

QUICK THEOLOGY

A Beginner's Guide to Prayer



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Introduction

In this book we're going to look at what prayer is, what the goal of prayer is, and how we can pray practically. A couple of weeks ago I sent out my weekly newsletter, *The Conlectio* I talked about how there are several phrases in Christian world that make me crazy. One of those happens to be: "*Just pray about it,*"—especially when it's said without the fundamental step of teaching people how to pray.

Now, I'll be the first to admit that there have been periods of time throughout my Christian life where I definitely felt like (and knew!) that my prayer life wasn't what it should be—as in, it wasn't as strong as I knew would be good for me. I knew that God wanted better for me, so I made a concerted effort to work towards a healthier prayer life. In my walk, it was reaffirmed to me over and over again just how important prayer is to every single Christian—because prayer is the very heart

of the Christian life. It's our direct connection to God!

I think a lot of times we would argue that, and say: "*Well, the word of God is the heart of the Christian life.*" But I would say that, "*The word of God talks a whole lot about prayer.*" Jesus gave us the example of how to pray, as we'll see in a moment, and assumes actively that His disciples will be praying. It is important to us not only to pray, but to develop a spiritual discipline of prayer. It's not easy, and it's not natural...but it is necessary. *Why?* Simply put, this discipline of prayer is what mobilizes the Word of God in our lives and in the lives of others. It connects us to the heart of God, connects us to the Holy Spirit through Christ—and we are becoming more and more like Jesus as we submit to the Holy Spirit's leading.



Praying People

If you read my books *How to Hear God's Voice* or *How to Walk by the Spirit*, you'll see that every concept is interlinked when it comes to the Christian walk. If we want to walk by the Spirit and hear God's voice for the decisions we're making, we have to pray—and we will not know how to walk by the Spirit if we don't pray. *We won't hear God's voice if we don't pray.* We're commanded and expected to be a praying people. But beyond this, though, I want to encourage and assure you that you'll experience such exciting and amazing things in your Walk with God. You will ask yourself: "*Why did I not begin this sooner? Why did I not devote myself to prayer sooner?*" You'll suddenly come alive with the realization that the Christian life that Jesus promised in the Bible is the direct result of your prayer life with God. And that's a powerful promise to live in.

I think so many of us miss out on this, or we wonder all of these intellectual questions about God and the Bible *because* we aren't praying about it. We aren't seeking God in prayer, or we try out prayer like it's a car on a used car lot—we take it for a spin and then we go right back to where we were, whether or not it was conducive to living a Spirit-filled life. The problem? *That's not how prayer works.* Prayer is a long-term relationship with a loving and righteous God.

Here's the thing we have to realize, though: He doesn't owe us anything. Every good gift that comes from God is a gift of grace to undeserving people. We do not deserve the blessings He gives us, and yet He promises: *"If you seek me, I will be found by you."* Jesus affirms this, saying that: *"God is not like a father, who when asked for a loaf of bread and said, He gives his child a snake or a stone."* Instead, He's kind. He wants to give blessings—but at the same time, we can't take those truths and then begin to assume that we deserve God to answer us the way that we want Him to answer us. That undermines His sovereignty in our lives.

I believe a lot of us come to prayer that way. We come to prayer wanting to test God, we come to prayer wanting to get results on *our time*. Right now. Yesterday. Because of this, we don't come to prayer with a heart

that's ready to fully experience what God allows us to as obedient, prayerful people. That starting mindset *has* to change for your prayer life to truly grow.

I was thinking about this a few weeks ago, and I realized: I cannot accept a person's opinion of the effectiveness of prayer if they do not possess a daily habit of it. It's not wise to do! Here's why: If someone just prays once, and God doesn't jump like a genie, and then says, "*God doesn't work, prayer doesn't work.*" It's not that prayer doesn't work—it's that they don't pray enough to know whether it does or doesn't. Their mindset going into it is one of testing God and demanding that He perform for them in order for them to believe. In the *Walking by the Spirit* book, I discussed this and how this is not designed to be a game of God proving Himself to us. Faith is belief in what you cannot see, and that belief is not in the thing you're praying for. It's in the character of the god you're praying to. We don't seek God's hand, we seek His face. Now, this does not mean that we never have requests of God. We likely always will! However, this shift from seeing prayer as about a list of requests of God, to an intimacy with Him—a conversation with Him—is life-changing. Listening to Him, hearing His voice, reading His word, praying it back to Him, and sharing all of your requests and experiences with Him is the purest form of

intimacy that we have with our Creator.

You can look at prayer requests in the context of an earthly parent/child relationship. For example: If my relationship with my children was only them asking for things, it would not be a healthy relationship—especially if they got older and kept up the behavior. Certainly, at their young and immature stages though, there are a lot of requests. “*Mom, can I watch Bluey?*” “*Mom, can I have a snack?*” “*Mom, can we go outside?*” etc. All of those requests are made because they’re very dependent on me—and the fact that they’re young and immature. But as they mature, the litany of requests should grow less, and our relationship should consist of more than that. The same applies to the Christian life. You might be starting out in prayer, and find that all you’re making is requests. But, as you mature and grow in your faith, your understanding of God and prayer (and your overall relationship with God) should also mature.

Let’s look at what Jesus gave us as a model for this kind of prayer life. We see one of the earliest references in Matthew 6, during the famous sermon on the mount. He’s instructing his disciples on how to pray here, and He specifically points out that the Pharisees would come and pray in public where they could be seen. He says in verse 5, “*When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for*

they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.”

Instead, He tells us:

“Truly I say to you they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words, do not be like them. For your Father knows what you need before you ask Him, pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day 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 evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

In this passage, we see that He gives us a lot of

information. He starts by giving us an example of a trend among the religious leaders at the time, which was to pray publicly and elaborately for the attention that they would get. And He basically says: *“That’s the only reward they’re getting.”*

Then He compares the godly prayer—first comparing it to the prayers of the Pharisees, and then comparing it to the pagan religions of the day. He then says: *“Look, the Gentiles heap up a ton of empty phrases, extra words, fancy words, thinking that that’s going to impress their deity. But I’m not asking you to do that, you can say exactly what’s on your heart because your Father already knows what you need before you even ask Him.”*

Then He outlines the Lord’s prayer for us. An important thing I want you to remember here is that the Lord’s prayer is a model. This isn’t the only prayer that you can ever pray. It was a model for the disciples to follow, as they were still getting the concept of prayer down.

Let’s break down what that prayer looks like. Let’s start with the first line: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.* This is a statement of reverence and respect for God. It’s acknowledging His power, His greatness and His Holiness. Hallowed directly means Holy, and we’re implying this concept to the Lord’s name. We

then move to the next line: *Your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* So here, we give the Lord the total submission that He deserves. We're saying YES to what He wants, what He directs, what He wills—bending our will to His. Next line: *Give us this day our daily bread,* which is us asking for things we need or requests just as I spoke about earlier—and then we ask for forgiveness: *Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.* Now we've come full circle, leading to repentance and lament, asking for forgiveness and accountability to God. We ask Him to show us where we need to forgive other people. Then lastly, we close: *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*—where we're essentially asking for His protection, His guidance, His discernment, and His wisdom. So, this is a model for how to pray, completely inclusive of the things that you can (and should) be praying for.



Praying Like ACTS

Over the course of your Christian walk, you may have heard of the ACTS model of prayer. It's an acronym for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. I personally love this quick model! It's convenient and flexible, and a great reminder to cover all of the bases when I'm writing out my prayers in the morning. I especially appreciate that it reminds me not to get stuck in that litany of requests.

Let's take a look at what prayer within the ACTS model looks like.

ADORATION

Adoration occurs when we focus our minds to the character of God, preparing ourselves to pray in alignment with His will. We see Jesus do this in the Bible, as he says: "*Our Father in heaven, Holy be Your Name.*" The Psalms are a great resource if you want to

practice using adoration as a base for your prayers. I also love the book, *Adore* by my friend Sara Hagerty—which talks at length about how adoration of God radically changes our daily lives. That’s the kind of prayer that you can pray at any point during your day, and you can adore God for literally anything. From the sun that you see in the sky, to the security of a house and a loving family. Adoration is the very first part of this prayer model for a reason—this type of acknowledgement is powerful for our spiritual standing and focus.

CONFESSION

The second part of the ACTS model is confession, which looks like confessing any sins that you’re struggling with. If you aren’t sure where to start, you might try asking yourself: *What is a roadblock in your intimacy with God? What do you need to bring to the Lord and ask for His wisdom about?* I would say during the confession portion is where I spend time listening to God’s voice and listening for Him to speak, allowing Him to show me what I need to do with any areas of repentance that he’s working on. *Do I need to apologize to someone, do I need to reach out to someone, do I need to set a better boundary?* He always shows me—faithfully.