

The Purpose of Prayer:

How Prayer Changes Us

There are many legitimate reasons why we might want to pray, reasons that reflect the message of the two great commands of love for God and love for neighbor. But there is a unique way in which prayer has a focus on the person who is praying: When we pray, one of God's goals is to use that prayer to change *us*. From this perspective, prayer is for *our* good. It is one of the means by which our relationship with God is built. It is also a means that God can use to accomplish his purposes through us!

Prayer provides us with an opportunity to learn to *agree* with God. It would be totally backwards if the goal of our prayer was to get God to do what *we* want - to get him to conform himself to *our* will. God is greater than we; he is not *our* servant - and we should remember this when we pray!

We need to be willing to *listen* to God, as well as to *talk* to him. God communicates his will to us through his Word; we express our thoughts to God through prayer. As *we* reflect on God's will (as expressed in his Word) and compare it to our thoughts, desires and values (as expressed in our prayers), we may discover that our will does *not* always match God's will. We may discover that there are areas of our life which need to change.

As these changes take place, our values will begin to line-up with God's will; and the way we pray will change. Asking for things will not be the primary focus of our prayer. In fact, we will discover that we want to spend time talking to God, simply to express praise, worship and thanks to him, because of who he is!

As our values change, our focus will become less *self*-centered. This will impact all of our prayer, for we will begin to desire what God desires. When we ask for things, our prayers will cease to be a mere "shopping list" of our *own* wants and desires. They will begin to be an expression of *God's* will - at least, we will strive to make it that way. (Since we are not yet perfect, our prayers may be influenced by a mixture of motives - some of which we might not realize at the time.)

Even when we are uncertain about God's will in a matter, our desire will be for him to answer in a way that brings the greatest honor and glory to *him*, and accomplishes the most good for *others*. These desires will begin to eclipse any desires we may have for *self*.

When our values have changed to the point that our hearts begin to cry out, "Your will be done" (Matthew 6:10; 26:39, 42, 44), we will know with *certainty* that our prayers will be answered. After all, we will only be asking God to do what he already wants to do, and what he promises to do!