
LEARNING TO PRAY

LESSON 1 - The "Who" and "What" of Prayer

Who prays?

Many religions, cultures, and traditions pray.

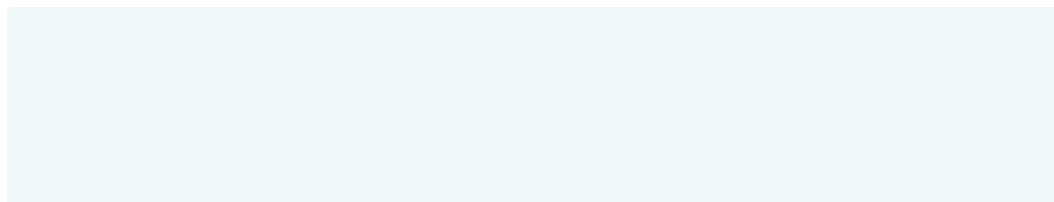
A different question to ask would be *to whom* do we pray?

- Christians believe in a personal God who loves people.

We come to faith in Jesus by prayer when we:

1. Admit the error of our natural inclinations and desires.
2. Believe that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were for *our* salvation, and accept that gift.
3. Become children of God

A Christian's relationship with God is personal, which should be reflected in how we pray.

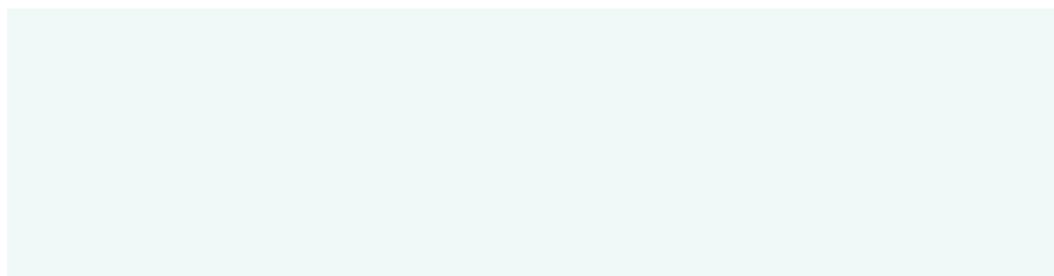


What is prayer?

At its simplest, prayer is talking to God.

God speaks to us primarily through His Word (the Bible) and the Holy Spirit, and we respond with prayer.

“Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through His Word and His grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with Him.” - Timothy Keller, "Prayer"



What should I expect?

1. That the outcome of any and every prayer will be good.

“...God works for the good of those who love him...” || Rom. 8:28

- The answers may not be exactly what you want, *but God is good.*
- The timing may not be what you expect, *but God is good.*

God is perfectly good and therefore cannot tolerate or orchestrate anything that He cannot use for good.

2. God answers all prayers.

- He may answer with "Yes", "No", or "Not yet"
 - "Yes" example: Acts 12:4-16
- If He only ever answered with "yes", He'd be nothing more than a genie or our slave. Instead, His goodness often compels Him to answer with "No."
- Dealing with answers of "No / Not Yet"
 - We must find a balance between two required attitudes: **restful trust and confident hope**
 - The idea is that we start our prayers with honest pleading about what "good" we personally have in mind, but that we always end by saying to God, "Your will be done."
 - "And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure." || James 4:3, NLT
 - If you are struggling with a "no" answer, tell God that, and ask Him to help you. (ex: John 11:4-6)

LESSON 2 - The "Why" of Prayer

Why do we pray?

To grow our relationship with God

- Just as an infant grows up and matures, so are we called to grow and mature in our faith and our relationship with God.
- As we grow closer to God, our prayers expand in:
 - scope
 - potential
 - effectiveness

“Prayer is meant to change our list of desires so that we instead seek God’s kingdom and the things He wants rather than the comforts and riches of this world.”- John Perkins, "Dream With Me"

Prayer demonstrates our obedience to God and our trust in Him.

- Instead of treating prayer as a last resort, Christians utilize prayer as the most important thing we can do.
- Even if we might not "feel" like praying, we pray anyway, knowing that God is more authoritative than our feelings.

Why pray if God already knows everything?

Yes, God does know. But, do you?

- Prayer is a way to have a conversation with Him so that He can expand our understanding.
- “This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed and established it—the LORD is his name: ‘Call on me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’” || Jeremiah 33:2-3, NLT

In prayer, we must be alert, sensitive and interested in His perspective so He can begin to teach, lead and answer us.

Instead of simply giving us the answers we want, God teaches us what He knows, what He sees, and how He responds so that we will better know and see and respond.

Does prayer matter?

“I used to view prayer as a kind of transaction in which I waved my arms desperately in an attempt to get God’s attention. Now I view prayer as two things: inviting myself into God’s life and inviting God into my life. I know what God wants done in the world by looking at Jesus, who brings mercy and grace and justice and compassion. What part should I play as a partner of God’s activity on earth? Prayer connects me with God so that I “tune in” to what God wants accomplished through me.

Then, I invite God into my life, asking that I start viewing the world around me not through my selfish, American-culture eyes, but rather through God’s eyes. Again, I get the best clue into how God views that world through the life of Jesus. How did Jesus treat people, and how do I? It will take a lot of prayer to close that gap!

[As for whether or not prayer makes a difference], I would express it this way: things happen on this earth that would not happen apart from prayer...God works in partnership with us, and prayer is the primary channel of that partnership.” - Philip Yancey

God is going to accomplish His will, but it is His will that we partner with Him.

Ephesians 6 reminds us that our prayers must go beyond simply what we can see on this earth or what we can get from God.

LESSON 3 - The "When" and "Where" of Prayer

When should we pray?

We should pray regularly and at all times.

- Regularly: an intentional, committed time of prayer on a consistent basis
 - See Luke 5:16, Matthew 14:23, and Mark 1:35
- At all times
 - "Never stop praying" || 1 Thessalonians 5:17, NLT
 - What does that mean, practically, to pray at all times?
 - An attitude of dependence should permeate all that we do.
 - We are to pray repeatedly and often.
 - We must have an attitude of faith that never gives up on prayer.

Where should we pray?

We should pray privately and anywhere.

- Privately:
 - "But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you." || Matthew 6:6, NLT
 - The majority of our prayer life should be private.
 - If you're always in the middle of chaos or noise when you pray, then there isn't as good of a chance of hearing any kind of response or developing a sensitivity to God's answer.
- Anywhere:
 - There is nowhere we can go where God cannot hear us (ex: Jonah)

LESSON 4 - The "How" of Prayer

How should I pray?

"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!" || Matthew 6:5-8, NLT

- We do not need to babble on in prayer or use fancy language.
- Instead, God cares about quality over quantity. He is not interested in rote repetition or empty ritual. He's interested in relationship.

The Lord's Prayer:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today, 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, NIV

The Lord's Prayer has two main sections:

- The first section directs us upward to God.
- The second section directs us to our lives on earth.

"Our Father in heaven"

- "Our" includes everyone in a relationship with God.
- "Our Father" reminds us of the type of relationship we have with God - that of a child and a loving parent.
 - "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!" || 1 John 3:1, NIV
- "in Heaven" reminds us that God has authority over us.

"hallowed be your name"

- put another way: "may your name be kept holy"
- To pray that God's name will be kept holy is to ask that He mold and shape us into the kind of people that keep His name holy.
- Consider:
 - Do you pray that your life would do justice to God's holy reputation?
 - Do you confess to Him the ways in which you do not represent Him well?
 - Do you ask Him to show you where you need to grow?
 - Do you ask Him to develop specific areas of your character?

"your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

- This is a prayer of submission.
- It also shows our willingness to participate in bringing God's will to bear here on earth.

"Give us today our daily bread"

- This is a request for our needs, not for luxuries.
 - "...give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God." || Proverbs 30:8-9, NIV
- This line recognizes and affirms our dependency on God and our trust in His goodness to meet our needs.

"and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

- Positional forgiveness is the judicial forgiveness we receive when we first trust in the death of Christ to cover over all our sins.
- Relational forgiveness is forgiveness that allows us to stay intimately connected to God and to not take our positional forgiveness for granted.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

- God does not tempt us.
 - "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone..." || James 1:13, NIV
 - This part of the prayer recognizes that God is our leader and asks Him to redirect us if and when we are tempted.
- And yet temptation is real.
 - "...but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." || James 1:14-15, NIV
 - Our rebellious nature often wants to get as close to the edge as possible.

- This is a proactive prayer. It recognizes our own weakness and that victory can only come through Jesus Christ.



The Lord's Prayer is not meant to be a strict formula, but it is a helpful guide for organizing our prayers and to help us make sure we are praying about the things that most matter to God.

A.C.T.S.

A: Adoration

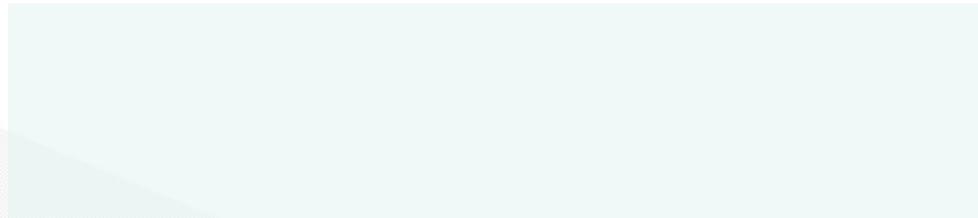
C: Confession

T: Thanksgiving

S: Supplication

Adoration

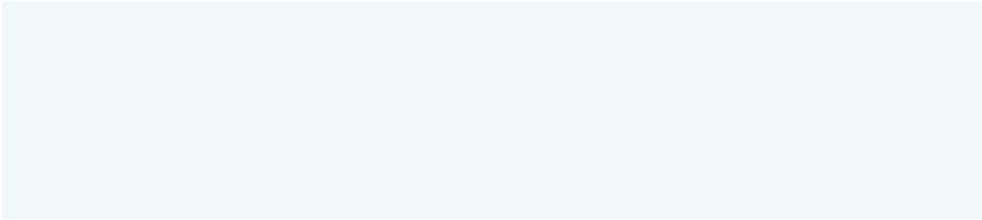
- To adore is to show deep love and respect.
- Adoration rightly fixes our attention, focus and confidence on the one to whom we pray.
- Consider:
 - What do I love about God?
 - Why do I love God?



Confession:

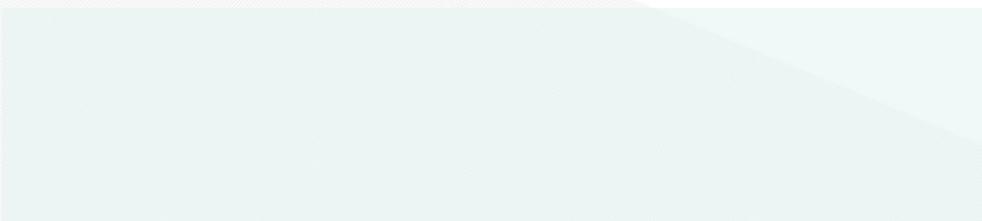
- : the act of identifying and admitting the sins in our lives and our hearts
- To identify the sin in your life:
 - Pursue the character of God.
 - Notice patterns of sin.
- Be specific about your sins when confessing.

- Being specific helps us understand better the relational consequences of our actions, sensitizes us to areas with which we need consistent help, and gives us eyes for the victories over them that God can help us achieve.
- If we confess our sins, God will forgive us.
 - "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." || 1 John 1:9, NIV
 - "He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west." || Psalm 103:12, NLT

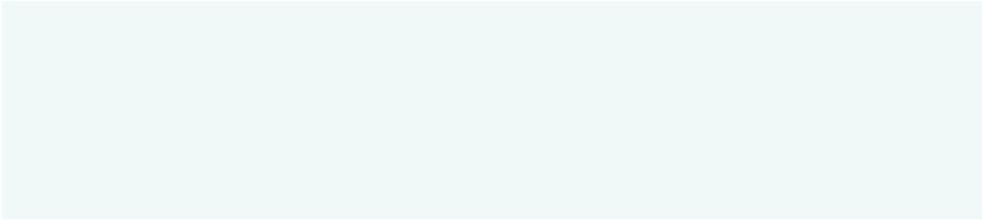


Thanksgiving:

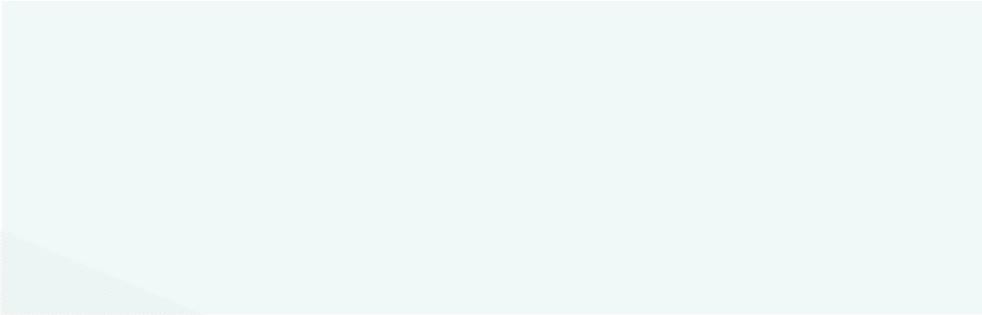
- : expressing gratitude
- Cultivating a spirit of gratitude reflects several attitudes:
 - an attitude of reflection and attention to what God is doing in our lives
 - an attitude of humility that doesn't assume we "deserve" anything good or that God somehow "owes us" whatever we ask
 - an attitude of acceptance for God's provision and an acknowledgment of our need for Him in our lives
 - an attitude of recognition that all good things come from God
 - "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." || James 1:16-17, NIV
- "... give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." || 1 Thessalonians 5:18, NIV



Supplication

- This is when you give your requests to God.
 - Pray:
 - for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-4)
 - for wisdom (James 1:5)
 - about worries and concerns (1 Peter 5:7, Philippians 4:6 and Psalm 55:22)
 - for all the Lord's people (Ephesians 6:18)
 - for your enemies (Matthew 5:44)
 - to know God better (Ephesians 1:17)
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Prayer Tips

- journaling
 - phone reminders
 - prayer apps
 - index cards
 - Post prayer requests where you can see them.
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LESSON 5 - Other Questions about Prayer

Does God listen to all prayers?

"In other words, is there anything that obstructs God from listening?"

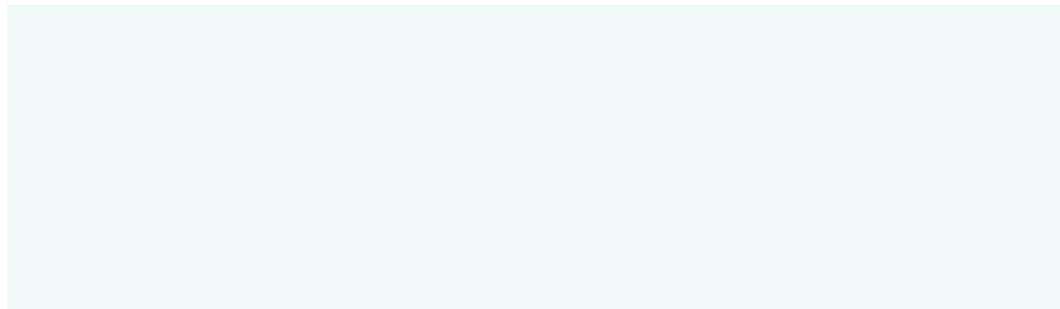
If you aren't praying for it, then it's not considered part of the conversation.

- "Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it." || James 4:2, NLT
- "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." || Matthew 7:7, NIV

Unconfessed sin can block our prayer path.

- "It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore." || Isaiah 59:2, NLT
- **This includes unresolved relational conflict.**
 - "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." || Matthew 6:14-15, NIV
- **This also includes selfishness.**
 - "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." || James 4:3, NIV
- **And an uncaring attitude.**
 - "Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." || John 13:34-35, NLT

Inadequate faith can also block our prayer path.



What Are We Listening For?

God speaks in four ways:

1. The Bible
2. People
3. Circumstances
4. The Holy Spirit

To discern between God's voice and your own...

- Read the Bible often to recognize God's voice.
- Does this make you more like Jesus?
- Are there others who can confirm what you believe God is saying to you?
- Is this consistent with how God made you?
- Does it concern you?
- Is it convicting or condemning?
 - God will convict us of sin, but He never condemns us.
- Do you sense God's peace about it?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- "Names of God" by Ann Spangler
- "Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God" by Timothy Keller
- "A Praying Life" by Paul Miller
- "The Prayer God Longs For" by James Emery White
- "Praying the Lord's Prayer" by Elmer L. Towns
- "Paradoxology" by Krish Kandiah
- "Unanswered" by Jeremiah Johnston

