

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you... (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)

Excuses, excuses.

It seems that there are few things in my own life that I find more excuses for *not* doing than for praying. That seems weird, doesn't it? Sure, I pray at various times a day, but not usually for as long as I would like. Now, if I were a betting man, I'd bet that that sounds familiar to many of you, too. Why is this? Why don't most of us take enough time to pray, or even ignore prayer all together?

This month's "Catechism Corner" touched on some questions that we have regarding prayer. My letter to you, then, is a sort of extension of our thinking through prayer. Below, then, is a non-exhaustive tracing through the list of excuses we might make for not praying.

1) "Why should I if God knows everything?"

This was also one of the questions in the "Catechism Corner" article, but it's so important that we should expand on it a little. While God knows everything, he invites us – *commands us* – to pray. Why? First, because it gives us an opportunity to fulfill the second commandment ("You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God"). You might remember that the 'positive' part of that commandment (i.e. what we *should* do) is that we should "call upon [God's name] in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." Prayer, then, gives us the opportunity to use God's name rightly for glory and honor, to reflect on who He is and who we are, to recall our needs, and to earnestly ask Him to fulfill his promises. Second, we recognize that prayer gives us the opportunity to speak to God, as a child speaks with his parents. Our Father in heaven cares about us and wants to hear us, even though he already knows what we need. What greater opportunity do we have, then, to do this except by prayer?

2) "Why would God listen to me?"

Luther has a response for this excuse: "[God] makes it clear that he will not cast us out or drive us away, even though we are sinners; he wishes rather to draw us to himself so that we may humble ourselves before him, lament our misery and plight, and pray for grace and help." In other words, what Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection accomplishes is, in part, that he is now our mediator (see Hebrews 9 and 12). When we pray in and through Christ, God listens to us not because of our own merits or worthiness, but because we are found in Christ through faith.

3) "I'm too busy!"

Luther, again: "God requires [prayer] of us; it is not a matter of our choice. It is our duty and obligation if we want to be Christians..." Are you *really* too busy? Or are your priorities simply found elsewhere? This is probably the most convicting one for me...

4) “I’ll do it later.”

Luther, a third time: "It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night. Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, 'Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.' Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day." In other words, if we are going to make prayer a priority (and we should!), then we need to make sure that it happens, no matter how busy we are (or think we are). So, before you pick up the phone, turn on your TV, or press the ‘on’ button on your computer, make sure to come to the Lord in prayer.

5) “I don’t know how.”

Well, you’re not alone. No less than the Apostle Paul himself admitted the same. We do not know what to pray for as we ought (Romans 8:26). But, for Paul, this is no excuse. He doesn’t stop there! Paul reminds us *that the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words*. Just because you don’t know what to say or how to say it, God has blessed us with his Spirit, who intercedes between God and us, bringing to God our deepest needs, thoughts, and feelings. What greater gift could God give to us? Well, actually, there’s more!

If you ever need a prayer — one that covers everything we might need to say — we have one! [*Jesus said,*] “*Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one...’*” (Matthew 6:9–13).

What is it that makes us want to come up with excuses for not praying? Prayer seems like it should be a natural part of our Christian lives. James reminds us that *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working* (James 5:16). Paul tells us to pray *without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17). But, as you might expect, the answer lies in our corrupted human nature. Sometimes, we value other things above prayer. The devil also works on us, trying to distract us from prayer. But, we are left without excuse! God expects us to pray. After all, why wouldn’t we want to be persistent in talking with our God and Father? He created us, sustains us, and promises to hear us in our need and in our praise. So...pray! It’s a wonderful gift!

-Pastor Squire

“Rise! To arms! With prayer employ you, O Christians, lest the foe destroy you; for Satan has designed your fall. Wield God’s Word, the weapon glorious; against all foes be thus victorious, for God protects you from them all. Fear not the hordes of hell, here is Emmanuel. Hail the Savior! The strong foes yield to Christ, our shield, and we, the victors, hold the field.”

(“Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You”, *LSB 668*, v. 1)