform God or to give God our counsel and our advice as if he were wavering and waffling on what he should do in any given circumstance. That violates omniscience.

So what that means is this, it means that we need to rethink and retrain our entire thinking about God and prayer if we're going to contemplate prayer rightly in light of the doctrine of omniscience and that's what we get to do briefly here together this evening. Why do we pray then? If God is omniscient, why do we pray? And I'm going to give you three answers to that question that are kind of independent of one another but they reinforce each other. I'm not pretending that we're going to say everything about this topic that we could, but when we're done, here's what's going to happen to you: you're going to walk out of here this evening with a clear sense of purpose in prayer, why you pray in a way that is going to refresh and reinvigorate your commitment to prayer because all of these things are compelling.

Why do we pray? Point 1: you should pray because the Bible commands it. You should pray because the Bible commands it. Now, let's go to Matthew 6 and we'll kind of use this as our home-base tonight, Matthew 6, as we go back to this passage one more time before we move onto other things next Tuesday. Matthew 6, beginning in verse 7. Jesus says, "when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Now, we looked at this two weeks ago, three weeks ago, and we made this observation: that's a statement of omniscience. Before you say anything, God already knows what you need. He knows because he's omniscient. There's nothing lacking in his mental, intellectual, wise arsenal of knowledge. Everything is there. Everything that is conceivable, everything that is true

and right is in the mind of God already and so God doesn't need you to give him a long lengthy recitation of facts so that he can be brought up to speed on the situation. No, God already knows what you need before you ask him.

There is something liberating about that. I've said this about prayer in times gone by. You know, let's be honest, all of us feel our own inadequacy in prayer. Whenever the topic comes up, we immediately start to slump our shoulders and say, "Yeah, I know I don't pray as much as I should. I don't pray like I should," and all of that and we feel very weak and inadequate in prayer as a result of that. I'm going to talk about that more at the end of the message but here's what I want you to remember, something that I love to say and have repeated many many times over the course of my ministry: if you are struggling in your prayer life, the answer is not for you to try to pray longer. That's where everybody starts and that's always a mistake. You come to this recognition, "Oh, I've strayed from prayer. I'm not doing well in prayer. Well, I'm going to start praying longer then." Well, that doesn't even make sense, does it? You say, "Well, I don't know. Maybe it does." No, it doesn't make sense. If you're praying badly, why would you want to pray more?

We were at a restaurant not long ago with my mother on her birthday and the food was miserably bad. It was a big disappointment to want to take my mom out for her birthday and then the food was just so bad on that night. Well, look, and actually we complained about my mom's meal and here's what they did. We said, "This food is bad. It's not acceptable. You need to fix this." So what did they do? They brought out a replacement that was just as bad as the entrée before. Well look, if the food is bad, giving you more of the same food doesn't fix the problem, does it? You understand that. Why do you think that giving us more bad food would compensate for the bad food that you gave us in the first place? Well, brothers and sisters in Christ, if you're praying badly, if your prayers are meager and inadequate, then it would seem obvious to me anyway, that the answer to that is to not just double down on praying badly and just expand the time in which you are spending on it. Why would you do that? That doesn't make any sense whatsoever. Jesus says, "Don't be like those Gentiles who use meaningless repetition and say the same things over and over again in an effort to get God to hear them." Jesus said, "Don't be like that." The answer is not multiplying words, in other words, in order to fix your poor prayer life. That's not the answer.

Jesus says, look at it there again in verse 8, he says, "don't be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." God already knows. This means that it's possible that brevity is better than multiplicity of words. And what does Jesus do based on omniscience? Just make this very simple observation, verse 9, "Pray, then, in this way." Notice this, what Jesus gives you in light of the doctrine of omniscience, your Father knows what you need before you ask him, is a command, it is an imperative. He says, "Pray like this." Why do we pray if God knows everything? Well, at a very simple level, we pray because Jesus commands it and for those of us that call him Lord, that's more than enough reason for us to pray. We recognize his authority and if we knew nothing else, if there was no other information to inform our mind, it would be sufficient, it would be enough, it would be adequate to drive us to prayer to simply say, "Jesus told me to. Jesus commands me to pray and therefore I pray." So we pray because the Bible

commands it. You should pray because Jesus commands you to pray. He says, "Because God knows everything, you pray like this." So entering into the mind of your Savior, entering into the mind of your Lord, you should be thinking like this, "Well, to Jesus, omniscience did not make prayer irrelevant, omniscience became the grounds upon which we pray." So why do we pray if God knows everything? Because Jesus said to and the fact that he commands us is enough.

Now, elsewhere the Bible makes this same point. Look over at Ephesians to a passage we'll get to very, very soon on Sunday mornings, Sunday mornings at 9 o'clock here at Truth Community Church. Ephesians 6:18. The Apostle Paul says, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit." So Paul, having laid out the grandeur of salvation and calling people to unity in the body and holiness of character, he says, "You pray at all times in the Spirit." Scripture commands us to pray. Look over at Colossians 4:2 just to show you that this isn't an isolated matter. Colossians 4:2 says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." Devote yourself to prayer. Pray at all times in the Spirit. Jesus said, "Pray then in this way." Turn to the next book over, 1 Thessalonians 5:16. "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Why do you pray when God knows everything? Well, you pray because Scripture tells you to, because your Lord commands it, and that in itself is sufficient for us to obey.

Now, it's the nature of God, it's the nature of Scripture not to simply give us bear commands without giving us also understanding that informs our obedience to the command. Scripture gives us this command to pray but it also informs the command with enough information, enough motivation, to help us know and to be motivated to follow through on the command. I love this about Scripture. And so we could answer the question with a second way: why should you pray if God already knows everything? Point 2: you should pray because God uses prayer to bless you. God uses prayer to bless you therefore you should pray even though God knows everything.

Now, go back to the Sermon on the Mount in the book of Matthew. We'll go to Matthew 7 now. Matthew 7. Remember that in chapter 6, verse 9, Jesus had said, "Pray in this way." He gives an imperative. He commands prayer. And then later on in the Sermon on the Mount, he attaches promises to the whole concept of asking things from God. He promises certain blessings that are attached and the word of God, the promise of God, can never be broken. God never violates his promise. He always does what he says he will do. And so Jesus, as we are mindful of the faithfulness of God to keep his promise, he is a promise keeping God, then our ears should really perk up when we see what Jesus says in Matthew 7:7. Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." Now, in the original language, the description of this has the idea of ongoing asking, ongoing knocking, ongoing seeking, that it becomes a pattern of life to apply yourself to make requests before the throne of heaven, to pray and ask God for things and that Scripture says God will respond to that.

Now, in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, we don't have time to develop this thought fully, just enough to qualify it for tonight, this is not a passage that promises or guarantees that God will give you every physical request that you ever make in prayer. That's not the context, that's not Jesus' point at all. What Jesus is teaching here and in the Sermon on the Mount, is that we should be asking God to work in our hearts so that our lives reflect the righteousness that true repentance brings forth. The Sermon on the Mount opens with, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." Actually, it opens one verse back saying, "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Then, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." It starts with an attitude of repentance and then goes and shows what repentance produces in the life of a true disciple.

Now, beloved, here's the thing for you tonight and just in this context of how God uses prayer to bless you. Well, as a repentant disciple, as someone who is seeking Christ and desiring righteousness and hungering and thirsting after righteousness, what Jesus is saying here is that you should continually be asking God to enhance your spiritual growth. You should continually be praying and asking God to multiply the evidence of his grace in your heart and in your life. Why would you do that when God already knows everything? Because he answers. Because when we ask for the right things, when we ask according to God's will, he hears us and he responds and he gives us that which we ask for. So he uses prayer to bless us.

Here's the thing: somehow in a way that I won't pretend to be able to explain in direct causation to you, somehow, beloved, God in his sovereignty and in his omniscience, in his full control of all things that ever happen, somehow God gives to us in response to our asking and in James 4:2, he says, "You don't have because you don't ask." So Scripture gives us this picture that we can't fully get our minds around that God is fully sovereign and always accomplishes his will, and yet somehow woven into the matrix of the outworking of his sovereignty, it pleases God to manifest his blessing to us in response to our prayers.

Think about it this way, think about farming. I'm not sure if there are any farmers in here with us this evening. I don't see any but you know enough about farming to understand this illustration. A Christian farmer who fully believes in the sovereignty of God would do what? He would plant and he would harvest. Why? Because in God's sovereignty, that is the means that he has appointed to supply for the farmer. The farmer goes and he plants and he maintains the field and then when it's full grown, he harvests the field. The Christian farmer doesn't say, "God is sovereign and therefore I don't have to do anything." Everybody understands that the way the universe works is the farmer gets a crop only when he plants and harvests. That's how God blesses the farmer. Well, in a similar way, beloved, the way that it is with you is this: is that we receive blessing through prayer that we would otherwise miss somehow. Somehow God gives in response to our asking and in light of that and the fact that God is far more willing to give than you are willing to ask, that God is generous and abundant with his people and we are sometimes meager and shriveled in our prayers, we need to understand that God is far more willing to give in response to prayer than you are even to ask in that. Regardless of

whatever your experience in prayer has been, regardless of how you evaluate your faithfulness in prayer, step back from your own self-centered perspective on it and look at what Scripture says. God gives in response to prayer. That is motivation for you to pray. That's why you pray. And beloved, we may not understand how human prayer intersects with divine sovereignty but watch this, mark this: our overriding trust in God's word, our confidence that Jesus always tells us what is true and God always keeps his promises is more than enough for us to say, "I don't have to understand how all of this works. I don't have to know how an internal combustion engine works in order to drive the vehicle. Christ tells me that prayer, God blesses us through prayer therefore I will pray because I see that laid out in God's word." And don't you see it in your own life? Haven't you seen, Christian friend, haven't you seen that you have seen God, haven't you witnessed God dispense blessing in your life in response to prayer? Haven't you seen that? You've seen that, haven't you? So you have experience in your life that affirms what Scripture says on its own. We pray because God uses prayer to bless us.

Now, thirdly, there's a final reason here that I want to lay out for you this evening. Why should you pray if God knows everything? Well, you know, point 3: we pray in order to incline ourselves to God, in order to bend ourselves in his direction, and this is a reversal of the way that most people think about prayer. We think that the idea of prayer, somehow we got it into our Arminian minds that we pray in order to incline God to us; in order to make God favorable to us. Well, look, God can't possibly, if you're a Christian, God cannot possibly be more favorable to you than he already is. He has already manifested himself to you in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has reconciled you to his holiness through the shed blood of our Savior on the cross. God is already favorable to you and therefore the idea is not, the weakness in the link is not the heart of God toward you, it's your heart toward God that is weak. It is your heart that has remnants of being stubborn in it. It's your heart that is cold and indifferent, not God's. So how do we change that dynamic? Well, we pray in order to incline ourselves to God.

Go back to Matthew 6, if you would. Jesus here describes a pattern of prayer where you consciously submit to God, you consciously worship him, you consciously yield to him, you consciously depend upon him. Look at what he says there in verse 9. He says, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.'" Notice the starting point that Christ calls you to, notice the cornerstone of your prayer: worship. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name." Another cornerstone in perfect symmetry with that one, "God, your kingdom come. God, your will be done. God, here's what I'm doing in prayer, I know that you know everything, there is not a weakness in your knowledge but there is a weakness in my heart and so, God, I exercise the spiritual discipline, I exercise the spiritual effort, I make the motion toward you." As James says, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." "God, I am drawing near to you in order to submit. I'm drawing near to you in order to express my dependence upon you."

Look at verses 11 through 13, "Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen." What is Jesus teaching us here other than to incline our heart to worship, incline it to submission, incline it to physical and spiritual dependence upon him. That's why you pray, it's because your heart is cold and rocky without it. So we pray in order to line ourselves up with the will of God, not to line God up with the will of man. It's a completely different perspective and you can incline yourself to God with a full understanding of his omniscience and suddenly that starts to make sense. You say, "Oh, that does make sense. I know my own heart enough to know that I'm often cold, I'm often indifferent and so I pray in order to incline myself in the direction of God." And that's why we pray. We pray because Jesus commanded us to pray. We pray because God uses prayer to bless us. He mediates blessing through prayer. We pray to incline ourselves to God.

Now, with all that said, you're just like I am in this sense in that you feel inadequate in prayer and sometimes the very concept of prayer, teaching on prayer, has a tendency to kind of weigh you down because you know you don't measure up, right? You feel that way. You know that your prayers aren't passionate enough and all of that. Well, let me give you something here to shift your perspective and hopefully to encourage your heart because I'm not here tonight to wag my finger at you and say you need to pray more and why don't you pray better and all of that. That's not the point of this at all and so you can breathe a sigh of relief. There's not a guilt trip on the other end of this focus. Here's the thing, beloved: rather than focusing on your inadequacy in prayer, we can assume that, we can take that for granted, that's not where our focus is supposed to be anyway. Remember why you can approach God in the first place and when you remember this, then the motivation to prayer will take care of itself. That sometimes burdensome, irksome duty that some people, not all, some people fall into and say, "Oh," all of that can change when, and we can all be strengthened in prayer when we remember this, Christianity 101, remember this, beloved: you have access to God not because of the strength and fervency of your own prayers. That's not why God receives you. You know, and there came a point in my life where the impossibility of praying enough finally sank into my Arminian, at that time Arminian head. Think about it, if you prayed 10 hours a day, would that be worthy of Christ? Could you pray enough in order to earn the favor of a holy God in your life? You can't. We don't approach God on the basis of our works and even if you prayed, if you did nothing but prayed 24 hours a day, it still wouldn't be enough to bridge the gap between you and God because of your sin. That's if you did everything you possibly could, you would still fall short, and so we don't approach God on that basis anyway. Why is it that you have access to God? Why is it that God is willing to receive you? Why does God bend his ear favorably to your prayers? Beloved, it's because you and I approach God in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. That's why we have access. Christ has already satisfied the Father with his obedience. Christ has already satisfied the demands of God's justice by shedding his blood on the cross. He has removed your sin from your account through his death on the cross. Let the thunder affirm the truth of what I'm saying. Beloved, Christ has pleased God, has he not? Hasn't Christ satisfied the Father completely with his obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross? Wasn't he sinless? Wasn't his sacrifice to the Father perfect? Didn't God accept it and therefore manifest his pleasure with his Son by raising him from the dead, supernaturally showing, putting the stamp of his approval on Christ as his beloved Son,

giving proof to all the world by raising him from the dead and receiving him into heaven? Isn't that true?

Well, beloved, understand and always, always remember that you are approaching God in and through the righteousness of Christ, in and through the sacrifice of Christ. God accepts Christ. The Father loves his Son and accepts him. And when we come to God in his Son, clinging to Christ, based on the work of Christ on our behalf, when we are clothed in Christ as we approach the throne, beloved, you can know this and take it to the bank, you can know that God is pleased to receive your prayers. Not because of the inherent worth of your own words but because your Brother, your Advocate, your Intercessor has come and has brought you into himself and therefore gladly gives you access through him to your heavenly Father and that is the basis upon which God is pleased to receive your prayers.

So, beloved, why do we pray when God already knows everything? What can we say as we think about our own inadequacy in prayer? Beloved, don't start with, don't focus on your own performance and check your watch and, "Oh, I got my half hour of prayer in today." Don't do that. That puts the focus on you and that's the wrong place to be. Rest in the finished work of Christ that pleases the Father. Understand that the door of heaven is open and God is pleased to hear your prayers when you bring them in the name of Christ. That's why you pray. That's how you can pray, it's because Christ has purchased access with his own blood on your behalf and resting in him, coming to God in him, the Father hears your prayers in the name of Christ, received on the basis of Christ, offered in the name of Christ, and our rest in Christ and the promise of God to answer our prayers gives us all the motivation that we need to move into prayer rather than getting stuck on a piece of speculation. Why do we pray if God already knows everything and stumbling over that which should never be a stumbling block? Go the path that says Christ calls you to this. Go the path that says God promises to bless you. Go the path that says prayer is designed to incline you to God. And in that, let the omniscience of God draw you to believing prayer and watch over time as God manifests his faithfulness to his word to you.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we do gladly come in the name of Christ here this evening and we thank you for the marvelous way that you have condescended to us; that in the incarnation Christ came to us, as it were, Christ came to earth in order to offer himself a sacrifice for our sins. We thank you that the Holy Spirit came to us with the Gospel message, that message that said, "Repent and believe in Christ for eternal life," and the Spirit came and opened our hearts to hear, opened our hearts and changed our nature so that we would willingly come in response to that message. Oh, Father, thank you that your Spirit and your word continually point us to Christ, point us to you and your promises to receive your children; that it pleases you as a Father to give good gifts to your children, to give what is good to those who ask him. That pleases you. That makes you glad. It gives glory to you and so, Father, we have all of the incentive and all of the understanding that we need to approach you in prayer and we do that here this evening.

Father, we ask you to increase the work of your Spirit in our hearts; to sanctify us still more in the truth. Father, to work in our corporate body a deeper, greater, broader unity with one another. To help us, Father, that we might walk in a manner that is worthy of Christ; to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Father, to ask you for that which would please you; to order our steps and to arrange and orchestrate your providence in such a way that each one of us would most certainly enter into heaven at the end of our earthly lives in a safe and wondrous manner even as the Apostle Paul spoke about in 2 Corinthians 4 that you would deliver him safely into your kingdom.

Father, we ask not so much for things of earthly temporal nature, although we ask you to supply our daily bread for sure and, Father, we ask you for the rich blessings of a sanctified heart, of a purified mind, of forgiveness of our sins, and that you would order our steps in such a way that you would not lead us into temptation but that you would deliver us decisively from evil, Father, and help us to walk through this wicked world in a way that pleases you, where we are conscious of your favor and we know that your goodness is upon us.

Father, those are the things that we ask for. Those are the things that we need. We realize that you already know all of that. You know that we need these things more than we know that we need them. But, Father, we come and pray because your word bids us to, your word commands us to and you said that you would give if we asked. So tonight, O God, we ask and we trust that your answers will be evident, that they will be obvious, and that as the answers come it will strengthen us to pray still more. Father, as we begin to see answers to prayer in tangible ways, in seeing people converted under the sound of our pulpit, under the ministry, the members of this church and people coming to Christ, Father, as we see that begin to happen and we pray, Father, that it would happen soon, as we see these things begin to happen, Father, may it not cause us to slack off and say, "Oh, that was nice," but may it cause us to double our efforts even more and to ask that you would turn the sprinkles into rain and the rain into showers and the showers into an opening up of the heavens of the spiritual blessings of Christ upon our individual and corporate lives.

Father, I thank you for this church. I thank you for these faithful brothers and sisters in Christ that are in front of me here this evening. May you bless their love for your word. May you bless their desire to be pleasing to you. May you bless their faithfulness to Christ and to this church, to the ministry that you have given to them. Bless them in their work and their home and their family and their parenting and their marriages. O Father, we think of the broad range of needs and when you have said that you would bless us if we would only ask, well, Father, we may not ask enough but we're asking tonight. Father, in response to your word, we come and we ask and we trust that what we see henceforth will be a manifestation of your promise that to those who ask, they receive. To those who seek, they find. To those who knock, the door is opened to them. May it be ever thus for those of us who know Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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