

Prayer: Holding Onto Hope in a Fractured World

I rarely watch the news. But away for the weekend, in a quiet hotel room, I turned it on. The screen flickered between Olympic triumph — human bodies stretching toward excellence, discipline, resilience — and then the familiar litany: violence, division, greed, politics, power, struggle. And then the story of a woman missing for more than two weeks. Nancy Guthery. Interviews with family and friends. “We’re praying,” they say. “Please pray.”

And I found myself wondering again:

What do I really believe about prayer?

Am I talking to God?

Does God grant requests like a cosmic dispatcher?

Is there power when many people focus their intention on one hope?

Scripture doesn’t seem to give us a simplistic answer. Instead, it invites us into relationship.

The psalmist writes, “*The Lord is near to all who call on him*” (Psalm 145:18). Jesus teaches, “*Your Father knows what you need before you ask him*” (Matthew 6:8). Paul tells us that even when we cannot form words, “*the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words*” (Romans 8:26).

If God already knows, already is near, already intercedes — what is prayer for?

I have come to believe that prayer is not about changing God.

Prayer changes me.

God is God — omnipresent and omnipotent, the One in whom, as Paul says in Acts 17:28, “*we live and move and have our being*.” My morning prayers do not summon God into my day. God is already there. Prayer awakens me to that presence.

When I begin each day saying, “Help me do your will. Help me be my best. Thank you for the abundance and blessings in my life. Be with me,” I am not informing God of anything new. I am aligning myself. I am consenting again to the truth that “*This is the day the Lord has made*” (Psalm 118:24). I am placing my will within God’s will, echoing Jesus’ own prayer: “*Not my will, but yours be done*” (Luke 22:42).

Prayer is consent.

Prayer is alignment.

Prayer is attention.

French philosopher, Simone Weil says that attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity. Prayer is holy attention — to God, to others, to the world's suffering and beauty.

And yet — there is still mystery.

When people gather and focus their hearts on one hope — for healing, for safety, for return — something happens. Jesus himself said, *"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them"* (Matthew 18:20). Not that God arrives from elsewhere, but that presence becomes palpable. Shared prayer binds us together.

The early church understood this. In Acts 12, when Peter is imprisoned, the community prays fervently. The story unfolds with miraculous overtones — chains falling away, doors opening. Whether we read that literally or symbolically, the theological truth is clear: communal prayer strengthens courage, deepens hope, and emboldens action. It transforms frightened disciples into a resilient body.

Prayer does not always change outcomes. But it changes participants.

When we pray for someone missing, we hold onto hope.
When we pray in the face of violence, we resist despair.
When we pray amid division, we choose love.

Prayer stretches the heart, so it does not harden.

Philippians 4:6–7 promises, *"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* Notice what is guarded: our hearts and minds. The promise is not control of circumstances, but peace within them.

Prayer opens us to peace.

And I believe something else too — something harder to articulate but deeply felt. I believe in connection. I believe God transcends time and space. The Spirit hovered over chaos at creation (Genesis 1:2), and that same Spirit animates us now. When we put love into the world — when we focus intention toward healing, mercy, justice — we participate in that Spirit.

Creation itself is relational. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are one body, deeply interconnected. What touches one touches all. Love ripples. Fear ripples. Hope ripples.

If God is love (1 John 4:8), then the connective tissue of the universe is love. And prayer is participation in that love.

It is not magic.
It is communion.

Prayer tunes the heart like an instrument. It reorients our frequency toward compassion instead of cynicism, toward courage instead of fear. It softens us enough to act. After all, the Lord's Prayer does not end with contemplation but with daily bread and forgiveness and deliverance — concrete realities.

When I pray, I am not sending wishes into the sky.
I am consenting to become part of the answer.

If I pray for peace, I must embody peace.
If I pray for justice, I must pursue justice (Micah 6:8).
If I pray for someone's safe return, I must be willing to search, to support, to stand with those who ache.

Prayer is not passive. It is participatory.

The Olympics remind us of disciplined bodies striving toward excellence. Prayer is disciplined attention striving toward love. The news reminds us of division and violence. Prayer reminds us that despair is not the final word.

Romans 12:12 says, "*Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.*" Perseverance suggests that prayer is not about instant results. It is about sustained relationship.

In the end, I do not fully understand the mechanics of prayer.

But I know this:

When I pray, I become more aware of God's presence.
When we pray together, we become more aware of our belonging.
When we pray in crisis, we keep hope alive.
When we pray daily, we practice alignment with love.

Prayer is not about persuading an absent God.
It is about awakening to a present One.

It is how we hold onto hope.
It is how we extend love.
It is how we focus on peace.

And perhaps that is the deepest power of prayer:
not that it bends God toward us,
but that it bends us toward God —

and toward one another —
until love becomes the energy that shapes the world.