



Prayer Guide



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**“OF ALL THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES
PRAYER IS THE MOST CENTRAL
BECAUSE IT USHERS US INTO PERPETUAL
COMMUNION WITH THE FATHER.” -
RICHARD J. FOSTER**

MADE FOR RELATIONSHIP

In the beginning, God created the heavens, the earth, and all living creatures. But human beings were given a distinction that no other earthly creature received.

Genesis 2:25-27 (NLT)

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

This special designation of being “made in the image of God” signals that we were created for something unique from all other earthly creation. We are literally hardwired to be able to connect with God in a personal way.

Let that thought sink in for a moment. The **GOD OF THE UNIVERSE** designed you for relationship with him! And, he’s given us some tools to draw us into deep fellowship with him.

One of the primary tools he offers is **Prayer**.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Many beautiful definitions of prayer have been offered through the ages but the most basic way of defining prayer is this:

Prayer is Communication with God.

This divine communication is multifaceted and takes many forms but here is a basic categorization of the common elements involved in prayer using the acronym A.C.T.S.

Types of Prayer

- 1 Adoration/Blessing/Praise** - Recognizing who God is and responding in deep love and respect.
- 2 Confession/Repentance/Contrition** - expressing remorse, regret or guilt; humble acknowledgment of wrongdoing and seeking forgiveness.
- 3 Thanksgiving/Gratitude** - acknowledgment and celebration for blessings received from the goodness of God.
- 4 Supplication/Petition/Intercession** - A request or expression of need on behalf of one's self or another.

There are other types and categories of prayer offered by others but these provide a basic framework to begin.

WHY PRAY?

Question: If God knows what will happen, and if he is sovereign over all things, then why should we pray? Won't things happen according to God's plan regardless of our prayers?

We'll come back to this question in a moment. The simple answer to why we should pray is this:

God wants his people to pray.

How can we be sure? Let's look to the Bible for further support of this claim.

1 Jesus Taught It

Luke 11:1-2a, 5a (NLT)

¹ Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” ² Jesus said, “This is how you should pray...”

⁵ Then, teaching them more about prayer, he used this story...

Luke 18:1 (NLT)

¹ One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up.

The importance of prayer continued in the church after Jesus returned to heaven.

Acts 2:42 (NIV) - **Early Christians devoted themselves to prayer. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**

Acts 6:3-4 (NLT) - **The apostles prioritized time in prayer.**

³ And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. ⁴ Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.”

Philippians 4:6 (NLT) - **The apostles taught others to pray.**

⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

1 Timothy 2:1 (NLT)

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them.

2 Jesus Modeled It

Mark 1:35 (NLT)

Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray.

Luke 6:12 (NIV)

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

Matthew 14:23 (NLT)

²³ After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone.

Luke 5:16 (NASB)

¹⁶ But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

Prayer was commonplace for Jesus. If Jesus is our example then prayer should be a normal and regular part of our lives too!

3. Prayer Is Powerful.

Prayer is like a switch that causes a release of the power and the plan of God in the earth. He set it up that way!

James 5:16b-18 (NLT)

The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. ¹⁷ Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! ¹⁸ Then, when he prayed again, the sky sent down rain and the earth began to yield its crops.

Acts 16:25-26 (NLT)

²⁵ Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶ Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off!

Acts 12:5, 7 (NLT)

⁵ But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.

⁷ Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, “Quick! Get up!” And the chains fell off his wrists.

As followers of Jesus we have been granted access to enormous power through prayer!

4. Prayer Changes Our Perspective.

“In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills.” - Richard J. Foster

2 Kings 6:15-17 (NLT)

¹⁵When the servant of the man of God got up early the next morning and went outside, there were troops, horses, and chariots everywhere. “Oh, sir, what will we do now?” the young man cried to Elisha. ¹⁶“Don’t be afraid!” Elisha told him. “For there are more on our side than on theirs!” ¹⁷Then Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!” The Lord opened the young man’s eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire.

“Open my eyes and let me see!” This should be our prayer as followers of Jesus so that our perspective is aligned with truth rather than what we experience through our physical senses.

With all this in mind let’s revisit the questions posed earlier...

If God knows what will happen, and if He is sovereign, and if he has asked us to pray, then that can only mean one thing:

In the sovereignty of God, he has decided to include us in his plan through prayer!

Prayer actually makes a difference!

Why We Don’t Pray

Most of us probably recognize that we should pray, and yet for many of us prayer simply doesn’t find a place of priority in our lives. Why not? Do you identify with any of the enemies of prayer below?

Enemies of Prayer:

- **Busyness/Distraction/Hurry**
- **Fear**
- **Ignorance**
- **Intimidation**
- **Discouragement**
- **Guilt**
- **Unforgiveness**
- **Pride**

There are many things that can inhibit our prayer life. Our prayer is that anything competing for your attention and affection would become insignificant as you come to know the intimacy and power available to you in prayer with your creator.

WHEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

This question concerns not only an appropriate time to pray, but also the priority of prayer. Let's look at the issue of priority first.

The Priority Of Prayer

Priority is the concern, interest or desire that comes before all others. Whenever we decide to do something first we give that thing priority by default. Take a moment and think about what currently has priority in your life.

1. We should pray First.

Praying first communicates that God is the priority. It means we're looking to God to meet our needs and not ourselves, our friends, our government, our jobs, etc. God desires to release His power and wisdom in our lives through prayer, even in the small things!

Prayer should be our first response, not our last resort.

So when should you pray?

- **When you're afraid** (Psalm 56:3)
- **When you're happy** (Luke 1:46-55)
- **When you're sad** (Psalm 119:50)
- **When you feel alone** (Psalm 25:16)
- **When you're overwhelmed** (Matthew 26:28-39)
- **When you're in distress** (Psalm 4:1)
- **Before major decisions** (Luke 6:12)
- **All the time!** (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Prayer should be a regular and indispensable practice. It should be the soundtrack of our lives!

2. We should pray Regularly.

Establish a regular prayer rhythm.

Rhythm - a strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound.

As the habit of prayer solidifies you will naturally begin to reach for prayer as a first response and the discipline of prayer will begin to bloom into desire for God's presence.

Let's Get Practical - Think consistency over quantity

If you prayed for **5** minutes, **3** times a day, that would equal **1** hour and **45** minutes of prayer per week and **91** hours per year!

Don't get overwhelmed by trying to manage long periods of prayer if you're not used to it. Begin where you are and expand as you become more consistent.

Tips For Getting Started

- **Pray an A.C.T.S. prayer (see resource page) in the morning**
- **Pray for the needs of others at midday**
- **Pray the Examen (see resource page) in the evening**
- **Keep a prayer journal to record what you sense God saying to you in prayer. You can also keep your prayer needs there and record how God answers them.**

HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

Many people concern themselves with how to pray the right way. The key to prayer though isn't working to "get it right", it's working to know the listener! Prayer is an expedition not an equation. As followers of Jesus we have been invited to explore the depths of the mystery of our God and participate in his plan for mankind.

We'll need a few tools if we want to be effective on this journey:

Tools For Effective Prayer

1. A Conducive Place.

Luke 5:16 (NIV)

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Mark 1:35 (NIV)

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Jesus had a place of prayer. Having a regular place of prayer where we plan to meet with God helps us in establishing a lifestyle of prayer. Wherever you set a regular place, aim to make it a place that is conducive to focusing on God. Your regular place of prayer should be:

- **Free from interruption**
- **Free from distraction**
- **Secluded enough to pray out loud**
- **Comfortable enough to stay for a while**

2. An Appropriate Posture.

Posture has to do with being positioned and prepared to approach and receive from God. Our posture provides an on-ramp for intimacy with God. What's most important is the posture of your heart but your physical posture can also play a role in prayer.

Heart Posture - Creating emotional and spiritual space to encounter Jesus.

- **Humility** - Recognize God as bigger than yourself.
- **Faith** - Trust in God's character.
- **Surrender** - Lay down your agenda and seek to adopt his.
- **Stillness** - Quiet the internal noise of the mind.

Try starting out your time of prayer with a few moments of silence. Tyler Staton calls this "offering God the first word". You can also try meditating on a short scripture like a Psalm or an attribute of God like his love or power. Prepare your heart to interact with God rather than rushing into prayer.

Physical Posture - Involving the external in communion.

There is no set body-posture required for prayer. In fact, we see many postures used in the Bible when people pray:

- **Kneeling** (Daniel 6:10)
- **Bowing** (Psalm 5:7)
- **Laying prostrate** (Matthew 26:39)
- **Sitting** (2 Samuel 7:18)
- **Standing** (2 Chronicles 20:5-6)

While the posture of the heart is most important, our physical posture shouldn't be overlooked. We communicate with our bodies all the time in normal conversation with others. Our physical posture can be used in communication with God to help nurture our inner attitude of prayer.

3. An Intentional Plan.

In Matthew 6:5-14 Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray and contrasts his method with that of the pagans and hypocrites. The pagans (non-Jews) believed they would be heard for their many words and the hypocrites used prayer as a means to posture themselves in a positive light before others. Jesus wants us to know that prayer isn't about mindless repetition or showmanship. Prayer is about pursuing the heart of God through relationship with him.

If you're just beginning to develop a prayer life the **A.C.T.S.** acronym mentioned earlier can be a great place to start! Let's break it down practically.

Adoration

First, take time to recognize and affirm God's character. God has revealed what he is like in Christ and through scripture. Use this revelation of God to bring him adoration. You can Praise God for his holiness, his unfailing love, his mighty power, his amazing grace, and his infinite wisdom... just to name a few. The more you learn about the nature of God and what he's like, the more fuel you'll have for praise! Here is a beautiful example of adoration from the Bible:

1 Chronicles 29:10-11 (NLT)

“O Lord, the God of our ancestor Israel, may you be praised forever and ever! ¹¹ Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things.”

- King David

Confession

The Bible tells us that everyone has sinned and is in need of moral cleansing from God. As the standard of moral perfection, only he can offer us complete forgiveness when we fall short of his holy standard. The good news is that God has given us an incredible promise concerning forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 (NIV)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Make confession a daily part of your prayer life. You don't have to wait to make yourself feel bad enough to come to God. One of the tactics of our enemy is to use guilt to keep us from the only one who can offer us what we desperately need. The key to removing the barrier that sin creates is confession. Look at David's prayer of confession in Psalm 51 for a practical example:

Psalm 51:1-2 (NLT)

Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. ² Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.

Thanksgiving

Praise and thanksgiving go hand in hand and it's very natural to move fluidly between the two in prayer. In fact, the two words are sometimes used interchangeably in the Bible. Thanksgiving typically focuses on responding to God for what he has done for us where praise or adoration focuses on who God is. Psalm 136 is a beautiful example of thanksgiving.

First the psalmist encourages the reader to give thanks to God:

Psalm 136:1 (NLT)

**Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!
His faithful love endures forever.**

Then the author lists several reasons for giving thanks:

- **His mighty miracles** (v. 4)
- **His acts of creation** (v. 5-9)
- **His rescue of his people from Egyptian captivity** (v. 10-15)
- **His provision for his people in the desert** (v. 16)
- **His overthrow of earthly kings and deliverance into the promised land** (v. 17-22)
- **His compassion in our weakness** (v. 23)
- **His salvation from our enemies** (v. 24)
- **His provision for all creation** (v. 25)

Try this in your times of prayer! Take a moment to reflect on all the blessings of God in your life and then begin to thank him. Here are just a few of the many passages from the Bible that encourage us to thank God:

Psalm 9:1 (NIV)

I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.

Psalm 106:1 (NIV)

Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

Psalm 100:4 (NIV)

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Supplication

Supplication is simply making a request to God about something. This could be asking God for wisdom in order to make a good decision or for provision for a need. It could be asking God for something on the behalf of someone else which is called intercession. It could be asking for God’s will to be done or for the strength to stand against the powers of darkness.

Here’s an example of a prayer of supplication from Jehoshaphat:

2 Chronicles 20:12 (NLT)

O our God, won’t you stop them? We are powerless against this mighty army that is about to attack us. We do not know what to do, but we are looking to you for help.

One thing we know for sure, God wants us to ask him for what we need. He has made this abundantly clear in scripture.

Luke 11:9-13 (NLT)

⁹“And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ You fathers—if your children ask for a fish, do you give them a snake instead? ¹² Or if they ask for an egg, do you give them a scorpion? Of course not! ¹³ So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

We have a loving heavenly Father who loves to give his children good gifts. He has encouraged us to ask for them as a part of his plan to release them.

Let's Get Practical - A.C.T.S. Prayer Example

(Adoration) “Father, you are Holy. The highest glory, greatest power, and deepest wisdom are yours. There is no one in heaven or earth greater than you. **(Thanksgiving)** “I thank you for your goodness and unfailing love for me. Thank you for calling me out of darkness and into the light of your truth and purpose for my life. Thank you for the promise that you are always with me. **(Supplication)** I ask for your help today to put you first in every area of my life. Help me to see others through your perspective and to extend the same love and kindness to them as you have to me. Help me to walk in humility and to see the needs of those around me. Let your will be done in me and through me today for the glory of your name and kingdom. **(Confession)** I ask your forgiveness for unclean thoughts, impure motives and sinful actions. I open my heart to your discipline so that I can receive the cleansing that only you can provide. **(Supplication)** Show me your ways and lead me in truth. **(Thanksgiving)** Thank you for the promise that when I call to you, you hear and answer. **(Adoration)** To you be the all the glory and the highest praise. Amen.

Notice that this example is not in the exact A.C.T.S. order. Remember, prayer is not a formula, it's an access point for growing in relationship with a loving, heavenly Father.

Tips For Getting Started

- **Start small - No one goes from the middle school track team straight to the Olympics! The best way to grow in prayer is to pray!**
- **Think practice over theory. Prayer is a conversation not a speech. Improvement comes with practice!**
- **Speak to God like you would a “real person”. Avoid saying what you think He wants to hear and focus on sincerely expressing your heart to him.**
- **Incorporate the prayers others have written in your time of prayer for encouragement and guidance in your own prayers. (See resource page)**
- **Your physical posture can affect your inner focus. Many times our inner turmoil can manifest in external, physical posture. Find a posture that is comfortable and not distracting.**

For more ideas on developing a prayer plan see the resources page at the end of this section.

RESOURCES

Types of Prayer

Incorporating the prayers of others into your prayer time can be a great way to guide yourself in prayer and find your own voice in the prayers of others. It can also be helpful in times where your mind begins to wander or in seasons of spiritual dryness. The Psalms are a great example of prayers written by others but used in prayer by Christians through the ages. The prayers of others are not substitutes for your own voice but rather, helpful partners in a growing prayer life. Here are just a few examples of prayers and prayer guides:

The Lord's Prayer

The Lord's prayer is a model prayer Jesus used to teach his disciples to pray. It's found in Matthew 6:9-13 with a shorter version in Luke 11:2-4. While it can be read as a prayer, the intention was to be a model for what prayer should look like compared to the prayers of the religious hypocrites and pagans of the day. Below you'll find the text along with commentary from Chris Hodges' book called "Pray First" that will provide some practical insight into how to incorporate its principles into your prayer life.

Our Father in heaven, | Connect with God relationally.

hallowed be your name, | Worship his name.

**your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on Earth as it is in Heaven.** | Pray his agenda first.

Give us today our daily bread. | Depend on him for everything.

**And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.** | Get your heart right with God and people.

**And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.** | Engage in spiritual warfare.

Prayer of Examen

The Prayer of Examen is a spiritual practice of reviewing the day and examining your heart with God's help. This allows us to reflect and recognize where God was active in the ordinary and uncover areas where we need God to work in us. Usually lasting 15–20 minutes and done in the evening, the prayer prompts us to remember God's presence, express gratitude, reflect on the day, and prepare for the day to come. There are five prayer prompts typically associated with this method:

1. Ask God for guidance

Ask God for his guidance and insight as you begin to examine your life over the past day. It's crucial for us to have God's help to see things as they really are, not just from our perspective. Become aware of God's presence and humbly ask God for his perspective as you prepare to review.

2. Give thanks

Thank God for all of the moments of the day and for being with you through each of them.

3. Review the day

Allow God to lead you as you begin to review your day. Think of all the interactions with others, all of the things that brought you joy and happiness. Recount all of the things that brought you sorrow, pain or frustration and offer them to God.

4. Face your shortcomings

As you consider your day, reflect honestly on the moments you felt out of tune with God—something you said, a missed opportunity, some way you wish you had acted differently. For what do you need forgiveness? Do you need to make things right with someone else? Look at your shortcomings, and allow God to heal them.

5. Look toward the day to come

As you end your day, look to tomorrow. What are you looking forward to, and what concerns you? Ask for God's help in the future: to open your eyes, your ears, and your heart to see where God is working.

(For more info on this prayer method go to www.fullerstudio.fuller.edu/prayer-of-examen/)

A Prayer of Confession: Psalm 51:1-13 (NLT)

- 1 Have mercy on me, O God,
because of your unfailing love.
Because of your great compassion,
blot out the stain of my sins.**
- 2 Wash me clean from my guilt.
Purify me from my sin.**
- 3 For I recognize my rebellion;
it haunts me day and night.**
- 4 Against you, and you alone, have I sinned;
I have done what is evil in your sight.
You will be proved right in what you say,
and your judgment against me is just.**
- 5 For I was born a sinner—
yes, from the moment my mother
conceived me.**
- 6 But you desire honesty from the womb,
teaching me wisdom even there.**
- 7 Purify me from my sins,[c] and I will be
clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than
snow.**
- 8 Oh, give me back my joy again;
you have broken me—
now let me rejoice.**
- 9 Don't keep looking at my sins.
Remove the stain of my guilt.**
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God.
Renew a loyal spirit within me.**
- 11 Do not banish me from your presence,
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.**
- 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and make me willing to obey you.**
- 13 Then I will teach your ways to rebels,
and they will return to you.**

A Prayer of Intercession

Almighty God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit: You taught us to pray not only for ourselves but for people everywhere: so now hear us as we pray for others, in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

We ask that You inspire Your whole church in power, unity, and peace. Grant that all who trust you may obey your Word, and live together in love.

As we pray for the world, we ask that You lead all nations in the way of Your true justice and righteous goodwill. Direct those who govern, that they may rule fairly, maintain order, help those in need, and defend the oppressed; so this world may know your rule and experience true peace.

- Richard Herman

A Prayer of Commitment

I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you,
Praised for you or criticized for you.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and fully surrender all things
To your glory and service.
And now, O wonderful and holy God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
You are mine, and I am yours.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
Let it also be made in heaven.
Amen.

- John Wesley

A Prayer of Adoration: 1 Chronicles 29:10b-12 (NIV)

**10 “Praise be to you, Lord,
the God of our father Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.**

**11 Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.
Yours, Lord, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.**

**12 Wealth and honor come from you;
you are the ruler of all things.
In your hands are strength and power
to exalt and give strength to all.**

Books:

- **Practicing The Way** - John Mark Comer
- **Pray First** - Chris Hodges
- **Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools** - Tyler Staton
- **Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home** - Richard Foster
- **Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God** - Timothy Keller

Apps:

- **Prayminder:** Set daily reminders to pray for specific needs
- **Pray First App:** Guided prayers to help grow your perspective of prayer
- **Lectio 365:** A daily devotional app that helps you pray the Bible every day

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