

## Prayer (introduction)

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**N**o matter where you go, or what culture you may encounter, you will find someone with some form of religion or faith. This is because there is something deep in the heart of man that seeks eternal things. Solomon, the wise king of Israel, wrote:

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.*  
*Ecclesiastes 3:11*

One thing that virtually every religion or faith group will practice is prayer and/or meditation. All over the world you will find people who, in one way or another, pray! Write down the answers to these questions:

- How do people pray?
- To whom do people pray?
- Why do people pray?



I believe that all true believers have a desire to increase their prayer life. In fact, even Jesus' disciples wanted to learn how to pray. Let's consider their request:

*Luke 11:1-13*

*1 - Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."*

**Q – why do you think they asked Jesus at this particular time?**

Jesus responded this way:

*2 - So He said to them, "When you pray, say:*

*Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.*

*Your kingdom come.*

*Your will be done*

*On earth as it is in heaven.*

*3 - Give us day by day our daily bread.*

*4 - And forgive us our sins,*

*For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.*

*And do not lead us into temptation,*

*But deliver us from the evil one."*

*5 - And He said to them, "Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves;*

*6 - for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him';*

*7 - and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'?*

*8 - I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.*

*9 - "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

*10 - For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.*

*11 - If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?*

*12 - Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?*

*13 - If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

**Q – what did Jesus say here that really stood out to you?**

The aim of this series is to help us to:

- Understand what prayer really is
- Understand who we are praying to
- Know why our prayers are often hindered
- Pray with a better sense of communion with God
- Pray according to the will of God
- Pray in faith
- Be persistent in prayer
- Understand the Holy Spirit and prayer
- Pray for others

May the Lord bless us as we learn together!

## What Is Prayer?

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**H**ow do you communicate? It may seem easy to answer such a question until you really begin to think about it. This is because the way that we communicate differs depending on who we are communicating with. For example, when we are speaking to a friend, we may speak differently than the way that we may speak to someone in a position of power, like a magistrate or judge. Our language, slang, expressions and even the words we use would be different. In fact, even the way that we dress would probably be different! Would you speak the same way to your doctor as you do to your spouse?

Q – For those of you who are married, do you speak to your spouse the same way now as you did when you first met? If the answer is no, how then is it different?

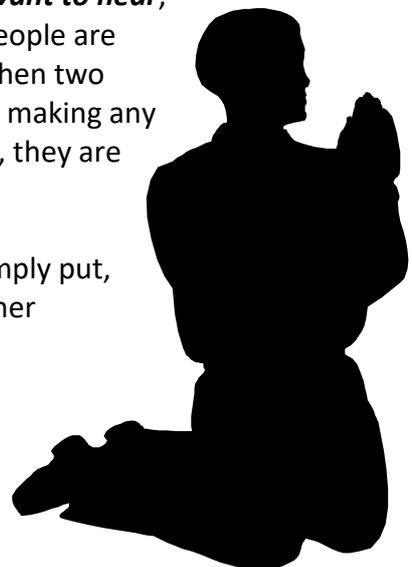
Q – For those of you who are single, would you speak the same way to a potential boyfriend/girlfriend as you would to one of your best friends? If the answer is no, why would it be different?

The way we communicate always depends on three things:

- Our communication depends on **how well we know the person**. When we know little about a person conversation can sometimes be difficult, as both parties may not know what to say to each other. It can also be exciting when one discovers something different about another, or when something in common is revealed. However, conversation changes as we become familiar. If you know someone for a long time, you may have heard most of their interesting stories from the past and would then focus on the present and future. The more you know about a person, the more the conversation changes.
- Our communication depends on **the circumstances surrounding the conversation**. What if your father was an important political figure? In public you probably would refer to him by his title (Prime Minister, Mr. President, etc.), but at home you would call him Dad. His wife would call him something more intimate (honey, sweetheart, even stupid!)
- Our communication depends on **how much you really want to hear**, compared to how much you want to be heard. Some people are very good at talking but very bad at communicating. When two people are talking only to get their point across without making any attempt to understand the other person's point of view, they are usually not communicating.

What does this have to do with the way that I pray? Prayer, simply put, is the way in which we communicate to God, and it, like any other communication, depends on three things:

First, your **relationship with God**. If you really don't know Him well, you may find prayer to be awkward, as you may not know what to say to Him. When God first begins to speak with you, it can be very exciting, especially when you begin to



discover what He is like. The more you know about Him, the more the conversation changes. You can express your joy, fears, hurts, mistakes and even anger, knowing that you will not be rejected or embarrassed.

**Q – What can we do to develop a good relationship with God?**

Second, the ***environment in which you are in*** can make a difference. When praying publicly you may address Him by his function (what He does) or by His titles. You may speak to Him about issues that concern the particular group that you are with and your speech may sometimes be more formal. It may also be necessary to be careful with what you say, in order to avoid any offence to those that may be listening. But when you are alone, you can be more intimate and talk to Him on a much more personal level.



**Q – Do you find it more difficult to pray in public than in private? If so, why?**

Third, your ***desire to hear from God*** may be the most important thing of all. If you are doing a lot of talking but never listening, you may not be communicating with God. In order to really get close to God, you must make a conscientious effort to listen to Him. You must really want to hear what He has to say to you. This happens when we pray over His word, or in other words we prayerfully read it and ask Him to speak through it. This is when we really begin to hear from God.

**Q – Is there anything we can do to make us desire to hear from God more?**

Prayer is the way that we gain access to heaven (the realm of God) to influence things on earth. God could do everything all by Himself, but he chooses to work with us through prayer. We are told to ask, seek, knock, (Matthew 7:7,8) and to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We are encouraged to pray for all people asking for God's help as we pray and to be watchful (Ephesians 6:18). If we want the things on earth to become more like heaven, we must pray (Matthew 6:9,10).

## Who Are We Praying To?

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**W**ho are we praying to? This may seem like an obvious question, but throughout the world you will find people who pray to idols, animals, the earth, their ancestors, saints, holy people, relatives and even demons. In many religions people pray to many “gods”, so it is important for us to really understand a few things about the God that we are addressing, and about the way that we address Him.

When people pray they are appealing to someone who they believe is **greater than themselves** and who has the **ability** to help them in their request. Whenever someone prays they are actually putting their **faith** in something or someone; or in other words, they trust that that being is able and willing to help them.

It is also important to know that our faith is only as good as the one that we put our faith in. I may ask a good friend to give me some money to help me out of debt, but no matter how much I believe in him, that friend can only give me the money if he has the **ability to do so**. If my friend has no money, my friend cannot help me! This is why a false god, idol or even a saint should not be prayed to, because they do not have the power to help me. If you pray to someone or something that does not have the power to help you, you will not receive help no matter how much you believe.



Here are three vital things to know about the One whom we pray to:

1. Only God, the Almighty Creator, is greater than all and has the ability and desire to help us.

**Q – What do these verses tell us about the nature of God?**

**Isa 42:5** - Thus says God the LORD,  
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it,  
Who gives breath to the people on it,  
And spirit to those who walk on it:

**Isa 45:18** - For thus says the LORD,  
Who created the heavens,  
Who is God,  
Who formed the earth and made it,  
Who has established it,

Who did not create it in vain,  
Who formed it to be inhabited:  
"I *am* the LORD, and *there is* no other.

**Psa 33:6** - By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

**Dan 5:23** - And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who *holds* your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified.



**Psa 50:15**- Call upon Me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

**Psa 86:7**- In the day of my trouble I will call upon You,  
For You will answer me.

**Psa 91:15**- He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;  
I *will be* with him in trouble;  
I will deliver him and honor him.

2. We have **access** to the Father through the mediator, Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for our sins and made us children of God! Jesus is the only one that can save us from our sins and the only way to the father is through him.

**Q – What do these verses say about Jesus?**

**Joh 14:6** - Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

**Rom 5:1** - Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

**Rom 5:2** - through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

**Eph 2:17** - And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

**Eph 2:18** - For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

**Eph 2:19** - Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

**Eph 3:12** - in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

Look at what The apostle Peter said in Acts 4:9-12 about Jesus after doing a great miracle in His name:

*"...If we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

3. It doesn't really matter how much faith we have. What is really important is **whom our faith is in**.

**Q – What does this verse say about faith?**

**Luk 17:6** - So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

God is our creator who is greater than all and has the desire and the ability to help us. We have access to Him through Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for our sins. Because of Jesus, we can talk to God in prayer about anything and have access to His help and protection

## Why Do We Find It Difficult To Pray?

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**P**rayer is the way that we gain access to the resources of heaven in order to bring change here on earth. When you think about it, God could do everything without us, but He chooses to work with us through prayer. Yet it seems that at some time in every believer's life, we find it difficult to pray. There are many examples this in the bible:

**Psalm 22:2**

O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear;  
And in the night season, and am not silent.

**Psalm 80:4**

O LORD God of hosts,  
How long will You be angry  
Against the prayer of Your people?

**Q – Have you ever found it difficult to pray? Are their times when praying is more difficult than at other times?**

Although we are encouraged to pray about everything, sometimes it seems that our prayers are hindered. At times it can seem that God is far away, while at other times God seems to be completely silent. We often must wait for a long time before we receive an answer from God, and sometimes He just says no! We must make sure that there is nothing on our part that would prevent us from hearing His voice or hindering our communication with Him. Here are 13 things that can hinder our prayers:

1. **Bitterness** - holding grudges against others will hinder our prayers -

*Heb 12:15* - looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

2. **Discouragement** - sometimes we become discouraged when it seems that God doesn't answer us and eventually give up -

*Gal 6:9* - And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

3. **Doubt** - sometimes we can doubt God even though we believe in Him. Peter believed that Jesus was the Christ, yet doubted when he began to walk on water

*Mat 14:31* - And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

4. **Ignorance** - we are used to something different – we are not accustomed to talking to someone that we cannot see -

**1Jn 4:20** - If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

5. **Lack of compassion** - we can become hardened to the needs of the world around us.

**Mat 9:36-38** - But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly *is* plentiful, but the laborers *are* few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

6. **Lack of discipline** - if we don't establish a routine of regular prayer we may become slack -

**Dan 6:10** - *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.*

7. **Lack of Faith** - if we really do not understand who God is, we will not believe that He will answer or even hear us -

**Heb 11:6** - *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

8. **Lack of intimacy** - it is difficult to talk to someone that you don't really know well

**Eph 3:16** - *that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,*

**Eph 3:17** - *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,*

**Eph 3:18** - *may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—*

**Eph 3:19** - *to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

9. **Our enemies** - the devil wants to stop us, our flesh doesn't want to, and the world distracts us!

**1Pe 5:8** - *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*

**Rom 7:18** - *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*

**1Jn 2:16** - For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

10. **Physical weariness** - when we are tired it can become very difficult to concentrate or to keep our focus when praying.

**1Ki 19:4** - But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"

**1Ki 19:5** - Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat."

11. **Religious Attitudes** - to some, prayer can be no more than a religious exercise with no depth or sincerity (Luke 18:9-14).

**Luk 18:9** - Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

**Luk 18:10** - "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

**Luk 18:11** - The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

**Luk 18:12** - I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

**Luk 18:13** - And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

**Luk 18:14** - I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

12. **Un-forgiveness** - If we do not forgive those who have wronged us, how can we expect to be forgiven of our own wrongs?

**Mar 11:24** - Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

**Mar 11:25** - "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

**Mar 11:26** - But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

13. **Wrong motives** - sometimes what we are asking for is not good for us (James 4:3)

**Jas 4:3** - You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

Let's make sure that there is nothing on our part that may hinder our prayers. If you ever feel that your prayers are stalled, go through this list to make sure that there is nothing on your part that is hindering your prayers.

## How Do We Do It? *(part 1 – what did Jesus say?)*

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How did Jesus tell us to pray?

Don't be like the hypocrites

Go to your room

Don't use vain repetitions

Forgive

The Lord's prayer

It is a pattern to follow

Don't say it if you don't mean it

Our Father in heaven

Holly

Reign – Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done

Provision – our daily bread

Forgiveness

Protection – lead us not into temptation

Worship – thine is the kingdom