

Why Should We Pray if God is Sovereign?

I thought I could start with the genesis of my topic this morning. Two years ago, after our Bible reading time, I asked my son to pray. We had done this for a while, and so it was habitual. He thanked God for what had happened during the day and requested two things that were always in his prayer list. One of those was a computer game. Besides praying, I would often hear him wish in Japanese, “ゲマが欲しくてたまらない.”

At first, I thought it was not serious because of the causal way he said it, there was no expression of passion in his voice and neither was it seen on his face. But later, I got to understand the expression meant that he wanted it so badly. That night, after praying, he wondered quietly, and while I thought he was getting himself to sleep, he opened his eyes, and genuinely asked, “mama, why do we pray if God can do everything?” I have to admit that it was a good question that caught me unawares. Of course, I searched in my head and found something that a nine-year-old could understand, “God tells us to pray to him. Praying is speaking to God. When we ask him something, we receive it. So keep praying, one day God will answer your prayers.”

He seemed contented and slept, but you see, in the back of my head, that question sank so deep in my conscious mind and I thought, “But seriously, why should we pray? Why should we pray:

- if God can do whatever he wants to do?
- if He already knows everything, controls everything and predetermines everything?
- if He doesn't change?”

My mind raced with answers none of which was satisfactory and because it was taking a toll on me, I literally brushed it off and said, “a question for another day.” Little did I know that after about two years, the question will surface again, and this time, I could not help but seek for the answer.

Some of you could relate to this question. If you do, did your answer fall into one of these categories? We pray because:

1. It's God's command that is further exemplified through His son Jesus.
2. It's a foundational element in Christian life. I, therefore, ought to pray.
3. They say, when we expect something, we should pray, so I am holding onto that faith.
4. It's a religious exercise: people of different sect and religion pray - I think there's some magic to it.
5. My parents tell me to pray. I got to respect them, so I do what they tell me to.

I was inclined to number 1. I agree with what Lk 18:1 says: “**Men ought to pray and not lose heart**”; “**they should pray without ceasing**” (1Thess 5:17), Paul tells us; and God commands and promises us that **if we, His people, who are called by his name, shall humble ourselves and pray, seek His face and turn from our wicked ways, then He will hear from heaven, forgive our sins and will heal**

our land (2Chronicles 7:14). I was, however, in a period of restlessness because most of these answers were directed to God's command, and not to something about his sovereignty. I could not take it anymore and the safest place I could run to was to His throne in prayer. I asked, not once, not twice but whenever and wherever. When I walked, rode my bike, jogged, I kept asking...

"Lord, you tell us to pray, you have even given us a format on how we should pray, but could there be any underlying reason (s) why you tell us to pray?"

Through God's guidance, I found out that the notion of prayer goes back to the Biblical account of the creation of man found in Genesis 1:26, KJV: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." This means:

Humanity reflects God's nature & the fellowship between the two parties

In His "image" and "likeness" means that we were created to be like God. God is Spirit, and He made us out of His spirit to reflect His character and personality. Think about this for a minute, imagine how much importance you put on an image. Some of you have specific brands you want to buy: apple, NIKE, Under armour, Asics, Uniqlo. On the other hand, the manufacturer works hard to protect that image, making sure everything is intact before it is released to the public, and in case it is defective, they recall the product. Why? Because of the company's image.

What is special about you is that you are God's masterpiece, a finished product, and because He wanted to share His authority with you He put you on a dirt body, manifested in the form of a male or female, so you could rule in the physical realm of the earth. That's why the Bible talks of man's creation in both singular and plural: Gen 1:27 "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created he Him; male and female he created them."

(KJV). "Man" in vs. 26 & 27 refers to the spirit man, which was then put in a dirt body - humus man: man and woman.

The spirit essence was meant to reflect God's nature and moral character. God created man to establish a relationship of mutual love, where love could be freely given and received between the two. Thus when God said, "Let them rule.." He intended to share not only a relationship with man but also His authority. "The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to mankind." Ps. 115:16.

God entrusted the care of the physical earth to man. With God's given free will, man was to plan and make decisions and take action to fulfil those plans, just as God did in creation. That means, we are to subdue the earth, fashion it with our creativity to reflect God's loving and creative Spirit. God didn't create a table for Adam, Adam made one out of a creative spirit. No wonder the Bible discourages laziness. "We also gave you this rule: If you don't work, you don't eat." 2Thess 3:10. God put in each of us something special, I call it potential, that we need to tap into to contribute to the purpose for which He created us. For instance, the iphone product does not come empty

but with functions that would make your work more efficient. If all you do is to send messages and make calls, then you are not maximizing the worth of the product.

Ps. 82:6 says that “**You are gods, you are all sons of the Most High.**” You are bestowed with the power to subdue the earth, to contribute in His creation. This doesn’t mean we are equal to God or we are deities. Adam and Eve could fulfil their purpose only if they were relying on, and in **constant communication** with God. Similarly, we can function in the purpose we were created for only as we are connected to our source. We are not self-sufficient. We can only reveal God’s essence apart from a relationship with Him. He must have a primary place in our lives because we are designed to find fulfillment and ultimate meaning in Him.

The Essence of Prayer

After He created mankind and gave him the free will to rule over the earth, the scripture says, that God visited mankind in the cool of the day Gen 3:8. But they hid themselves from the presence of God. It was strange because God asked, “Where are you?” The implication of this statement is that God would regularly come to spend time with Adam and Eve. God’s visits suggest some form of communion with man; a fellowship that was close and intimate. Prayer means to “commune with.” It’s from the word communion, to mean “common-union”. In other words, it is to come in union with. Thus some people believe, I included, that prayer began with the creation of mankind. The fellowship between God and man, and man’s agreement with God’s purposes, formed the essence of the first prayer. However, tragedy came when mankind turned away from God when they desired their own will apart from God’s. Man’s effectiveness in prayer was thus broken, and because of the separation, mankind needed a way to reconnect to God, which became another use of prayer. True prayer is maintained through oneness of heart and purpose with God. To keep you in common union with the one who gave you the purpose. Only then can we fulfil God’s ways and plans.

Within this context, we can say that:

Prayer is an expression of man’s relationship with God, and participation in His purposes.

That means to pray is to commune with God, to become one with God in purpose, thought, desire, will, objectives and feelings.

The Role of Prayer

The answer as to why we have to ask God to do what he has already predetermined to do, in spite of His sovereignty, relates to God’s faithfulness to His own Word and His integrity never to break His Word. Psalm 138:2b “**for you have exalted your Word above all your name.**” Whatever God says, becomes a law not only to Himself but also to His creation. That is why He is so faithful. We can trust Him. Thus, when He said, “**Let them have dominion...**” This became a law. Laws are special in such a way that they limit your freedom.

I could relate to the power of a law to that of a promise, especially through the Japanese word, “約束(yakusoku)” that I learned from my son. One day, we were invited to a party, and I thought that it was natural to go as a family. I was a little irritated when, he innocently mentioned that he

would not come because he had an appointment with a friend. I questioned his priorities and wondered when 9 year olds started making appointments. I was somehow happy about the growth, but a little upset about his decision which he had firmly stuck to. It was a serious case because tears ran down his eyes while he said, "I promised my friend two weeks ago, and I can't break the promise. He'll think I'm a liar. When I finish to play, I'll come and join you." That calmed my heart, and sure, he later joined us. That's how powerful a promise can be. It trapped him. He was free until he promised!

Just as my son was free until he promised, so is God's sovereignty. When we say that God is sovereign, it means that he is free from human influence, and so he cannot be affected by what we say. However, He is sovereign until He speaks. If He doesn't speak, He is sovereign, but when He speaks, He becomes trapped by what he says. His sovereignty becomes limited by His Word. Now, when God said, "Let them have dominion..." He took himself out of the equation of the legal authority on earth, and entrusted humanity with that responsibility. It would have been a different thing altogether would He have said, "Let us have dominion."

In Gen 1:26, God gave mankind the freedom to legally function as the authority on this earth. That is, God placed His will for the earth on the cooperation of the will of man. When man fell, God didn't change this purpose because His purposes are eternal. Psalm 33:11, NIV: **"But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations."** Remember, God does not violate His Word.

Even after the fall and before Christ came as a second Adam to redeem us back to God, God used humans to fulfil his will, to fulfil His purposes on earth even though man's part was now limited by sin and lack of understanding of God's ways. We see that God worked with Abraham, Noah, Moses, Gideon.... For instance, from our human understanding, we would imagine that God could save the Israelites from slavery by Himself. He is sovereign, isn't He? He let them be, and they were! However, He could not because of the way He organized dominion and authority for this planet. He cannot come on earth without a human body; not because he is weak, but because He is too faithful to His Word. For anything to be done on earth, it has to be through a spirit with a body. He had to search for a human - Moses - to fulfil His will.

It is within this organization that I find John Wesley's quote profound: He says, "It seems that without God, man cannot – and without man, God will not." The principle is, there has to be a partnership between heaven and earth in order for things to happen on earth. So what happens on earth depends literally on you! Humans are the most powerful creatures on earth because of the legal authority God gave them. God needs your cooperation so He could interfere with the affairs of this planet. He is asking, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" (Is. 6:8). Are you willing to show up like Isaiah and say, "Here I am. Send me!" God needs you to pray. He needs you to pray so He can keep working on the earth. When you stop praying, the heavens go quite. When we pray, we carry out our responsibility to demonstrate what our relationship with God

means in terms of living and ruling in the world. That is why Jesus told us that we should always pray and not give up Luke 18:1. He understood that the authority God has given us is so powerful that He said in Mat 16:9:

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." His emphasis continues: "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." Mat 18:19.

Prayer is therefore not an option. It is not a religious activity but a legal action that is a necessity. It is a direct line to our headquarters, which is the source of our daily bread, our daily wisdom, our daily direction... Jesus told the disciples, "**When you pray**.... (Mat 6:5)." to imply that prayer was a natural thing to do. He expected them to pray. Prayer according to Jesus wasn't a choice. It was a way of reviving his spiritual reserves. It was the source of his daily direction. Jesus walked the talk. He had a committed prayer life that amazed His disciples. Funny enough, the disciples never asked Jesus to teach them how to do something dynamic that would make them famous. Imagine if you were near Jesus, what would you have asked? Given the human desire to become famous, may be something that would, in an instant, attract NHK, TBS, Fuji TV. But of all the things the disciples asked Jesus, it was to teach them how to pray.

They witnessed Jesus wake up before dawn (mark 1:35) to go and pray while they enjoyed the warmth of their blankets. They witnessed how dynamic He would be during the day. It took Him a fraction of a second to heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out demons. I imagine they concluded that, if you spend quality time in the morning with God in prayer, you will spend a few minutes with men during the day. But you know what we do, we casually spend a minute with God in the morning and spend the whole day trying to solve a problem in the day with men.

The priority of Jesus was not a ministry to men but having communion (common-union) with His father. Even Jesus, being in the very nature of God (Philip 2:6), still checked in with the headquarters to get His assignment for the day. He says, "...**the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing**..." (John 5:19-20). Similarly, we need to go to God and ask Him, "God show me my assignment", and come back to Him for a recharge after a long day, tired and worn out. You need to run to the one who gave you your work to tell you to keep going. Asking for guidance is an act of surrender. It takes humility to tell God that "You know what is best for me. I can't do this on my own." Because God wants to share His plans with us, he wants to give us the right directions that will go along with His will. No wonder He says, "Call to me, and I'll answer you, and show you great and mighty things which you don't know" (Jer 33:3).

From this context, we could define prayer as: man allowing God to use him as a vessel through which He, God, can interfere with the affairs of the earth.

Operating in God's Dominion

The dominion authority is our heritage. The essence of this dominion is for us to seek to be in agreement with God's will so that His purposes can reign on earth. God's will is meant to be the backbone and the confidence in our prayers. God wants us to desire what He desires, He wants

us to ask Him to fulfil His purposes on earth. David understood this point. The Bible talks of him as a man after God's own heart. The book of 2 Sam 5:19 tells us that **"David inquired of the Lord, shall I go attack the philistines? Will you hand them over to me?"** Notice his humility. Before making any engagements, he went to the headquarters to get his daily directions. He did not assume that because he had won battles before, it was going to work the same way. He had partnership with God, with whom he needed to consult to get the go ahead. He recognized that God was the strength of his ability. After David got clear directions from his inquiry, he fought and defeated the Philistines. The Bible tells us that the philistines attacked again at the same valley, and David inquired of the Lord, again. This time, God told him not to fight them. God fought for them in a different way.

It would have been common sense for David to rely on the first formula, but God had a different plan. It was good of David to inquire of the Lord. Just because it worked right last time, it doesn't mean it would work right this time. If all it takes is to follow a particular formula to become successful, then we would not need God. God changes formulas on purpose so we would have to go to Him for our daily bread. Many times, we are limited because we try to do things in our own strength, in our own intellect and in our ability. We assume that just because we are christians, God will automatically fight for us when we go into battle. When we are successful, we are tempted to think that we can do it on our own. We lay back and don't ask him for directions. Imagine where you would be if you would ask God for directions.

Brethren, don't burn yourself out. God can see beyond what you can see. He knows where the dangers are; He knows where the dead ends are; He knows the right people that should be in your life. He knows how to launch you to your destiny. Don't do it on your own. **"In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths (Pro 3:6).** Whichever your capacity, the right approach would always be to ask, "God what is your plan? How do you want me to respond to this situation? Shall I attack or be still and let you fight for me? If I go will you go with me?" If we go the David way - to inquire of the Lord, to get our daily bread, to get our directions and ask Him to let His will be done, before any engagements, it will save us a lot of heartache. We will pray not convincing God to do our will, but His through our will. Let us remember that God is not obligated to bring victory to battles that were not supposed to be.

God is looking for people who will recognize Him as the "I AM" The self sufficient God, the source of our strength. His eyes are running to and fro throughout **the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless (2 Chronicles 16:9), to those who seek Him.**

To those who seek Him for wisdom - He's the giver of wisdom

To those who are sick - He's Rapha, God our healer

To those who are lacking - He's Jireh, God our provider

To those who are restless - He's Shalom, God our peace

To those who are tired - He's the Lord who renews our strength

Keep yourself connected to your main source. It took my son Wisdom two years to pray and believe God for the game he wanted most, and he got it. In the process of praying and waiting, he learned the virtue of patience and waiting upon the Lord's timing. As before, he acknowledges

that God is sovereign, and more so as a father who wants us to have constant fellowship with Him. In this way, God can use him to fulfil His purposes and plans on earth.

Dear brothers and sisters, all that God is and that He has may be received through prayer. Ask, seek and keep knocking on the doors to our headquarters. Get into that partnership with God, ask Him for your daily bread and your daily directions. God doesn't want you to miss out on His purposes for your sake and His. I pray that as we embrace God's will, seek to fulfil his purposes, nothing will be able to hinder our prayers, and we shall begin to understand Jesus saying, "With God all things are possible." (Matt 19:26).

Are you taking time for your daily bread? I will urge you to check with God to get your assignment(s) each morning. If you have, keep on keeping on and do not faint. If you've never, start today, and let not the 30 days of prayer limit you.

I do not want to finish without giving anyone who does not know Jesus the privilege to receive Him as their saviour. If you are in this room, please repeat this prayer after me:

"Lord Jesus, come into my heart, forgive my sins. I invite you to come into my life as my Lord and Savior."