

Did you know that Christians pray differently than others?

by Bob Young

Lots of people in the world pray. In fact, according to many surveys, the truth is that most people pray. Religious people pray; non-religious people pray. Prayer is part of most religious systems. For many in our world, prayer is a given. At times of death or tragedy, we often hear the words, “Our thoughts and prayers are with them.” I applaud the fact that many recognize the need to pray—to ask for help beyond what is humanly possible.

But for Christians, the ever-present nature of prayer raises questions and presents a challenge. What makes our prayers distinctively Christian? Is there any difference in our prayers and those of non-Christians? When you think about it, no work of the Spirit of God is necessary for someone to want things to go well for themselves or for others. Non-Christians want their loved ones to find a job. You don't have to be a Christian to want illness to go away, to desire a cure for cancer, to seek that conflict be resolved, or to pray for problems to go away.

I fear that too often our prayers are not discernibly Christian. What we pray, how we pray, why we pray—all are guided by our Christian faith. It is true that God is gracious and he says to cast all our cares on him. But to pray genuinely Christian prayers means praying in Jesus' name and being guided by Jesus' will. Christian prayer reflects Jesus' purpose. Christian prayer goes beyond gratitude for the things that everyone is grateful for. Christian prayer touches heartstrings attuned to the unseen realm. Christian prayer is not just praying, “God, help my problems go away; help bad things get better.” Christian prayer is not presenting a want list to make life in this world a bit easier.

Christian prayer is at least adoration and praise, admission and confession, asking for those things focused on spiritual realities. Here is some of what I wish when I pray or hear others pray. May I see again the greatness, grandeur, splendor, and majesty of God. May I be reminded of who God is and of who I am, and of the impossibly great divide that is bridged only in Jesus Christ. May our requests help us grow and develop as disciples. God, help us glorify your name in every situation. God, give us opportunities to talk to others about Jesus. God, help us live as seeing the unseen, confident of your promises. May your kingdom come; may your will be done!

Christian prayer is asking God to bring gospel realities into our lives, our families, our churches, our neighborhoods, our communities, our country, our world. Christian prayer confidently approaches the unseen dimension where God's eternal kingdom purpose is supreme, focused on Christ and his will, for his sake, in his name. That is what makes Christian prayer distinct. It's not about us and our needs or blessings. It's all about him! May His name be glorified!

For more thoughts about prayer, see the Prayer playlist on my YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLhJQx_GRsMZZnR-VjFUxxJngca6O4Bkk8