

An Introduction to Prayer

- **What is prayer?**

Prayer is a worshipful offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to His will and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Prayer consists of worship, confession of sins, thankful acknowledgement of God's care and providence, and supplication on our behalf as well as others.

Question: Does praying in “the name of Jesus” mean that you end your prayer with the right words in order to get what you asked for?

Answer: No, we may end our prayers by saying, “...in the name of Jesus, Amen.” but this is not a special formula or incantation. This is a way of saying, “I am offering these prayers because of Jesus,” or “I am offering these prayers based upon the promises of God in the person and work of Jesus.” A prayer in “the name of Jesus” has much more to do with our submission than with getting God to do what we want.

Diving Deeper:

1) We should pray *according to the will of God.*

Psalm 62:8 – “Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Selah”

1 John 5:14 – “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.”

John 16:23-24 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

2) We should *confess sin to God.*

Psalm 32:5-6 – “I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.”

1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

2b) We should confess *personal and communally shared sin to God.*

Daniel 9:4-19 – “I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, “O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. We have not listened to your servants the prophets... To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him... All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice...

[F]or the LORD our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly...

For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.”

Question: What two major themes do we see in Daniel’s exemplary prayer?

Answer: First, we see Daniel contrast God’s righteousness with human sinfulness. Second, we see Daniel acknowledging and resting in the reality of God’s sovereignty. Daniel is glad to know and takes great comfort in understanding that everything happens under God’s authority and according to His divine plan.

3) We should *make supplication with thanksgiving to God.*

Philippians 4:6 – ...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

- **What has God given for our direction in prayer?**

The whole Word of God, the Bible, is of use to direct us in prayer; but there is special direction in the form of prayer that Jesus taught His disciples. This is commonly called the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer is found in Matthew 6:9-13. Jesus says,

“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be 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 forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.”

Diving Deeper:

1) What can we learn from the opening of the Lord's Prayer?

Jesus teaches us to begin prayer with a holy reverence and a humble confidence, as children to a father who is able and ready to help. Additionally, we learn that we should pray with and for others.

Our Father in heaven

Psalm 95:6-7 – “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”

Matthew 7:9-11 – “Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

1 Timothy 2:1-2 – “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”

2) For what do we pray in the first petition?

In the first petition, we pray that God would enable us, and others, to glorify Him in all; and that God would arrange all things to His own glory in order to make Himself known.

Hallowed be your name

Psalm 67:1-3 – May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, Selah that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!

Psalm 99:3 – “Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he!”

Psalm 100:3-4 – “Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!”

Romans 11:33-36 – “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

Revelation 4:11 – “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

3) For what do we pray in the second petition?

In the second petition, we pray that Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, as ourselves and others are brought into it and kept in it. Additionally, we pray that the kingdom of glory would come quickly with Christ’s return.

Your kingdom come

Matthew 12:25-28 – “Knowing their thoughts, he [Jesus] said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Luke 22:31-32 – “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Romans 16:20 – “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 – “Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.”

Revelation 22:20 – “He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

Question: Is Jesus the King of the universe now, or must He wait for some future time that He will actually rule?

Answer: Jesus is King of everything and everyone right now, and all of creation awaits the final consummation and display of His dominion. Nothing is outside of God’s authority, and Jesus is God in human form. Yet, there is still a sense in which all of those who are in Christ look forward to a day that has not yet arrived. We look forward to the day when Jesus Christ will eradicate evil, pain, and suffering everywhere. We look forward to the day when our hope shall be an immediate reality, and we shall see the One who died for us.

4) For what do we pray in the third petition?

In the third petition, we pray that God, by His grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to His will in all things, just as the angels do in heaven.

Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven

Psalm 19:14 – “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”

Psalm 119:1-11 – “Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.

Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules. I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

Question: How can someone know what the will of God is for him or her?

Answer: Rather than expecting some esoteric feeling or mystical urging, Christians can seek the will of God as He has revealed His will, His character, and His nature in the Bible. Some people may say that they “*feel led*” to do this or that, but the question that one must ask is “*why do I feel as though I should do or not do this thing or that?*” Feelings can often mislead us, but choices made based upon a solid understanding of the precepts of God are the kind of choices that honor God and lead to experiencing the will of God in real time and real life.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 – “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

Question: Who faithfully completes the task of sanctifying Christians?

Answer: “The God of peace himself” is the One upon whom Christians rely for their sanctification. Sanctification is that promise and process through which God brings about practical righteousness in the life of each of His own children. All Christians remain sinful, but the promise of God is that sin no longer dominates the Christian, and the sinning Christian may actually live in progressing degrees of freedom from sin. The purity and sanctity of the Christian’s life is grounded upon and kept by the faithful God who calls and saves.

Hebrews 13:20-21 – “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Question: Who is responsible for doing God’s will?

Answer: Christians are obligated and privileged to be doers of God’s will and things that are pleasing in His sight. God empowers believers for this task.

5) For what do we pray in the fourth petition?

In the fourth petition, we pray that God would providentially give us a competent portion of good things in this life, and that we would enjoy His blessing in them.

Give us this day our daily bread...

Proverbs 30:8-9 – “Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.”

Matthew 6:31-34 – “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Philippians 4:11-13 – “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him [Christ] who strengthens me.”

1 Timothy 6:6-10 – “But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”

Anxiety

Anxiety comes from a worrisome heart that seeks security, peace, and satisfaction from things that are not capable of delivering such things. Money, prestige, food, circumstance, and health are not ultimately secure or satisfying.

Contentment

Contentment is the result of finding peace, security, and satisfaction in the only One who can truly deliver. Christ is supremely beautiful, wonderful, good, and magnificent. He satisfies the human heart and brings contentment like no other.

6) For what do we pray in the fifth petition?

In the fifth petition, we pray that God, because of the person and work of Christ, would freely pardon all our sins, thereby enabling us to demonstrate grace and forgiveness to others.

Forgive us our debts

Psalm 51:1-12 – “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”

Question: What is the thought progression in the passage above?

Answer: First, there is a plea for mercy according to God’s steadfast love. Second, there is an honest admission of abhorrent sin. Third, there is a reminder that God delights in truth, and sin is a horrendous distortion of truth. Fourth, there is a humble request for cleansing. Fifth, there is a restoration of joy and willful submission to God’s presence and commands.

As we also forgive our debtors

Matthew 18:21-34 – “Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

7) For what do we pray in the sixth petition?

In the sixth petition, we pray that God would keep us from being tempted to sin, and support and deliver us when we are tempted.

And lead us not into temptation

Psalm 19:12-13 – “Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.”

Matthew 26:41 – “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

1 Corinthians 10:13 – “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

Hebrews 2:18 – “For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. “

Question: Are Christians able to keep from sinning?

Answer: Yes, and No... It is true that Christians are no longer slaves to sin, and they are not ruled by sinful desires as they once were – before they were saved and renewed by God. However, Christians also continue to have sinful desires, and they continue to think, speak, and act upon those cravings. The goal of the Christian life is to fight against the sinful hunger within, and to encourage one another towards greater freedom from those strong dispositions.

But deliver us from evil [or evil one]

John 17:15 – “I [Jesus] do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.”

Luke 22:31-32 – “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I [Jesus] have prayed for you that your faith may not fail...”

Question: How are we to view the Devil and our clash with him?

Answer: We do not fear the Devil, and we rely upon God’s strength – not our own.

8) What can we learn from the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer?

The conclusion of the Lord's Prayer (while not included in some biblical manuscripts and, is therefore excluded from some Bible translations) is in wholehearted agreement with the entirety of scripture.

It can teach us to take our encouragement in prayer from God alone and to praise Him, ascribing to Him the authority of the kingdom, full power and ultimate glory forever.

The final word Amen signifies our testimony of desire and our assurance of God hearing the prayers offered.

For Yours is the kingdom, and power, and glory forever, Amen.

1 Chronicles 29:10-13 - "Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever.

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.

Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name."

1 Timothy 1:17 - "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

Revelation 5:11-13 - "Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!'

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

Consider this: Prayer should always focus us upon *God*, and it should always move us from the temporal to the *eternal*.

A Poem to Recite or Pattern for Instruction?

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be 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.
Yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever... Amen

Some people recite this prayer in poetic form. Reciting a group of words as a memorized formula does not seem to be the intent of Christ in teaching His disciples how to pray. While there is not anything inherently sinful about reciting the Lord's Prayer or any other prayer, it appears that this exemplary prayer can also be used as a pattern for our prayer.

So should The Lord's Prayer be recited or merely used as a pattern?

Well, both...

The Lord's Prayer is great to recite and to memorize. Praying prayers that have been prayed before, and praying prayers that have been so intentionally planned that they have been written down, is a great practice. Too often Christians spend little effort on thinking through what they are saying and to whom they are speaking when they pray. Reading written prayers can be a tremendous help, and what better prayer to recite than the one attributed to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself?

The Lord's Prayer is also a great pattern for personal and corporate prayer. The concepts, themes, and progression is a marvelous path to travel again and again.

The pattern of The Lord's Prayer has been considered as a progression through four major concepts. The prayer begins with Adoration, which is worship and reverence. The prayer continues with Confession, which is the confession of sinfulness and a recognition of the need for forgiveness. Then we find Thanksgiving, which is a glad gratitude for and humble acknowledgement for God's provision each day. Then we see Supplication, which is the pleading request that God would act on our behalf and that of others.

The acronym **ACTS** helps us to remember the pattern as we pray.

Adoration

We adore God; we worship Him because He is worthy. It is fitting that we begin our prayers with worship to God. He is great, but we often forget how great He really is. Starting our prayer with adoration focuses our minds on the wonder of God and the beauty of His nature. Adoration comes as an outpouring from our hearts response to Who God is.

Ps. 57, 76, 93

Confession.

That is we confess our sin to God. This seems to be the natural progression from adoration. When we consider the greatness of God, our own contrasting sinfulness seems to be all the more evident. Confession of sin is not to simply rattle off the checklist of things that need to be forgiven, but a heart-felt acknowledgement of our sinfulness before God and our desire for God to make us more holy. It is also important to remember that, as Christians, God has already forgiven us for our sin. Therefore, our confession is not to beg forgiveness, as one would from a merciless judge, but it is to acknowledge the truth about us and express our desire to be holy in light of our merciful Savior.

1Jn 1:9, Rom 10:9-13

Thanksgiving.

This does not the big meal that we eat every November, but thanking God for all that He is and does. We have so much to be thankful for and we should remind ourselves of Whom it is that provides so much. In fact, the Apostle Paul commands us to pray prayers of thanksgiving and reminds us that one of humanity's most basic rejections of God is that of ingratitude. As believers, we should actively war against this inclination and be ever thankful.

Phil. 4:6, Rom. 1:21

Supplication.

This kind of praying is the one with which we are most familiar. Supplication is asking God to do something. It is last, because it is actually the least important aspect of prayer. While most of us spend the majority of the small amount of time we do give to prayer in this form, this is not the primary purpose of praying. However, God is a loving Father and desires to give good gifts to His children. We can bring our needs and wants before Him and know that He hears us and will answer according to His perfect will.

2Sam. 7:29, Matt. 6:26, 30, Luke 11:13

Did you know?

The great theologian and reformer, Martin Luther, is remembered most for his incredible courage and conviction to stand upon the word of God. Yet, he was especially noted in his own day as having a vibrant, consistent, and meaningful prayer life. His written prayers are rich and demonstrative of what it means to pray.

Luther's friend Veit Dietrich wrote of Luther's consistent and reverent prayers,

"I cannot sufficiently admire the singular steadfastness, the happy attitude, the faith and hope of this man in serious times. . . . There is not a day on which he does not devote at least three hours, the very ones most suitable for studying, to prayer. Once I was fortunate to overhear his prayer. Good God, what faith in his words! He speaks with the great reverence of one who speaks to his God, and with the trust and hope of one who speaks with his father and friend."¹

Pray regularly and for every reason.

"Cultivate the habit of falling asleep with the Lord's Prayer on your lips every evening when you go to bed and again every morning when you get up. And if occasion, place, and time permit, pray before you do anything else. In this way you get ahead of the devil by surprise and without warning, whether you are ready or not, before he catches up with you and makes you wait. For it is better to pray now, when you are half-ready, than later, when you are not ready at all."²

Luther said that one could pray indefinitely if he or she would memorize 3 things (each listed below for your convenience and benefit).

1. The Lord's Prayer
2. The Ten Commandments
3. The Apostle's Creed

Praying through each of these, in the way that The Lord's Prayer has been broken down in this introductory teaching, will result in lasting and far reaching benefits.

¹ http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/deliver_us_from_the_evil_one_martin_luther_on_prayer

² Ibid.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be 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.

Yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever... Amen.

The Ten Commandments

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell.

The third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.