

The Conversation

On learning how to pray

God's goal for you is to cultivate an intimate relationship with Him. Prayer is one of our means of enjoying and cultivating that intimacy.

"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. Matthew 6:6-13

Notice He says WHEN you pray, not IF you pray! It's almost like saying WHEN you breathe. Prayer has been called "the breath of the soul." It's one of the foundations of our faith in Jesus Christ. It's key to becoming a passionate follower of His.

Notice also that He says to *go into your room* (or closet) to do this praying. The Greek term in the New Testament here is one that denotes a 'treasure room' - a place where God keeps his treasures. God wants to share these treasures with us, so when we cultivate a lifestyle of prayer and come boldly to His throne, He doles them out to us little by little.

Someone might ask, "If He wants to give us these gifts, why doesn't He do it all at once?" Why doesn't God give us all He's got in one lump sum? I'd say it's because He knows that we would go off and live off of what He gave us, and then fail to get to know the One who gave them to us. As I've said, the goal is to know Him, not just to get His treasures!

Notice that He talks about *rewarding* you. I think that the "reward" is usually not something that He gives you as a result of your prayers, it's the praying itself and the intimacy between you and God. I encourage you to view prayer not as a formality, or as a religious duty, but as entering a room full of God's treasures (fellowship, partnership and worship).

We call this, "**The Conversation**," because when we pray we are conversing with God. We're interacting with Him. We're talking and He's listening, and He's talking while we're listening (and acting on what we've heard).

Let's pose three questions and discuss simple answers to each:

- ***What is Prayer?***
- ***How Should We Pray?***
- ***When Should We Pray?***

WHAT IS PRAYER?

First, praying is not the same as *saying prayers*. Children are often taught to say *their prayers*. But prayer is so much more than the mere recitation of religious verbiage. Prayer is fundamentally three things: *fellowship, partnership and worship*.

1. ***Prayer is Fellowship***

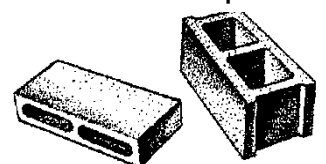
Fellowship is intimacy in relationship. Prayer is our expression of that relationship with God.

- *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." 2 Corinthians 13:14*
- *"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." 1 John 1:3*

We know that we are to have fellowship with each other, but don't forget that our primary fellowship is with *God*. There is an intimacy that He is trying to cultivate in us and between us. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, *"Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."* He is saying that if you open the door to your heart, He will come in and have an intimate meal with you. In the days in which the Bible was written, eating a meal together was a means of fellowship, of relationship building and bonding.

**...the goal is to know Him,
not just to get His treasures!**

1 Corinthians 1:9 says, "God, who has *called you* into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." He has called you into this intimate relationship with Himself. Someone said, "Prayer is a friendship with God



that makes a conversation possible."

Prayer is not just for emergencies. Don't wait for a disaster to happen and then engage only in 'desperation praying.' I heard about a guy who was marooned on a desert island. He prayed out to God saying, "I know I haven't talked to You in 30 years, but if You get me out of this alive, I won't bother you again for another 30 years!" This is exactly what God doesn't want. He doesn't want you to pray only when you're in trouble. He wants you to spend time with Him so that you can get to know Him. Then when there's trouble, you'll have the spiritual wisdom and strength to weather it! He wants you to pray, looking for His *Presence*, not merely His *presents*. Often, people treat God like He is an ATM. You just push the buttons and the money comes out!

2. Prayer is Partnership

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone -- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:1-4

We're told here that we should pray for and be thankful for everybody - especially those in authority. We call this kind of prayer, "Intercession," which could be described as loving somebody so much that you are willing to talk to God for them, even if they are not willing to talk to God on their own behalf.

**"Prayer is a friendship with God
that makes a conversation possible."**

"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you." 1 Samuel 2:23

Praying for one another is a responsibility that we have that we have as His followers. It's in prayer that we partner with God in His life-changing adventures in other people's lives! It's as though a billionaire chose you, rescued you from off the street, took you home, cleaned you up and made you a partner in all his business dealings. He then took you down to his bank and changed all of his accounts to reflect a *two-signature* format, so that every check he writes requires his signature and yours in order for them to be valid. He still decides what needs to be accomplished with his business, and he still signs the checks. But they aren't any good until you sign *your* name too. That's what intercessory prayer is - God decides what to do, but you are His partner. His business requires your signature,

your cooperation. When He wants to get something accomplished, He asks you to ask Him for whatever it is which would bring Him pleasure. What a privilege!

3. Prayer is Worship

"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks." John 4:23

"Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD. Psalm 150

In addition to *fellowship* and *partnership*, prayer is *worship*.

We are taught all the way through the Bible that our highest calling is to worship God. We are to thank Him for who He is and what He's done. *He's made us to acknowledge Him and ascribe to Him the worthiness due Him.*

The universe was made by God to reflect the glory of God. We are really the only part of this earth that has the power to choose whether or not we will fulfill that destiny. As humans, we decide to worship God or not. Jesus said, *"If you refuse to worship God, the rocks will cry out."* When you pray, thank Him, praise Him, worship Him. He's worthy of your worship – *and more!*

HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

1. Pray With Realism

Notice that in Matthew 6 Jesus begins His exemplary prayer with, *"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name..."* One characteristic of this prayer is that it's very *real*. Jesus was praying in front of the disciples. When they saw the intimacy of His communion with the Father, they asked Him to teach them how to have the same. They noticed the reality in the way He expressed Himself to God and wanted to know how to do it too. When you come to God, *be real*.

Be sure to express yourself with a balance of *intimacy and reverence*. Some

overdue the intimacy and lose the reverence, treating God as their Heavenly Buddy! Others may overdue their reverence and lose their intimacy, talking to God as though He were a million miles away. Remember, He's both *close up* and *far away*, so pray with realism.

2. Pray In Christ's Name

- *"And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."*
John 14:13-14
- *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit --fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."* John 15:16

His Name is our access to the throne room of God. We have already learned that we are accepted at the Father's throne because of what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross. His *Name* is our 'password' into the presence of God, and we come to Him on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done by taking our place at judgment. We don't approach God on the merit of our spiritual success, but on the merit of Jesus' sacrifice for us.

**He's both close up
and far away...**

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." Hebrews 10:19-22

3. Pray With Faith

"Have faith in God, Jesus answered. I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, Go, throw yourself into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. " Mark 11:22-24

In another place the Bible tells us that we don't live by sight, but *by faith*. Faith is

how we receive Jesus initially, and how we grow in Jesus continually.

- *But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. James 1:6*
- *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11:6*

We can only please Him when we trust Him. He's pretty easy to trust because He's so trustworthy.

When you pray, you don't always get your answers immediately. So, don't play 'doorbell ditch' with God, where you knock on the door and then run away before He answers it! Learn to *wait patiently* for God to answer. Knock on His door and then wait for His solutions. God seems to answer prayer in one of four ways:

- **"Yes"** (That's when you get what you prayed for, exactly how you prayed for it.)
- **"No"** (That's when God knows it would be best for you not to have what you asked for, it might harm you.)
- **"Wait"** (He sometimes requires time to give us what we need.)
- **"My way"** (God has a way of answering our prayer that doesn't look like the answer we expected or prayed for, but it is the solution that is best for us.)

4. Pray With the Help of the Holy Spirit

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Romans 8:26-27

We need to learn how to listen to God and be available to pray His concerns back to Him. I like to say that, *"True prayer begins in the heart of God, is communicated back to the hearts of praying people, is prayed back to God again, and then God answers!"*

You can see that there's a back and forth going on between us and the Father. Praying is a partnership with God in the furthering of his eternal purposes.

Faith is the spontaneous reaction to the faithfulness

We need to be able to hear what is on the heart of God. I believe God is always *speaking*. The problem is that we may not always be *listening*. He is always broadcasting, but we may not have our receiver tuned to His station. People often ask how they can know the voice of God. The key is in knowing God better. When my son calls me on the phone he doesn't have to introduce himself, because I know his voice. The reason I know his voice is I know *him* so well! We've had lots of conversations. Get to know God and you'll be better at discerning His voice.

WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

1. Pray When You Are Alone

"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." Matthew 6:6

Pray in secret in a private place. In Mark 1:35 it tells about Jesus going off to a "solitary place" to talk to his Father, and I want to encourage you to find an alone place to do the same every day. Make an appointment with God and keep it. Spend time with Him so that He can speak to you and you can speak to Him.

2. Pray When We're Together

- *"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."* Matthew 18:19-20
- *"They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."* Acts 1:14
- *"When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. Acts 4:24*

Someone once said, "They pray best together, who pray first alone." So the first place you should pray is alone, but then join a church and pray with others.

3. Pray At a Set Time Each Day

"One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of

prayer --at three in the afternoon." Acts 3:1

Apparently, Peter and John had an appointment with God everyday at three in the afternoon.

"Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." Daniel 6:10

It sounds like Daniel had 3 appointments with God every day.

Someone once said, *"Seven days without prayer makes one weak!"* I have found in my life that I have to make an appointment for everything that I'm going to do that is important to me. I imagine that you'll make time to do what you feel is important to you. I trust that you'll come to count time spent with Jesus as vitally important. Set a time each day to get alone and talk to Him.

4. Pray At All Times Throughout the Day

1 Thessalonians 5:17 says simply *"pray continually."* In other words, "Live in such close *communion* with God that you are always *communicating!*"

"As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42

We have a lot of things going on in our lives, a lot of things calling for our attention. But Jesus says, "Only one thing is needed." Like Mary, we need to regularly "sit at his feet" and hear what He has to say to us. He said that Mary had "chosen what is better," and that's what we'll have to do as well – choose to spend time with Jesus.

**Seven days without prayer makes
one *weak!***

I encourage you to be a person of prayer. Know that prayer is *fellowship, partnership and worship*. Remember that you must pray with *realism, in Christ's name, with faith*, and with *the Holy Spirit's help*. Pray when you are alone, when you are with other Jesus followers, at set time each day, and at all times throughout the day!

Father, I pray that all of my readers will become addicted to spending time with You in prayer. Help them to not just "say prayers", but pray as a lifestyle. Help them make time to get alone with You regularly and share with You how they feel, what they think, and to ask You for help. And as they do, help them to get to know You better and better; and to know your voice when You speak to them. In Jesus' name. Amen.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Get started...

Here's a suggestion about how you can begin to develop a vital life of communion with God in prayer.

- Look up and read all of the passages cited in this chapter.
- Figure out when would be the best time for you to have your set time alone with God each day for prayer.
- Plan for the next 30 days to keep an "appointment" with Him each day at the time you've chosen.
- Spend at least 15 minutes in prayer each time. You'll probably find that 15 minutes will not be enough time for the conversations you begin to have with Him. So, get "off the clock" and go for it!
- Begin with WORSHIP. Praise Him for who He is and what He's done for you and others.
- SPEAK to Him about your problems and needs, and ASK for help in those areas.
- Then, INTERCEDE for others around you. Pray for your friends and family to become Christians and that God would meet all of their needs.

A verse to memorize...

- John 15:7

(I recommend that you look up the verse, write it on a card or something, and repeat it over and over throughout the day until you can quote it verbatim.)

Read it and write it...

- Take some time everyday to read the Bible (I recommend that you begin with the Gospel of John and then move to the book of Acts. When you finish those books, go on to the Gospel of Matthew.).
- And then journal your thoughts, feelings, and questions. In addition to

talking to God everyday out loud, write some of your praises and prayers on paper (or on your computer). Be honest and intimate in your conversations with Him. Expect Him to communicate with you with honesty and intimacy as well.

