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**Come to Him Who  
Answers Prayer**



# Why Pray?

*by Kurt Reinhardt*

**N**ow if God is going to do what He wants anyway, do our prayers do anything? First of all, without question the very act of praying does great things for us in our life of faith. Prayer is born of the life of faith but it also serves the life of faith. We pray because we believe, but we also pray *that* we might believe. Prayer leads us deeper into our relationship with God. Just as communication in our human relationships deepens our bonds with one another, so our relationship with God is deepened through our communication with Him. As the Lord shares Himself with us through His Word, so too through our word we share ourselves with Him.

He comes to us that we might come to Him. God could grant all that we ask without our speaking a word to Him, but He draws us deeper into our lives with Him by giving us the opportunity to share ourselves with Him. He draws us closer as He invites and enables us to bring all our needs to Him.

## Our dear Father draws us deeper into His family

Although an infant has a relationship with his parents from the moment the child is born to them, that relationship deepens and grows as the child grows and learns to communicate with his parents. In the beginning they share all with him but through their speaking to him he learns also to share himself with them. They know him from the start but his knowledge of them grows through his communication with them. His relationship to them deepens as he learns to share himself with them.

So too in our life with God, from the moment of our birth as His children in Holy Baptism we have a relationship with Him. He is our dear Father and we are His dear Children. As He shares Himself with us through His Word, He also teaches us to share ourselves with Him. As He speaks to us, He opens our lips that we might speak to Him.



Rev. Kurt Reinhardt presents at Lutheran Church–Canada's 2014 National Convention in Vancouver. (Photo: Gabor Gasztanyi)

In prayer we live out our relationship with our heavenly Father. As we encounter need in this world (our own need and the needs of others), the Lord opens our lips through faith to bring these needs to our heavenly Father. As these needs bring us to call upon the name of the Lord they lead us to live out our Father-child relationship with Him. We pray to Him because He has revealed Himself to us in His Son Jesus to be our dear Father in heaven. As we act in faith on this revelation we confess it and so are confirmed in it. I call out to God because He has shown me in Jesus that there is no other God who can save like Him. As I call out to Him in such faith, I exercise that faith and it is built up and strengthened.

Here is the reason that God allows need in my life and why He doesn't always take it away immediately. Here is the reason why He allows suffering and trial in life: that I might learn to pray. He allows these needs to come upon me that I might be turned toward the Lord and call upon His name. He allows these needs to come upon those that I love that I might learn to spread out priestly hands with Jesus and intercede for them. He allows need to come upon the world that I might cry out to heaven for it. He allows people to persecute and hurt me that I might learn to pray "Father forgive them." The Lord could provide for all of my needs without my prayer as He does with the rain and the sun for the whole of creation. Yet by drawing me through need to call upon Him in prayer He leads me to live out the truth

that He is my heavenly Father. God will grant whatever He wills to grant for me even without my prayers but by enabling me by His Spirit to ask for these things He draws me ever deeper into the truth that He is God.

## Our dear Father involves us in His work

Now our prayers serve an invaluable role in our life of faith but they do also accomplish great things in the world. In them as I mentioned earlier we take part in God's active speaking in the world. God could without question accomplish His will without our prayers but He chooses out of His great grace to involve us in His work as His true children. Our prayers as they are prayed to the Father in the Spirit through the Son truly take up their place in the ongoing creative and active speaking of the Holy Trinity. God wills to do this out of love for us because we are His children. Through our prayers God wills to provide for the needs of others. He wills to keep evil at bay in the world. He wills to prosper His Gospel and expand and strengthen His Church. Through our prayers God wills to accomplish His good and gracious will for the world. As we pray with Jesus in God's will, the Lord does some of His mightiest work through us.



If we were to fully grasp this truth we can see how quickly we would take up St. Paul's encouragement to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:16). In our sinful tendency to see ourselves standing on our own two feet independent of God we do tend to lean towards our own action when it comes to the needs we run into in the world. At times we treat prayer as a last resort when our own strength fails us. We treat prayer like little children who only cry out for their parents' help after trying to do something on their own until they finally break down in frustration and tears.

I know I've caught myself saying, "Sometimes all that we can do is pray"—as though prayer was the lesser of those things we can do as God's children instead of the greatest thing that we can do. At times God allows us to face such overwhelming trials and troubles just to leave us without anything but those most powerful words, "Lord, have mercy."

When it comes to our lives as God's children we need to know that growing up does not mean growing out of our dependence on Him but growing into it. The life of faith is about becoming more child-like (Mark 10:15), not about being big and strong and independent. In school it's frowned upon when little Johnny shows up with his giant life-like erupting volcano to demonstrate the real time flow of lava to his fellow four-year olds in kindergarten because it's clear Dad had a hand in little Johnny's work. Not so when it comes to our work as God's children. Our work as God's children is meant to have our Father's handprints are all over it. It's at its best when it does.

We get to be a part of truly beautiful things when we fold our hands so that the Lord's hands might be at work in us and in the world. When our hands are busy mucking around we might be able to proudly say we did it on our own but the volcano is just a lump of grey plasticine with a hole in the middle and some shredded construction paper sticking out of the top. Yeah, we did it. All by ourselves. But it lacks the wow factor that's there with the one that Dad had a hand in.

The wow factor of the project we're invited to take a part in can be seen in John's vision of the multitude from every tribe and nation and tongue standing before the throne of the Lamb waving their palm branches and crying out their praises to the Son of David who has saved them (Revelation 7:9-12). The will of the Father is the salvation of the world. He does not desire the death of any sinner but that he repent and live (Ezekiel 18:23, 32). He wills that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life and be raised up on the last day (John 6:40). He does not desire that any of His little ones should perish. God's will is to work all things for that good purpose—whether it's joys and blessings or a thorny crown and a cross.

God wants to save us. God wants to save all. This is the will of God that is the ultimate goal of all our prayers—that the Lord would save the world (1 Timothy 2:1-6). This is the sum total of what is prayed for in the "Our Father." Christian prayer at its heart is always a mission prayer. The end goal is always the multitude with each one of you as a part of it.



Albrecht Dürer's classic "Praying Hands" image (c. 1508).

As God's children born anew to Him from above in the waters of Holy Baptism we are being reshaped into His image. All that we will be is already conceived within us but its truth is being unfolded in our lives by the work of the Spirit. Although we might not be able to see it very often, as His true Children our Father's will is our will. Our old sinful man may struggle with that will on the outside, he may even rage and fight against it at times, but the new man in us embraces it with joy even if it means a cross for us. God in His wisdom knows what is best and we as His true children desire the same. With Jesus we learn to pray in hard times, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will (Matthew 26:39). I hold on to the truth that you are my dear Father and I can trust you to do what is best—what is best for me and others." Through the Spirit's work we can even be brought to the point of praying with Jesus that whatever is best for others is best for me—even if it means a cross.

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