

HOW TO PRAY

One of the questions of the Christian life is, “How do we relate to God?” How do we come before Him and present to Him the requests that we have? And how do we relate to Him in a way that brings a blessing to His heart that is proper and respectful, and a joy for Him to hear?

Prayer is the primary way that we come to God, where we talk to Him, and relate to Him the expressions and desires of our heart. And prayer is simply that. Prayer is simply talking to God.

Jesus specifically taught the disciples how to pray in Matthew chapter 6. He said,

“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 men. I tell you the truth, 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.

"This, then, is how you should pray:

'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (*Mt 6:5-15*)

And we can learn many things from this. Our prayers need to be simple, direct and sincere. There is no need for vain repetition. There is no need to impress God with great “sacrifice”. In fact, Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (*Lk 12:32*)

And this reflects the very heart of God. He loves us and He wants to help us. We are His children and He is looking for faith on our part. Do we know Him? Do we believe Him? Do we trust that He knows, sees, and cares? The Bible says that, “Anyone who comes to him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (*Heb 11:6 NIV*)

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul said,

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (*Phil 4:6-7*)

And from this we can also learn that our prayers are to be filled with thanks and praise to God for the many, many things He does all the time. And when we begin to see all that God does in creation around us, it is fitting to praise God for these things and acknowledge that they are His doing, not the result of chance, the hands of men, and certainly not any other god.

Notice from what Jesus said, however, that there are things that can stop God’s answer from coming to us, and a refusal to forgive others is one of them. One of the things that God desires strongly is that His children live with one another in unity. On the night before He died, Jesus prayed for all who would believe in Him, asking

“that they would be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you...May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (*Jn 17:20-23*)

It therefore is of the utmost necessity that our relationships are right with one another, for if we do not forgive men when they trespass against us, God will not forgive us our sins when we trespass against Him. And if we truly know God and truly want to make Him known to the world, we will forgive one another and make every effort to resolve any disputes knowing that whatever we sacrifice for His Kingdom’s sake will surely bear fruit for Him. (*Jn 12:23-25*)

There are times, however, when Satan and his dominions oppose us just because it is their intent to interfere with God’s answers to our prayers. The Book of Daniel tells us in chapter 10 that a heavenly battle took place for three weeks until the angel sent by God was able to get through with God’s answer. During this time, Daniel fasted and prayed, constantly looking to God to give him an answer. And truly, one of the most important principles of prayer is to keep praying until something happens. Press in, believe, stand on God’s promises, and pray again. Fast from food if you need to, but don’t give up. Jesus said, “If you believe you will receive whatever you ask in prayer.” (*Mt 21:22*)

In fact, God is so willing to give his children the desires of their hearts, that it is actually more important to be careful what you pray, lest you pray for the wrong thing and get it. The Old Testament patriarch Abraham asked God to bless his son Ishmael because he struggled to believe God’s promise that he would have a son through his wife Sarah. And God did bless Ishmael and

promised to make him into a great nation even though His promise would still come through Isaac. And the sons of Ishmael, the Arabs, have persecuted the sons of Isaac, the Israelites, to this day. So why did God bless Ishmael? Simply because Abraham was his friend, and Abraham had asked.

A far wiser way is to pray what Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane. He night before he died, time and again he went before the Lord knowing what he was about to experience, and still he said, "Father, not my will, but your will be done." (*Mk 14:35-36*) And that is really one of the wisest ways to pray. What better way is there to spare ourselves a lot of trouble but by asking for God's direction, and praying for His will -- free from self-serving motives or desires.

"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer." (*1 Pet 3:12*)

In this way God's will will be accomplished in your life and on the earth.

Finally, pray in Jesus' name. This is one of the greatest privileges of belonging to Jesus Christ. As Jesus received favor and approval from God the Father for His perfect obedience, we too have that privilege and standing if we are in Christ, and God will listen and graciously grant our requests if we pray in Jesus' name.

As Jesus said, "Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be complete." (*Jn 16:24 NIV*)

And this is God's will for our lives.