

PRAYER, LEARNING HOW TO

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Main idea: basics of prayer

INTRODUCTION:

What are the first words a baby says?
What are the first words you or your baby said?
What if a baby doesn't talk?

Natural for baby to try to communicate

CRYING at first

ACTIONS later

WORDS last

Sp growth = desire to communicate with God-Pray, Meditate
Takes time to learn, feel awkward at first

PRAYER LIFE growing over the years?

Closer to God when pray?

Learning better how to pray, what to pray for?

More comfortable talking to God than year ago?

Listen, not do all the talking!

TALK TO GOD AS TO ONE YOU LOVE

Years ago a military officer and his wife were aboard a ship that was caught in a raging ocean storm. Seeing the frantic look in her eyes, the man tried unsuccessfully to allay her fears. Suddenly she grasped his sleeve and cried, "How can you be so calm?" He stepped back a few feet and drew his sword. Pointing it at her heart, he said, "Are you afraid of this?" Without hesitation she answered, "Of course not!" "Why not?" he inquired. "Because it's in your hand, and you love me too much to hurt me." To this he replied, "I know the One who holds the winds and the waters in the hollow of His hand, and He will surely care for us!" The officer was not disturbed because he had put his trust in the Lord.

WHY PRAY?

One of the most effective tricks of Satan is to make us think that prayer doesn't matter. Why Christians should pray:

* **Because prayer defeats Satan.** There is a powerful, cunning, deceptive, determined, and vicious devil. He is after you personally. The first step in dealing with the devil is prayer. And lots of it.

* **Because prayer puts you at God's disposal.** It makes you as clay in the hands of the potter. It enables you to say, Thy will be done. It brings you to the place of full surrender. Then, with Isaiah, you can say sincerely, Here am I, send me (Is. 6:8).

* **Because prayer puts God at your disposal.** This is not blasphemy. It is a blessed truth. Of course, God is not an errand boy to jump every time you make a request in prayer. But He has yielded to us the keys of the Kingdom. The power He has is available to those He can trust

with it. Notice what Jesus said: Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours (Mark 11:24). If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish and you shall have it (John 15:7). And James declared, The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16). When you stay on your knees before God long enough and often enough, you will lay hold of the power of God.

* **Because of what prayer accomplished.** Much gets done when much time is spent in prayer. There is growth in grace. There are blessings like showers upon the parched land. There is Christlikeness. And there are revivals in your life. Just spend enough time on your knees so that you may walk tall and strong for Him and through Him.

HOW TO PRAY

Prayer is powerful (John 14:13-14; 15:7,16; Mark 11:24; 11:22-24; Luke 11:9-10; I John 5:14; Jeremiah 33:3). There should be six parts to your prayer life, all equally well developed. These are:

1. CONFESSION (I John 1:9; Psalm 66:18; 51:1). To confess means to agree with God that the issue at hand is sin (not a mistake, someone else's fault, etc.) . Use the lists on page 15-17 to help in this. After you confess your sin make sure you accept God's forgiveness (Daniel 9:9,19; Psalm 130:4; 86:5; 78:30; 99:8; 103:3; Amos 7:2). Only God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7; 11:25; Luke 23:24; 5:24; Matthew 6:14; Colossians 3:13). God doesn't over look sin, he forgives because it was paid for with the blood of Jesus on the cross (Hebrews 9:22; Ephesians 4:32; 1:7; I Peter 2:24; 3:18; Luke 24:46-47; Colossians 1:14; John 19:30). This forgiveness is available to all (Isaiah 53:6; Colossians 2:13; romans 8:1). When you confess/admit your sin God forgives it. This means He blots it out (Isaiah 43:25; 1:18; 44:22; Acts 3:19; Colossians 2:14; Psalm 32), casts it behind His back (a place He can't see it - Isaiah 38:17; Jeremiah 31:34), forgets it (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17; Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34), makes it disappear where it will never be found (Jeremiah 50:20), has it vanish like the morning mist at noon (Isaiah 44:22; John 20:31; Matthew 27:51), and casts it into the deepest part of the sea (Micah 7:19) which will then be gone forever (Revelation 21:1).

2. PRAISE (Psalm 34:1-3; 48:1; Hebrews 13:15). Praise is glorifying God for Who and What He is. It is different than thanking Him for things He has done. We will be praising God for all eternity, so we should start now! God is pleased with our praise (Psalm 22:3; Hebrews 13:5).

The Bible says there is power in praise (Psalm 22:3). Praise can be done by word or song. Make sure you develop a strong praise life (Philippians 4:4; Hebrews 13:15). Read the following passages and turn them into praise prayers: Exodus 15:1-2; Deuteronomy 10:21; 32:3-4,43; I Samuel 2:1-2; II Samuel 22:4, 50; I Chronicles 16:9,25,31; 29:10-12; II Chronicles 5:12-14; 20:21-22,27; Psalm 8:1-2; 9:1-3; 31:21; 44:8; 40:16; 47:1-3; 68:3-4; 72:18-19; 86:12-13; 104:33; 108:3; 117:1-2; 119:108,175; 138:1-4; 142:7; 149:1,3,6-9; 150:1-6; Isaiah 25:1,9; 38:18-19; 60:18; Daniel 2:20-23; Jeremiah 20:13; Habakkuk 3:17-19; Zechariah 9:9; Luke 1:46-47; Luke 10:21; John 4:23,24; Ephesians 1:3; Jude 25; Revelation 4:10-11; 5:5,12-13; 15:3-4.

3. THANKSGIVING (Psalm 116:12; Philippians 4:6; I Thessalonians 5:18). Thanksgiving is thanking God for what He has done, is doing and is going to do in your life (as well as the lives of others). We all appreciate being thanked for things we do, and so does God. Be specific in

your thanksgiving. Remember, everything comes from Him and is for our good (Romans 8:28) so we should thank Him for everything!

4. INTERCESSION (Psalm 28:9; James 5:14-20; I Timothy 2:1-4; I Samuel 12:23). Intercession is prayer for others. Often it is good to keep a list of prayer requests so you remember to pray for them and so you can mark down the answer, too. Then thank God for the answer. Remember God answers EVERY prayer. The answer is either yes (now), wait (later) or no (never). Every prayer gets one of these answers. God is able to do anything, but He isn't always willing to do what it is we think He should do to bail us out (Daniel 3:17). Therefore when you pray for others first be sensitive to how God would have you pray. Don't be so quick to come up with a solution and make that your prayer. God may have another solution (better than ours). Don't pray solutions to God, pray problems and let Him come up with His own solution. You'll find prayers answered more often when you let Him figure out how to take care of something. Often instead of removing something He gives us grace to endure it (II Corinthians 12:7-10). Include that option in your prayers for others.

5. PETITION (James 4:2; Hebrews 4:15-16; John 15:7). Petition means asking God for things for yourself. This is legitimate. We shouldn't always pray just for ourselves, nor should we feel unworthy to ever pray for ourselves. Much of what I said under "Intercession" above fits in here. There are some things the Bible says we should ask for: an understanding heart (I Kings 3:7,9), fellowship with other believers (Philemon 4-6), forgiveness (Psalm 25:11,18,20), guidance (Psalm 25:4-5; 27:11), holiness (I Thessalonians 5:23), love (Philippians 1:9-11), mercy (Psalm 6:1-6), power (Ephesians 3:16), spiritual growth (Ephesians 1:17-19) and to know and do God's will (Colossians 4:12). As you pray for yourself think of a Bible promise to claim for it. God promises He will not forget us (Isaiah 49:15), not fail us (Joshua 1:5), will show us what to do (I Samuel 16:3), will help us (Isaiah 41:10) and will strengthen us (Isaiah 41:10).

6. LISTEN (I Samuel 3:10; Hebrews 1:1-2; 3:15; Psalm 62:5; 46:10) Good communication is a two-way street. Pause a few minutes and listen to God talk to you. You should do that throughout your day. After all, which is more important: you passing on information to God or Him passing on information to you? Be still in your mind, let Him put in thoughts, feelings, ideas, etc., that you need. Be sensitive to His leading. As with any relationship, the better you know the person the better the communication. Good, deep communication is difficult with a stranger, but the more time you spend with a person the better you can 'hear' them, and that's true with God, too. This is an art that takes time to develop, but won't happen if you don't work on it!

THE FIVE FINGER PRAYER

1. Your **thumb** is nearest to you. So begin your prayers by praying for those closest to you. They are the easiest to remember. To pray for our loved ones is, as C.S. Lewis once said, a "sweet duty".

2. The **next finger** is the pointing finger. Pray for those who teach, instruct and heal. This includes teachers, doctors, and ministers. They need support and wisdom in pointing others in the right direction. Keep them in your prayers.

3. The **next finger** is the tallest finger. It reminds us of our leaders. Pray for the president, leaders in business and industry, and administrators. These people shape our nation and guide public opinion. They need God's guidance.

4. The **fourth finger** is our ring finger. Surprising to many is the fact that this is our weakest finger; as any piano teacher will testify. It should remind us to pray for those who are weak, in trouble or in pain. They need your prayers day and night. You cannot pray too much for them.

5. And lastly comes our **little finger**; the smallest finger of all. Which is where we should place ourselves in relation to God and others. As the Bible says, "the least shall be the greatest among you." Your pinky should remind you to pray for yourself.

By the time you have prayed for the other four groups, your own needs will be put into proper perspective and you will be able to pray for yourself more effectively

UNANSWERED PRAYER

1. LACK OF FAITH Mt 21:22; James 1:6-7
2. SELFISHNESS James 4:2-3
3. CARNALITY Psalm 66:18
4. LACK OF COMPASSION Prov 21:13
5. LACK OF COMPLIANCE WITH GOD'S WILL I John 5:14
6. LACK OF DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY I Peter 3:7
7. PRIDE Job 35:12-13
8. DISOBEDIENCE I John 3:22
9. NOT BEING FILLED WITH HOLY SPIRIT Eph 6:18
10. UNFORGIVING SPIRIT Mark 11:25

PRAY PROBLEM, NOT THE SOLUTION

Petition answered, desire unanswered

Jews desire happiness so ask for meat to eat,
but doesn't make them happy

Jews want a king so they can be 'successful' like
other nations but doesn't happen

Demons ask to go into pigs so they can be safe
but all the pigs drown

Petition unanswered, desire answered

Healed man asks to be with Jesus so he can serve
Him, but sent home to serve

Abraham desires a son so asks if Ishmael can serve
God, but gets Isaac instead

Abraham is concerned for Lot's safety so asks God to
spare Sodom, Lot OK anyway

Petition and desire answered

Samson asks for strength back to avenge himself,
gets both

Thief on cross asks Jesus to remember him in heaven

so he'll be there, it happens
Jesus asks for Lazarus to come back to life so
bystanders can believe

GOOD PRAYER HABITS

Don't constantly repeat the Lord's name.
Don't repeat the same old phrases.
Don't pray AT others
Don't pray TO others
Don't pray showy prayers to impress others
Don't mumble or talk too softly in public prayer
Do talk naturally but respectfully
Do be definite, don't wander
Do set aside a certain time for daily private prayer

PRAYER PROMISES

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone that asks receives, and he that seeks shall find, and to him that knocks it shall be opened. ... If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" Matthew 7:7,11

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

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3

You will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will hear you. Jeremiah 29:12

He freely gives all things to us. Romans 8:32

CONDITIONS TO MEET

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. Mt. 21:22

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. Mark 11:24

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him. John 5:14:15

You don't have because you don't ask. You ask, and don't receive because you ask for the wrong purpose, that you may consume it upon your selfish desires. James 4:2-3

And whatever we ask, we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. I John 3:22

This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us; and if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. I John 5:14-15

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will and it shall be done for you." John 15:7

GET INTO THE HABIT OF DAILY PRAYER

* **Set aside time.** Take time when it can best be found, preferably early in the day. Prayers that are not said in the morning tend not be said at all.

* **Be faithful.** Whatever length of time is decided, it should be firmly kept. Without some discipline, prayer tends to be pushed to the margin even by the most devout - there is always something else to do that appears more pressing or more attractive. There are days when prayer seems less easy and spontaneous and concentration is harder. On these days the offering of time is an act of obedience - which is itself an act of faith.

* **Have structure.** This can give shape on constancy without constricting your spontaneous approach to God. Begin with acknowledging the presence of God. Adoration follows: praise, awe, and love for who He is. Then follow where the personal situation leads. This might mean thanks for particular benefits or mercies to you and others, admission of sins, and requests for your desires or needs, intercession for the help of others. Don't worry if one area monopolizes your prayer time - consider this as a principal need of the day.

* **Prayer is relationship.** Essentially prayer brings you into contact with God. Your growth in prayer should be a deepening of that relationship with Him. Like a child who runs eagerly with requests to a loving parent, your sincerity and complete honesty are essential for prayer as you run to the Father.

IF PRAYER NOT PERFECT, God hear anyway