

START

Prayer is a confusing thing. You may think that all Christians have prayer figured out—but truth is, we don't. Prayer is generally something most new believers have to figure out on their own. In my experience the church has done a poor job equipping believers to understand how to pray. Prayer is one of the most essential pieces in having a deep and continued relationship with God.

In this lesson, we're going to talk about **prayer**, and equip you with an understanding of *how* you can talk to God.

What does your prayer life look like now? How many times a week do you pray? What words do you say when you pray?

Throughout the Start lessons, we're going to talk about listening to God, and how to understand that something is God's will for your life.

How do we **talk** to God?

For married couples, the best way to have a good marriage is to communicate regularly. If spouses aren't communicating, they're not happy. If they're communicating extremely loudly, then they're yelling at each other, that's not healthy communication. Like couples, we need to talk to God. When we communicate and talk to God, it's called prayer.

What is prayer?

We know it's talking to God, but God isn't just standing here. You can't have a one on one physical conversation face-to-face with Jesus. But we can talk to our God through prayer.

Philippians 4:4-6 (NIV), *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."*

Don't be anxious. Now I'm not going to ask this, but 100 percent of people are anxious at times. You're nervous. You're worried. You're scared. You're frustrated. You don't know if you have enough money to pay the bills, or you don't know what you're going to find out at the doctor.

We all go through these times.

But what Scripture says is we shouldn't be anxious, because we have God. What we should do in every situation is pray and petition—to ask—with thanksgiving in our heart and present those requests to God. God wants us to come and talk to him about our lives.

When a pastor prays with his congregation or a group of people pray together, we call that **corporate prayer**.

That basically means praying together.

At some churches, people come forward to pray at the front of the stage--an area that we call the altar. When people come forward, they aren't saying "I'm a terrible sinner and need Jesus." What they are doing is participating in corporate prayer and giving others the opportunity to pray along with them. It's a time to come together in community and lift up each other's prayers.

When some people come forward, they just want to thank God for what he's done. I had someone tell me at a church once, "Just so you know, I'm coming forward to thank God for all that he's done. That's why I'm coming forward. To praise him."

Isn't that Awesome?

Have you ever come forward during a church service to pray at the altar? Why or why not? What did you pray for? Did people pray with you?

Other people come forward because they have prayer requests. They want their church family to come pray with them. To petition God together by praying in unison.

Any reason that you go forward to pray is acceptable. You can go forward to an altar to praise God or share a prayer request. You can go forward to pray with other people, because you're a church family.

Going forward to pray in a church service doesn't make you super spiritual. You're not more spiritual if you go forward, you're just another believer who recognizes that we are all in this together and we all need to love and support each other. And you can go to the altar to pray if you've been a Christian for 5 seconds or fifty years--there's no seniority.

Now that you know that you can pray with other people, and that they can and should pray with you also, let's talk about how you pray.

Are there rules to prayer?

I've wondered this too. I've had conversations about this exact topic over the years. Are there things that you must do during prayer? And are there things that you shouldn't do? And if you make those mistakes, then did you ruin your prayer? Or if you don't pray right, does God stop listening?

Do you believe you can mess up your prayer? YES NO

Let's examine this further, Matthew 7:7 (NIV) says, *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."*

Often in the New Testament when the word prayer is used, it means *ask*. We're told over and over and over again to ask. One of the main things we do with prayer is we **ask God**. He wants us to ask him things. He wants us to communicate and talk to him. We pray to have a conversation with God, just like you would with any other person.

When do you pray?

It's kind of up to you. I pray in the shower, when I'm driving, when I'm alone, if I'm worried, and if I wake up in the night and can't sleep. Ever have that happen to you? You can pray whenever you want. There isn't a rule that says, "You can't pray during these times." We're told in 1 Thessalonians to pray without ceasing.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NIV) out loud, "**pray continually.**"

Isn't that an easy verse to read? You should memorize it.

Do you pray continually? YES NO

In your life, you should pray. At all times, you should pray. When should you pray? Always.

There's a parable in Luke 18 called The Parable of the Persistent Widow. Luke 18:1-3 (NIV), *"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: 'In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'*

When Jesus himself makes a point in scripture—we should listen. Jesus told his best friends in the world that the purpose of this parable was to reinforce the idea that you should always pray. You should not give up. Prayer can help to protect your heart or mind from becoming defeated.

What are some things in your life that have caused your mind or heart to feel defeated?

Jesus continues on in Luke 18:4-8 (NIV), *“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”* And the Lord said, *“Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”*

What Jesus is telling his best friends, is this—pray always. Come to me and ask and ask and ask.

You should never say, “I’m only going to ask God once because I don’t want to bug him.” In this parable, Jesus says from his own mouth, “Bug me.” You can nag him. Ask and ask and ask and ask. Almost like a child who wants ice cream and hasn’t eaten dinner.

Jesus is telling you to ask him repeatedly. Never get bored asking for the same prayer request. Over the years people have told me, “I don’t want to ask for the same thing because I’ll sound needy.”

Luke 18 says you should ask again and again because God listens. He’s listening. He cares. He wants to hear from you and he wants to see what matters to your heart—so ask.

Where do we pray?

You can pray wherever you want. In your car, bedroom, bathroom, or you can pray at church. You can pray at meals. Where you pray isn’t really important because we’re always supposed to be praying—remember 1 Thessalonians 5:17. You can pray wherever you’re at. If at 3pm today you’re going to pray, pray wherever you are. But don’t close your eyes in prayer if you are crossing the street at that time or driving. But you can still pray where you’re at.

God is always with you. We have the Holy Spirit that lives inside us as believers. He is always with you.

The Bible does talk about finding a specific location to pray. You'll see this in Matthew 6. Some people create a prayer room. You can create a specific place to pray where you can get away from the world and focus on God.

That doesn't work for me. It doesn't fit with my personality. But maybe that's a perfect strategy for your personality type. Find a place to pray and pray there regularly.

Read Matthew 6:5-15. Do you think you would benefit from having a specific place to pray? If so, where could you pray. In not, why not?

What about meals?

People ask about the rule at praying over meals more than any other. What's the rule to it? Do you pray before or after salad? Before the entree? Does soup count? If you don't pray for a meal, do you get a tummy ache? Because that's what my mom taught me.

That's not in the Bible. I proved that to my mom back in the day. But every time I eat without praying, I still secretly think I'm going to get a tummy ache--thanks Mom!

The truth is, it doesn't matter when or how you pray at meals.

I've got my own personal rules. Salads don't count. Soup doesn't count unless it has meat in it. ~~Obviously~~Obviously. I'm not a vegetarian.

Just be consistent with how you pray for meals. You don't have to pray for dessert, because dessert isn't good for you. God's not going to bless that. "God bless this giant hot fudge cake from Big Boy. I'm going to eat seven of them." I don't think he's going to bless that.

The purpose to praying to God at meals is to keep God as a priority in your heart and mind. And to instill the same priority in the hearts and minds of your family. Pray together. It's a conversation with God. And prayers for meals don't have to last ten minutes, because you can smell the food. The goal of prayer before a meal is to keep God as a priority in your heart, mind, and life. You can honestly say, "Dear God, thank you for this awesome food. Amen."

It can be that simple. Because a prayer is about your heart and your mindset. It doesn't have to be magic words. If you want to pray for ten minutes before your meal, that's fine too. Just be consistent. And when you're praying, make sure your heart's in it. You shouldn't rush your prayers, nor should you artificially lengthen them.

Prayer is something you can do for any length possible. You're just having a conversation with your creator who loves you.

What words do I use?

Some people call God, "**Father God**," when they pray. Some people call him, "**Lord**". There's no right way to address God. What matters is that you are respectful to God. The titles people associate with God in their prayers are usually learned prayer language. People often absorb the prayer style and verbiage of whoever taught them to pray, or whoever modeled prayer to them. It naturally sinks in.

But there are no 'right words' to use.

The Bible gives us lots of names for God, such as in Hebrew, Jehovah Jireh—our provider. I try to use these names when we're praying corporately. God's our provider. He's our comforter. These are titles I can call God when I'm praying. I usually pray to God and close in Jesus' name. I'm not a person who uses Lord or Father God repetitively because that's not the way I was taught to pray. There's no right or wrong way. They're just different.

You can use whatever words you choose to call God. We're going to talk about the roles of the trinity in prayer in a little bit. How does God the Father play into prayer? How does Jesus? What's the Holy Spirit's role?

But first, another rule question. Do you pray with **eyes opened or eyes closed**?

Do you pray with your eyes open or closed? OPEN CLOSED

I am an eyes-closed by default person. That's my prayer life. Eyes-open people weird me out. What it tells me is that when I open my eyes during prayer, you're going to be staring right at me. And that's weird. Eyes closed is what I think you should do because it focuses your mind. I'm ADD, if I'm praying with my eyes open, I will focus on anything that's shiny. I think eyes closed by default is a good way to focus yourself, but there's no right way. You can pray with your eyes open.

I pray with my eyes open when I'm driving. And because I am not a great driver, my wife prays with her eyes closed while I'm driving.

Praying with eyes open or eyes closed really just depends on the situation. If you're walking through town and crossing busy streets, you should pray with your eyes open. But if you're in a home and you just want to get away from all the noise and busyness, eyes closed is probably your best option. If you're reading a prayer it's hard to close your eyes and memorize it. You can read it with your eyes open and just make it your prayer.

Because prayer is just talking to God. There's no magic way to pray.

When we're praying in a group, if there's a lot of noise, I'll think to myself, "Should I open my eyes and look to see what's going on? Or should I keep them closed out of reverence for God?" When you're the person in charge, you probably should open your eyes to see what's going on. It's okay to open your eyes in prayer.

It doesn't matter. It doesn't ruin or steal your prayer.

Should I pray out loud or in my head?

Do I have to pray vocally? Or can I just say a prayer in my mind? I'm not a person who prays out loud for other people during a group prayer. That makes me uncomfortable. If someone is praying out loud, or leading a prayer corporately, I typically agree in my mind with that person's prayer. I'm not going to out-pray them. But if you want to say your own prayer, you *are allowed* to do that as well.

But one caution. Have you ever seen a prayer war? Multiple people trying to pray louder than each other. I don't think that honors God. I think what honors God is when you talk to God. If you're a person who likes to pray out loud, that's great. If you're a person who likes to pray in your head, that's fine too. Just don't ever make it a competition.

When you're driving and talking out loud to God, people driving by may think you're singing or you just look weird. I don't pray out loud unless I'm with other people. But you can. You can have an audible conversation during your prayer time at home. It doesn't make you crazy. It just means you're talking to God.

Both out loud and in-your-head prayers are good things.

There is one exception to praying out loud. In Scripture, we're told to resist the devil, and he will flee from you. But the devil can't get inside your head. So, to resist the devil, the prayer has to be said out loud. Make sense?

Have you ever prayed out loud to resist temptation, or an attack of the enemy? If so, when?

Read James 4:7 (NIV), “*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*”

If you feel like you’re under spiritual attack, you should pray that prayer *out loud*. Your enemy can’t hear inside your head. Satan is not omniscient or omnipresent like God. When you’re in moments of despair and feeling like you’re under attack from the enemy, take heart and always pray that prayer out loud.

Can I read or write prayers?

Yes, you can. A prayer is just as good written down as speaking it out loud. Some people have prayer journals that they write in every day. You’re welcome to do that. You can also buy a journal. There are lots of Christian publishers who publish prayer journals. You can read the prayer, and it still counts as a prayer even if you’re reading someone else’s prayer in a prayer journal. Remember what matters is the purpose and intention of your heart. In your heart, in your mind, you’re making your prayer to God.

Can I second or “echo” a prayer?

Yes, you can echo a prayer. You can second a prayer. You can make someone else’s prayer your own. Again, it’s all about the condition of your heart.

When you are praying with others, you can say, “Yeah, I agree with that prayer, God,” or “God I echo that prayer as my own.” You can even add to another person’s prayer by agreeing with their prayer and then adding more words or prayer requests of your own.

You can’t echo or second a prayer if you’re just being lazy. You can’t be like, “Well, I don’t want to pray right now, so his prayer’s good.” That’s not honoring God.

During corporate prayer when we pray, you can pray your own prayer. That’s totally fine. You don’t have to listen to the leader or pastor. You can also listen along and make that prayer your prayer. Because a church is a community, we all pray corporately together.

If you come forward to an altar and pray for somebody, you can pray for them in your mind. You don’t always have to know their prayer request. You can just go up, place your hand on their back, and pray for them. God knows the prayer request. You can say, “God, I’m just praying for this person. You know their prayer request or praise.”

You don’t have to know their specific circumstance to come forward and pray with people. All you have to do is care and know that the church is a family and you are part of it.

What about Unspoken prayer requests?

This was something my mom always liked to do, and I always thought it was a little weird. But now that I am older, I understand the significance for people.

If you're in a small group and you have a sensitive prayer request that you want people to be praying for, but you don't want to speak it out and share the details, you can say, "I have an unspoken prayer request." That's just a way to say there's something going on in my life, and I need people to pray for it.

You don't have to say every prayer request. You can say, "There's something going on in my life. I'm not ready to share it, but can you just be praying for me?" Or, "I've got something that's unspoken in my life. Can you be praying for me? I'll tell you when I can."

We don't have to know everything to pray for each other, but we do need to pray in agreement with each other.

After hearing some of the "prayer rules" explained, how do you think you'll be able to improve your prayer life?

The Lord's Prayer

In Matthew 6, Jesus tells us how to pray, which has become known as the **Lord's Prayer**. Read this below (out loud) and make it your prayer.

"Our Father, which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever.
Amen."

You just prayed a prayer with your eyes open. You can make something you read your prayer. The Lord's Prayer is the prayer Jesus used when he told his followers "When you pray, pray like this." When we examine the Lord's Prayer, we can figure out some of the mechanics of how prayer works.

What's God the Father's role in prayer?

We talked a few lessons ago about the three different distinct persons of God—The Trinity. God the Father, Jesus the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. First, we're going to talk about God the Father's role in prayer.

Ephesians 3:20 (NIV) says, *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,"*

We pray to our God who can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine according to his power.

In Matthew 6, right before Jesus goes into the famous prayer, it says this, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you"

This is the verse where we're talking about having a prayer closet at home, but it's also about praying to God the Father. When I pray, I try to work my mind and heart so I'm praying to God the Father.

Jesus' role in prayer

We pray **in Jesus name**. I might also say, "In your name, Amen." In my heart, I mean Jesus.

John 14:6 (NIV) says, *"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"*

The only way we can get to the Father is through Jesus, through his sacrifice on the cross, his death, resurrection, and the blood he shed for our sins. When we pray and communicate with God, we are able to because of the power of Jesus and his sacrifice.

John 16:3 says, "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."

When you pray, you have to pray to God the Father. You don't have to say, "Dear God the Father." You just have to know this in your mind. When you focus your prayer, you are intending to pray to God the Father, through the power of Jesus name.

Holy Spirit's role in prayer

When Jesus rose and ascended into heaven to prepare a place for us, we were left with the Holy Spirit who works in and through us. Read more about this in Matthew 28.

Romans 8:26 says, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

I love this. Because when we don't know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit that's in us and working through us, can intercede for us. When we're so downtrodden and broken and frustrated, and we just don't know what to say, God's still working in and through us through the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 6:18 (NIV) says, "*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*"

The Holy Spirit teaches us, comforts us, protects us, guides us—which is perfect as an accompaniment to prayer. When you pray in Jesus' name to God the Father, you do so with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit. That's how prayer works.

As long as we know and think about that as a regular part of our prayer life, we don't have to pray, "Dear God the Father, I'm praying in Jesus name with the power of the Holy Spirit" you don't have to say all of that. Just know that's how it works.

Is there anything you still don't understand about the Trinity's role in prayer? If so, what?

To help your prayer be more focused, there's an acronym called **A.C.T.S.** It's a prayer model. It's based off of The Lord's Prayer.

Adoration: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name

Confession: Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors

Thanksgiving: for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever

Supplication: Give us today this daily bread . . . Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one

When you break these 4 parts down into your own prayers, it's important to have all four pieces in your prayers.

Adoration: You can praise God for any of his attributes. You can be at the Grand Canyon and be like, "God in heaven who created this awesome thing." Or amazing Jehovah Jireh!

Confession: An important part of prayer is we have to confess our sins. We need to understand and know what we've done wrong to break the relationship with God. That's where the Holy Spirit helps. Sometimes we forget. Every sin that you can remember you should confess to God. Because if I break my relationship with my wife and kids, I gotta apologize to them. It works the same with God. Confession restores the relationship.

Thanksgiving: Not only do we adore God, we give him thanks for all the wonderful things he's given to us. We thank him for answers to prayer. When my wife and I make breakfast for each other, we always tell each other, "Thank you." That's a healthy relationship. We should do the same thing to God.

Supplication: A big word that means *ask*. It's just asking. Asking God for what you need, what you want. God wants us to ask, and he tells us that we can and should ask often. We should only ask for things that honor God. God's probably not going to let you win the lottery tomorrow.

If you make these four pieces part of your regular prayer life, you're going to have a healthy prayer life.

There's another acronym **P.R.A.Y.** It's very similar to **A.C.T.S.**

Praise
Repent
Ask
Yield

Yield is where you listen. A huge part of prayer is listening to God.

When I was teaching kids, I also used **B.A.T.**

Bow your head
Aim your heart
Talk to God

Prayer is **2-way communication** with God. There's lots of ways to talk to God, you just need to develop your own communication with him. We don't just tell him what we want. We're not just placing an order at McDonald's. We are having a conversation, and we must also **listen**.

Sometimes you have to listen for a long time.

Are there any prayers you are waiting for God to answer? If so, list.

Psalm 27:14 (NIV) says, *“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”*

The Bible says a day to God is like a thousand years for us. Our ‘long time’ is always short for God. We cannot fathom how God’s timing works in our world. We have to wait sometimes. The answer of *Not Now* ...is not *No*. We have to wait on God’s timing for his answers, and sometimes the answers can take weeks, years, and decades.

One of the other ways we pray is to intercede for each other. It’s called **intercession**—when you pray on someone else’s behalf.

When we have corporate prayer time, we’re told in scripture to lay hands on one another. There’s something healing and comforting about appropriate brotherly love shared through an affirming touch. When you lay your hand on someone’s shoulder and pray for them, you’re interceding on their behalf. You should want people to intercede for you, and you should desire to intercede on the behalf of others. You want people to go before God in support of your prayers.

When praying, it’s also important to understand the difference between general prayers and **specific prayers**.

Specific prayers allow for us to know when God answers. When specific prayers are answered, we gain a wonderful testimony of what God is doing in our lives and in the world around us.

If I say, “Lord, bless the congregation today. Help them to have a great week.” I don’t actually know how to determine if the congregation is blessed. But if I pray and ask God to protect every church attendee from harm in a car accident over the course of the next week, then that’s how you know if that prayer is answered.

Be specific. That’s when you know that God has done something.

General prayers are hard to know if God is answering, but they're still important. We can generally pray for our country, our friends, and our family. But as often as you can, pray specifically, so you know when God is moving, and then you can share a testimony.

So, what does this all mean for you?

It means that you can pray—in your life, in your home, and anywhere you're at. You also need to **make prayer a habit**.

Prayer is something you need to do on a regular basis. The Bible tells us told to pray without ceasing, to pray continually all day long. As a human, it's impossible to pray all day long. I have a difficult time focusing on one thing at a time, let alone praying all day long. So, you need to develop a heart and mindset of prayer. Talk to God as often as you need to, whenever you're lonely, scared, frustrated, or defeated. Prayers can be momentary. Prayers don't have to be long.

I can say a prayer in a couple of words. "God, I need you." "God help me."

When life is good, people often forget to thank God. Sit down and take time right now. "Lord, thank you for this great week. I needed this rest. You're so wonderful." Make prayer a part of your regular life.

What can you thank God for right now? Make a list and then thank him.

One of my favorite things to say is, a Church that genuinely prays together faithfully stays together.

Pray alone and together with others. Protect your prayer time each week and make it special. The church is a family and it should pray together. As a family at home, you should be praying together. Praying with your spouse, children, friends, Life group, or Sunday school class.

Do you take time to pray for other people each week? If you see someone share a prayer request at church or online, take a second and say, "God, I agree with all these prayer requests. Those are my brothers and sisters in Christ, and I lift up these prayer requests. Amen."

You don't have to pray for 20 minutes for each one. Just change your heart and mindset of prayer, and you'll be amazed what it does for your relationship with Jesus Christ.