
How to Pray! Part I

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How Can I Pray?

Matthew 6: 5-15; 7: 7-12

What if I have never been taught how to personally pray or to talk to God? What if I grew up in a church that never had conversational or personal prayer? What if I only know liturgy? What if I offend God?

If you think that you do not know how to pray, you need to ask yourself, *do I know how to talk and listen?* If you know how to talk to another person, then you know how to pray! Prayer is basically our communication with the Great Sovereign God of the Universe who wants the best for us and to hear from us! The great wonder is not so much in how we pray, but that God is willing to listen to us! The great, wonderful *fallout* from our redemption is our ability to pray real and effective prayers that God actually hears and to which He responds! God will actually speak to us through His Word, and the Holy Spirit teaches and convicts us through the Word. The fact is, our prayer time with God is basically our conversing with Him, through which we express our gratitude for whom He is, what He did for us, and discover our purpose in life. Thus, through our prayers, we can be taught, we can grow, and we can be convicted so we can apply His precepts to our lives and affect those around us, too.

Prayer is coming to God through discussion, learning, and relationship building. It is the channel of communication between Christ and us. We give ourselves to Christ as He has given Himself to us—much like a man and woman give themselves to each other in marriage. Since God has given Himself, what is in the way of our being able and willing to respond?

Prayer is not just talking to God; it is also meant to further link us to Him and develop our relationship with Him so we can build our faith, character, and maturity. Remember, we have access to God; we have permission to come to Him! Wow! What a privilege we have (Rom 5:1)!

We need to see that God is jealous when we do not spend time with Him. In the Greek language the illustration is referring to us, when we do not spend time with God it is like we are cheating on a spouse (2 Cor. 11:1)! He has taken care of the able part; because of Christ, we have direct access. The most incredible thing in the universe is the ability to talk directly with the Creator and Sustainer! We can do this because we are spiritually united; because of His redemption on our behalf, we have unity. This is communion, not the ritual with the bread and wine, but the intimate relationship that the ritual symbolizes. Prayer is the communication.

Prayer also helps keep us conscious of His work in our life. He is here with you now, so do not ignore Him or leave Him out of your life and decisions. He is to be the primary foundation and for whom we are to be and do; and, we must commune with

Him to make this happen. When we commune with God, our lives begin to line up to Him more fervently and powerfully. We gain more of Him in our lives, more of His will and insight, more of His direction and will. Thus, we will become dependent on Him and not the feeble ways of “self” with our needs, emotions, or the world. Our opportunities and call will be clearer and our lives given a greater purpose and impact for the Kingdom. However, the key is to get beyond being selfish and more into *how I can grow and contribute*. It is not about what I can get, but what I can do. Consequently, the more we pray, the more He is in our life, and more specifically—the more we feel and see Him involved!

Nevertheless, as a pastor, I have been amazed over the years at how many Christians just do not pray! I hear all kinds of excuses why they do not—from the theological, “why should I, since God already knows everything,” to the failed expectations of “I have tried and it does not work,” or “God never answers my prayers.” In addition, there is “I just do not have the time,” or “that is just for you.” But, what I get most from the folks who do not pray is feeling-based excuses, “I do not know how; and, when I do, I feel nothing.” I think that many Christians may try prayer and soon give up on it because what they expect does not come about when they want it. They get frustrated because they do not get the answer they seek, do not feel the power and impact they thought they would get, or just get frustrated because the time and efforts become overwhelming. We live in a fast-food and fast-paced culture where we see a television show that illustrates a problem and a solution in a 30 minute time frame; therefore, when the work of God takes more time and patience than we are used to, we give up because we want results *now*. We need to see prayer beyond our timing and expectations; rather, we should see prayer as relational, something that is not supposed to be fast-paced or instant-result orientated.

For us to even start to change our perception and expectations on prayer, we need to realize it is God at work in us, and allow Him to work at His pace. Prayer takes fortitude, as in the time and patience we are to put in it and in the time and patience God is working in us, slowly crafting and molding us. It is a learning endeavor, too. Learning to pray is like learning a new language. It takes that time effort; if we do not use it, we lose it; and, with prayer, we just end up not doing it. We also have to see that we are all in a process of learning and growing. Whether we spend three or more hours or five minutes a day in prayer, we are always learning and growing. There are no experts in prayer, as we are all apprentices.

Questions to Ponder

Read Matthew 6: 5-15; 7: 7-12

1. Did you have a favorite prayer as a child that you may have recited at bedtime? If so, did that prayer give you comfort and understanding about God?
2. Why do you think why that so many Christians just do not pray?
3. Have you ever gotten frustrated because you do not get the answer you sought?

4. What are some of the kinds of excuses some Christians give who do not pray, are any of them good?
5. How do you pray now? How much time is spent each day? What methods do you use? How should you?
6. How much time do you give to your personal prayer requests, and how much time to other needs, to others, etc.?
7. How much time in your prayer life is dedicated to praying and worshiping God? Remember, singing in church is only a small aspect of worship; worship is also prayer, an attitude, and a lifestyle!
8. Have you ever struggled with this thought, *what if I have never been taught how to personally pray or to talk to God?* What can you do to overcome your fears on prayer?
9. What can you do to make sure that how you pray and the things for which you pray are not just for your own needs, or that you are not using prayer to get attention?
10. Have you ever seen people--even pastors and church leaders--use prayer to grandstand (promote) themselves, displaying prideful and hypocritical actions? How does that make you feel? What would convict these types of people?
11. How would a mindset of seeing prayer as a conversation be a help to you?
12. Have you ever feared that, *what if I offend God?*
13. With what emphasis is Jesus calling us to seek Him? Why would that emphasis be important?
14. Jesus often taught His disciples about prayer, that it is directed to God, not people, and is to be heard by God, not used for show to others. So, how can you make sure you are offering up the kind of prayer that will please God?
15. What do you need to do to start to change your perceptions and expectations on prayer? How does it help knowing that it is God at work in us?