

How Do I Pray?

I have believed in Jesus for as long as I can remember so prayer has been a part of my life for that long. When I was a little girl, I knew praying was important and it was how we talked to God. But I often struggled to know what to say when I prayed. I struggled to feel confident praying because I felt like other people knew some sort of secret that I just didn't. I sure didn't feel like an expert on prayer, and I hoped that someone who was an expert would let me in on what the secrets are. The good news is there is an expert who can help us.

Jesus, who was an expert on prayer, taught his disciples about prayer in Matthew 6:5-8. He said:

“And **when you pray**, do **not** be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners **to be seen by others**. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 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**. And when you pray, **do not keep on babbling** like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your **Father knows what you need before you ask him.**”

In this teaching, we see a few important things to help us when we pray:

- 1) **When you pray.** Notice Jesus did not say “If you pray...” He said “When you pray!” This shows that he expected that we would pray. Here are two tips about “when” we pray.
 - a. **Choose a time.** We should set aside time that is our “when” we pray. Maybe for you that is in the morning, or maybe it's at night before you go to bed, or maybe it's both. The point is to make it a priority in our life and a habit that we don't overlook. Some people think they have to have an hour in prayer every day, but if we think that many times we won't do it. Or sometimes we start with good ambitions, but it can feel like we run out of things to pray about in the first two minutes. Start small. Try committing to spending 10 or 15 minutes in prayer each morning or before you go to bed. As you commit to the discipline of prayer, discipline will turn into delight.
 - b. **Pray at all times.**
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

We don't have to limit our prayer times to our set prayer times. The Bible says we can pray at all times. This is because God, Our Father, is always with us and is always eager to hear our voice. He always wants us to be in conversation with Him through prayer. This continual conversation does not necessarily mean that we are always praying out loud to the Father. That isn't always practical given the demands of work or school. Instead, we can always keep our hearts before Him and in an attitude of prayer.



While it's good to have focused times where we spend more time praying, we can also send up short prayers throughout the day. We don't have to feel like we have to have a long time in order to pray. God hears our prayers whether we spend an hour in prayer, or if we spend 30 seconds offering up a short prayer to Him. Sometimes these 30 to 90 second prayers can be powerful because we are keeping the conversation with the Lord open.

- 2) **Don't pray "to be seen by others"**. When we pray, we are not to show off or to do it so others will see us. It's not a competition of who can pray the most spiritual words.
- 3) **"Go into your room, close the door."** Jesus encouraged His disciples to go into their room and close the door when they prayed. There are two different ways to understand this.
 - a. **Pray in private.** Jesus modeled this for us as we often saw Him going off alone to pray and spend time with His Father. If Jesus needed to go and spend time with the Father, how much more so us?

There definitely are times when we should pray with others and those kinds of prayer are powerful too, but the more time you spend developing your personal prayer life with God the more confidently you can pray with others.

- b. **Remove distractions.** Unlike Muslims, Christians do not have to have a specific space in which they pray. We are able to pray to the Father anywhere. However, it can help us to have a space that we use for prayer and devotion as it can help us to focus if we have a place that we use specifically for prayer.

Our life gets so busy we often are pulled away from the simple devotion to Jesus and the place of prayer. When we think about closing the door, we can think about removing distractions. Sometimes that literally does mean going into our room and closing the door. Other times, it can mean turning off our TV or our phone and putting away our to-do list to focus on spending time in prayer.

- 4) **Pray to the Father.** Remember we are praying to God, our loving Heavenly Father. We can pray confidently knowing He loves us:
Hebrews 4:14-16 "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Because of what Jesus did for us, we can come to the Father in prayer. We can pray with confidence that God will help us in our time of need.

- 5) **Remember: “your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”** It can help us when we are pushing through the initial challenges of prayer to remember the rewards of praying that we have talked about.
- 6) **Do not keep on babbling.** Jesus taught his disciples that they wouldn't be heard because of their many words. The same is true for us today. Keep it simple. God does not care about us having all the right words. We can pray like a child, in childlike faith, saying short prayers with simple words. In fact, Jesus encouraged his disciples to keep their prayers short and he taught them a very famous model prayer called the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Another model that we can follow is the “I love you. I'm sorry. Please... Thank you.” Prayer.
- I love you.** Begin by expressing your love for God. Tell God about who He is in your life.
 - I'm sorry.** Ask God to forgive you of any sin you've committed against Him and to empower you to overcome sin. Prayer is a place where we can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. As we love God more our
 - Please...** Let God know your needs.
 - Thank you...** thank the Father for all of His blessings in your life,
- 7) **Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.** We can be confident that God knows what we need. He knows before we even ask Him because He knows all things. But just like our earthly dads will know that we need certain things before we ask them, our Heavenly Father wants us to ask. This is because prayer isn't just about presenting a list of our wants to God. Instead it is about building the relationship with our Father through spending time talking with Him.

So to sum it up...

- Make time to pray.
- You don't have to pray long prayers.
- Pray to your Father.
- Get rid of distractions.
- Don't pray to show off.
- Remember the rewards of prayer.
- Keep it short and simple.
- Your Father knows what you need before you ask, but He loves when you ask!

We will never outgrow prayer, but we can grow in the place of prayer. That is my prayer for you today: that you would grow in your ability to pray. I pray that you would make time to pray and connect with the Holy Spirit, you would be energized to love God. I pray that the discipline of prayer will lead to delight. And I pray that you will grow in your confidence before the Father, knowing He delights to hear your voice.