



# The Preparation of the Prayer

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## INTRODUCTION

The movie *Evan Almighty* is about Evan Baxter (Steve Carrell), a congressman who is told by God (Morgan Freeman) to build an ark in preparation for a great flood.

One evening, as Evan and his wife, Joan (Lauren Graham), are getting ready to retire for the evening, Joan comments, "You know, those boys were having so much fun tonight, I thought I would never get them to bed, and then Ryan did the cutest thing—he asked if we could all pray together."

"Really!" Evan responds. "What...uh...what did you pray about?"

"He met a dog; what do you think he prayed about?"

"Oh, yuck," says Evan. "That's a walking Petri dish, that dog."

Joan continues, "And Jordan was very precise. He prayed for good visibility and good weather on the hiking trip tomorrow."

"The hiking trip?" Evan asks. "Oh, right, yeah, the hiking trip. Yeah, yeah, yeah."

"Wanna know what I prayed for?" Joan asks.

"Yeah, what did you pray for?"

"I prayed we'd become closer as a family," Joan replies.

"Honey," says Evan, "you don't need to pray for that to happen. I will make that happen."

"What would you pray for?" Joan asks.

"Me?" Evan asks. "I don't know, praying just—"

"Honey," Joan interrupts, "you're the one who said you wanted to change the world. That's a pretty big job. If it were me, I would take all the help I could get."

As Joan goes to sleep, Evan watches the news and hears a commentator repeating Evan's campaign promise of "changing the world." The commentator remarks that, "Many have tried, and many have failed."

Evan then slips out of the bed and gets on his knees and begins to pray.

"Hello there, hi. This is Evan Baxter. Umm, just wanted to say 'thank you' for everything. Thank you for the new car and for the house. The house is great...umm...love it. I mean, I picked it out, but you created matter and everything, so...I just wanted to say that Joan makes a good point, and that I am now in a position of great power, and I know that with great power comes great responsibility. So, God, please help me change the world. Okay, that's it. I'm hanging up now. God bless—well...you."



## **BEFORE PRAYER BECOMES VITAL THE HEART OF THE PRAYER-ER NEEDS PREPARATION.**

Two major preparations must be made to open the door for a vital prayer life.

### **Dealing with the Whys**

One major question often keeps many individuals from prayer.

**Question:** "Why pray? What is the point of prayer when God knows the future and is already in control of everything. If we cannot change God's mind, why should we pray?"

The question reveals our misconception about prayer. We are deceived when we think prayer is first about getting what we want from a stingy God.

## ***Because of the relationship***

- Prayer not only establishes a relationship with God, it is vital to maintaining our relationship with Him.
- To illustrate, two friends who are in constant communion learn about each other, do things together, and share problems with each other.
- Thus, the key element of prayer is that it establishes a relationship with God.
- It is how we were created

*Gen 3:8-9 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

Prayer is essential to fellowship with God. Not just to have our prayers answered by God, nor just because the Scriptures tell us to, though that is reason enough. God is the Father of the entire human race, and God cares for us. ([1 Peter 5:7](#)) This means the child of God can pray, ask, and cast all his care upon God, his Father. Paul states in [Romans 8:15](#), when we are His children, adopted into His family, we can begin calling him, "Father, dear Father."

Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived. Prayer offers no ironclad guarantees—just the certain promise that we need not live that mystery alone.

—Philip Yancey, author of [\*Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?\*](#)

## ***Because of the testimony***

- Prayer is recognizing who God is and offering Him glory, honor, and adoration.

- Examples of this are found throughout the Bible, especially in the Psalms. Jesus illustrates this in the Lord's Prayer in [Matthew 6:9-13](#).

*Matt 6:9-13*

*9 "This, then, is how you should pray:*

*"Our Father in heaven,*

*hallowed be your name,*

*10 your kingdom come,*

*your will be done*

*on earth as it is in heaven.*

*11 Give us today our daily bread.*

*12 Forgive us our debts,*

*as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*13 And lead us not into temptation,*

*but deliver us from the evil one.'*

*NIV*

### ***Because of our model***

- Jesus prayed

*Luke 5:16*

*16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

*NIV*

- The Apostles reflected Jesus' attitude toward prayer and encouraged and commended prayer in their writings.
- In [Philippians 4:6](#), Paul tells believers to pray for everything with thanksgiving.

*Phil 4:5-7*

*6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*NIV*

- In [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#), Paul writes, “Keep on praying.” Prayer, for Paul, is the ultimate lifeline for the believer to God.

### ***Because of our need***

- [James 1:5-7](#) says

*James 1:5*

*5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

*NIV*

- Prayer is seeking direction from God. In [Matthew 7:7-11](#), Jesus talks about asking, seeking, and knocking, “For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks.”

*Matt 7:7-12*

*7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*9 "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more*

*will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*

- Prayer makes a difference? [James 5:16](#) provides another worthwhile answer.

*James 5:16*

*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. NIV*

- We may not know how, we may not know the specifics, but God says it makes a difference.

**So Why Pray?** Prayer is a 'transforming friendship' that provides something more than getting answers. This 'transforming friendship' is the setting in which we develop our confidence in God's care. Here we prove that he is looking out for us. By prayer we do not merely get the gifts; we also get to know the giver. In prayer we hear his heartbeat, grasp his agenda and begin to identify with his plans for us and our world.

## **Dealing with the Barricades**

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance ... it is laying hold of his highest willingness.

—Archbishop Richard Trench, (September 9, 1807 – March 28, 1886) was an Anglican archbishop and poet.

But sometimes we have erected barricades in the way of his willingness.

### ***Resentment and Anger***

- Maybe the one you're mad at is **God**. Whatever it is between you and God, it does no good to pout and go off to sulk. Say it. SCREAM it, if that's what it takes. Let your body express the anger. Whatever you do, share your anger with God. The

Lord will see you being truthful, and will respond with love and grace.

### **Toward God**

*Hab 1:2-3 2 How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? 3 Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds.*

- Maybe you're harboring **resentment or anger** against someone, or against a group of someones. In that case, first *hold them in prayer*, then ask God to forgive you for the anger, then ask God to open up an opportunity to go to that person and renounce that anger in their presence. Then, get up and go reconcile with that person.

*Matt 5:23-24*

*23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. NIV*

*1 Peter 3:7*

*7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. NIV*

### **Pretenders to His Throne**

*Ex 20:3*

*3 "You shall have no other gods before me.*

- Maybe it's superstition.

- Maybe dabbling in the occult, or paganisms old or new.
- Maybe you still 'play' with an ouija board or tarot cards, or pay attention to horoscopes and palm readers.
- Even a little of this does a lot of damage to your relationship with the real Lord. You're cheating on God; you're being a disloyal lover.

### ***Ingratitude***

- Maybe you've had deep mystical interchange with God before, but you rarely **thank or praise** the Lord for anything specific.

*Phil 4:5-7*

*6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*NIV*

### ***Too Much Talking***

- Maybe the Lord can't get a word in edgewise from **all your talking**. To pray right, there must also be lots of time for quiet listening.

*Ps 46:10*

*10 "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."*

### ***Compromise***

- Perhaps you recently **compromised with the world** around you in a way that compromises your relations with God at its very root. For example, the Christians among the executives of Enron or

WorldCom, whose dealings smack of the idol [Mammon](#) (Wealth). Which god do you follow?

*James 5:15-16*


*16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

*NIV*

- Maybe there's a **specific sinful act** you do that's been eating away at you. A sin that angers God. When you at last can name the sin and call it sin, you can take it before God to ask for forgiveness. Prayer time can be the start of repentance - turning away from the sin and committing yourself against it with your life.

**Barricades in your life** will keep you from discovering the missing ingredient. Are there barricades you need to forsake or confess right now?

Failing to deal with the questions and failing to deal with the barricades will keep you from prayer.

 **BEFORE PRAYER BECOMES VITAL THE HEART OF THE PRAY-ER NEEDS PREPARATION.**

## **SUMMARY**

We need to know why to pray.

- Because of the relationship
- Because of the testimony
- Because of our model
- Because of our need

We need to clear the barricades from our lives.

- Resentment and Anger
- Pretenders to His Throne
- Ingratitude
- Too Much Talking
- Compromise

## **CHALLENGE**

Preparing the heart of the Pray-er is an us thing. It is we clear the way by understanding why we should pray and by removing the barricades that stand in the way.

Are you ready? Is your heart prepared?