

How To Pray: the Beginner's Guide

Praying is communicating with God



Image: Denise Savage

Learning how to pray is really about developing a relationship with God. Relationships are built on moments of connection, bonding you to another person and many of them centre on communication — the words you say and the way you say them. Prayer is a means of connection with God.

This is a practical guide to getting started communicating with God,
no matter where you are on your spiritual journey.

What Is Prayer?

God has qualities we can understand and relate to, but we cannot expect to relate to the Creator of the universe in exactly the same way we relate to a close friend or family member. God is beyond what we can fully understand in the natural everyday world. Perhaps the best place to begin is by making clear that prayer is about talking *with* God rather than just talking *to* God. This requires mutuality in sharing with God and listening to God. What you believe about God and this relationship is fundamental to how you will communicate with God.

God is ready and willing to listen because God knows you and wants to be known by you. If you believe that, or you want to believe that, then you're ready to pray.

Why Should I Pray?

People pray for all sorts of reasons. Christians believe in Jesus Christ who came to reveal the goodness and grace of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. A Christian opens oneself to enter into a deep union with God through living life with Christ. Therefore, prayer draws us to be in tune with God's Spirit.

Maybe the question is not why should I pray, but why should I want to? Here are four areas to consider:

Adoration – Acknowledging the goodness of God presence, knowledge and power.

Confession – Receiving forgiveness for specific actions or attitudes that hurt others/self/God.

Intercession – Committing the needs and concerns of others/world situations to God.

Petition – Requesting direction/clarity in personal life decisions or for the communities future.

Thanksgiving – Being grateful for who God is and what God has done, is doing and will do.

How Do I Pray?

What position should I be in to pray?

You can sit, stand, walk, kneel, drive... when you pray. God hears your prayer whatever position you are in. There is value in choosing a position that helps you focus without distraction, but this is not necessary.

What do I say?

It's helpful to address God in a way that acknowledges who God is in that moment. Some people will say, "Loving God," "Heavenly Father (Mother)," "Gracious God," "Creator Spirit" "Almighty One"... There are no right or wrong words to say, if we are being genuine and honest.

Do I pray to God as the Father/Mother/Parent/Creator, or Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit?

This is completely up to you. Choose one or try praying to each member of the Trinity (three yet one) at different times, because prayer is dwelling within God's completeness. As a Christian, the Holy Spirit is living within, so there is deep intimacy when one prays.

Should I pray out loud?

God hears verbal and non-verbal prayers. Praying out loud with someone can encourage them or help them to hear God speaking. Sometimes another person can't find the words to say, so by praying out loud we might be able to give voice to what is going on for them. Listening to someone else talk with God can help you focus on God too. Jesus said that when two or more gather to focus on God, something special happens (Matthew 18:20). Praying however, is not all about talking. We need to stop talking to listen to what God is saying to us as well.

WARNING: It's easy to pray/say what you think another person should hear or what they want to hear, rather than what God needs to communicate.

How do I end a prayer?

A common way is, "In the name of Jesus, Amen." (Amen means 'so be it') This ending is not essential as many quick prayers happen between tasks and responsibilities in a day. However, using a phrase like this helps us remember who Jesus is and what he has done for us and the world. It can also be an affirmation that you believe God has heard your prayers and that you trust God for it to be as it needs to be.

What Will Happen When You Pray?

Transformation occurs when we pray. Here are eight things to expect as you pray. You might:

1. recognize that you are not God.
2. realize the world doesn't revolve around you.
3. gain strength from outside yourself.
4. surrender control to God.
5. communicate your real feelings.
6. receive affirmation that God loves you and cares about you.
7. trust that God is with you.
8. to experience an answer to pray.

Will I hear God talk to me?

God speaks verbally and non-verbally. God comes to us through:

- a word or phrase,
- a sign (a bird chirping, a rainbow appearing, a leaf falling...),
- another person (showing up, saying something that affirms the prayer...),
- in journaling (as we write/draw, something can stand out and bring clarity),
- opening the Bible (reading a verse or passage provides answers or comfort),
- ...

God always hears prayers, answers prayers and God is always good.

*Prayer is not about getting my own way
Prayer is about changing my heart*

"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."

Colossians 4:2