

Teach Me To Pray

by Dr. Mark S. Adams

In some way, nearly every aspect of our life ties in to the question of how to pray. Things are going really well! How should I talk to God about this? Things have been awful! What does this mean for me and my standing with God? The Christian life journey is an intentional movement toward God, and the question of how to talk with God is of great significance on this journey.

Jesus' own disciples witnessed Jesus' own dedication to prayer (Mark 1:35) and asked him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1-4). In response, Jesus taught them what we usually refer to as the Lord's Prayer. This study contains some basic ideas about how to deepen your prayer life.

There are **Four Ps of Prayer** that can help you in this process:

Purpose, Place, Posture, and Pattern.



Purpose

To deepen your prayer life, it is important to begin

with **"Why?"** While there are many great examples of God hearing and responding powerfully to the prayers of people, the fundamental purpose of praying is not to get what you want. Prayer is a tool to help us set our hearts on what God wants. If the only way you approach God in prayer is to treat him like a heavenly vending machine, expected to fulfill your every request immediately and precisely to your demands, then you will find prayer frustrating at best.

It may be helpful to think about prayer the way you think about a master sculptor creating a masterpiece. The world's finest artwork requires enormous attention to detail, and it often progresses at the rate of only a few chisel marks at a time. Sure, there are a few larger chunks removed to get it started, but for the art to take shape, the sculptor must have much time with his or her medium to bring it to its desired form. If the marble could get a mind of its own and wander off from its sculptor, it would be difficult if not impossible for it to reach its best possible design.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:10

In prayer, think of God as a sculptor and of yourself as the masterpiece that God is forming. Some of your major life events, good or bad, can have the effect of shaping the general kind of person that you are. But if you are to become the person God is forming you to be, you need to spend time submitting yourself to God's capable artistry. This is the purpose of prayer: opening yourself to God in such an honest and vulnerable way that he can work on you, gradually shaping your heart to become more

like his. When you love what God loves, you will instinctively begin to do what God would do. God likes when we pray to him, and it is absolutely true that prayer changes things, but the most important thing that prayer can change is us.

Pray then like this:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed by 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.

Matthew 6:9-13

Teach Me To Pray



Place

As long as you are alive, your physical and spiritual dimensions will be intrinsically connected. You cannot grow spiritually apart from what you do with your physical body. There are both external and internal aspects to your physical self that you should consider as you pray. In this section, our focus is on the **external** factors.

Look at Jesus' actions in Mark 1:35. Notice all the external physical dimensions Jesus took into account:

- It was early in the morning, still dark outside.
- He traveled to the place where he intended to pray.
- The place where he prayed was isolated.
- All of this was intentional on his part, because he got up early to do it.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Mark 1:35

In Matthew 6:6 Jesus teaches that when we pray, we should go into our room and shut the door so that a significant part of our prayer life is secret. The promise is that if we spend our quiet "secret" time seeking God's presence, God will reward us openly.

Whether you are going off to a mountain, beside a body of water, or into your bedroom closet, Jesus believed strongly that the place where you choose to pray is significant. When we pray, it is helpful to remove distractions so that our only focus is on God. Leave your smartphone somewhere where it can't distract you. In fact, it can be helpful to create a spot for yourself that you will use specifically for prayer. A favorite chair, a swing, or a window with a nice view can help you return to a prayerful mindset quickly when you return to the regularly for that specific purpose.



Posture

As we said above, you cannot pray without some use of your physical body. It is worth thinking about what you can do with your body that will help you to pray. In Scripture, there is no single way prescribed for our prayer posture.

For example:

- **Abraham** fell with his face to the ground, bowing before God (Genesis 17:3)
- **Moses** prayed with his hands held up (Exodus 9:27-29)
- **Solomon** knelt down as he prayed (1 Kings 8:54)
- **Jesus** looked up toward the sky as he prayed on some occasions (Mark 6:41) and fell on his face to pray on other occasions (Matthew 26:39)

You may want to try out various postures as you pray and see how they impact your experience of praying. Laying with your face to the ground is a very vulnerable position, and no doubt the experience of touching the floor or the grass outside may shape the direction your thoughts go. Standing with your hands raised, looking into the sky will produce a different experience. Likewise, you can vary whether you pray silently in your heart, or speak out loud to God as you talk to him.

Teach Me To Pray

In general, if you want to pray for a longer period of time, it is helpful to be in a physical position comfortable enough not to provide its own source of distraction. You are a physical person. Harness your physical self to enhance your spiritual practices. Otherwise, your body may be a source of distraction.



Pattern

The most challenging aspect of prayer is that it requires commitment. In developing a habit of prayer, allow yourself much grace and patience. If you intend to pray every day, but pray for one day and then miss a few, do not be hard on yourself. Don't let your inner perfectionist suggest that if you miss one part of your plan that you ought to quit. You probably had to crawl before you could walk or run, and a healthy life of prayer is the same way. If you make a commitment to praying more and then pray more at all because of this commitment, that is a victory to be celebrated. When you miss a few days, allow yourself to start again without needing to do any acts of penance for unfulfilled intentions. Do the best you can, just for today.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.
Revelation 3:20

In trying to make prayer into a habit, give some thought to how you have successfully implemented other patterns in your life. For most things we take seriously on our schedule, this involves sitting down and planning when we will do something, marking out time on our calendars, and then honoring that priority. When you make a schedule for yourself, include prayer in your list if high priority items to schedule, and then actually do schedule it. Put God in the most important spot on your agenda, and don't allow anything else to remove him.

Whether you pray as soon as you wake up, on your commute, on your lunch break, or before you sleep, whatever time you will give to God, he is glad to receive. When you give God space in your schedule to work on you, he will show up in ways that will amaze you. Sometimes you cannot perceive exactly what God is up to, but over time, you can see his handiwork in your life and character.

Would you like to talk to someone about deepening your prayer life? One of our ministers would be glad to talk to you. 361.992.8251

Mark Adams
mark@kingscrossingcoc.com

Les Maloney
les@kingscrossingcoc.com