

How To Pray God's Way

Think prayer is a grueling task that God imposed upon us? Think again—and find out how to pray His will with joy.

On Mount Sinai, Moses was instructed to build the tabernacle “according to the pattern” he received from God (Ex. 25:9; Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5). It is the pattern of heaven and promise of Scripture that God’s power will be released, His mercy will be shown and His kingdom will come in response to the saints’ prayers (Ex. 32:11-14; 2 Chr. 7:14; Luke 11:9-13; Rev. 8:3-6). Yet when it comes to actually engaging in prayer, many of us struggle to know how to approach God, what to say when we do and how to develop a strong prayer life.

TEACH US TO PRAY, LORD!

If prayer is the foundation of the church (Acts 2:42), the name by which God calls His people (Is. 56:7) and the means by which God promises to release His power through the church, right every wrong, release judgment and split the sky at the return of His Son (Luke 24:49; Rev. 6:9-11, 8:3-6; Luke 18; Rev. 6:14), then we should join the apostles in asking, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1)

CHEW ON THIS:

Read Acts 1-5. What place did corporate prayer have in the life of the early church? How did it impact the church’s spiritual power, evangelistic witness and influence on society?

In its most simple definition, prayer is agreement with God. In worship we agree with who God is and who we are to Him. In intercession, we agree with the things God has promised to do and ask Him to do them.

To persevere in prayer, we must come before God boldly with

confidence. Without a right view of what God is like and how He sees us, we will either not approach Him or give up and not persist in prayer, as Jesus told us to (Luke 18:1). If we see God as angry or disappointed, then spending time in His presence will be tortuous, and praying with confidence and persistence—knowing that He wants to answer us—will be nearly impossible.

It's important to understand that God is not mostly angry or disappointed with us. He isn't like the unjust judge of Jesus' parable in Luke 18:2, and He does not see us as a desperate widow begging for His intervention. He is not the caricature of the angry old man that many of us have in our minds.

To the contrary, He is a loving Father and a tender bridegroom, and we are His cherished bride (Is. 62:4-5; Rev. 19:6-7). We are His elect ones in whom He delights (Luke 18:7). He loves to hear our voices (Song 2:14) and longs to answer us (Ps. 65:2, 5; Is. 30:18; Matt. 7:7). Certainly, the answer may be delayed, but this is not a reflection of His disapproval for us.

SOUL-SEARCHING:

1. Are you able to go before God in prayer, filled with confidence that He is listening? If not, what is preventing that, and what can you do to remove the barrier?

2. Do you think God is angry with you? Why?

3. How do you handle delayed answers to prayer? Do you believe God's delays are good for you? Are you able to thank Him for them?

Unless prayer is enjoyable, we won't pray consistently. This is why the Lord promises to give His people joy in the house of prayer (Is. 56:7). Prayer becomes a pleasure when we enjoy being in the presence of the one we are talking to. For people with a wrong view of God, spending time in prayer is akin to visiting the principal's office. We know we have to do it, but

the quicker the appointment is over the better. Enjoying God's presence flows from a right (biblical) understanding of what God is like and how He feels about us.

THERE ONCE WAS A QUEEN ...

Queen Esther's intercession before King Xerxes on behalf of the Jewish people is a powerful illustration of this principle. With a death threat hanging over her people, Esther was in a unique position to petition the king. She was at first afraid because she was neither confident of his affection for her nor certain he would even entertain her request. Before she was prepared to present her petition, she needed to know that he delighted in her. After spending time with him and hearing his words of affection, she grew confident in his love and boldly made intercession. As a result, the Jewish people were spared.

We grow confident in how God sees us as we agree in worship with what the Bible says He's like and who it says we are to Him. I encourage you to enter into intercession through Bible-centered worship and adoration.

YOUR TURN:

Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In Him we see the perfect reflection of God's character and emotions. Read the book of John. How does God feel about those who are His? Declare these truths back to the Lord in your devotional time.

PRAYING THE WILL OF GOD

After we come into His presence, what do we ask for? For much of my life, I rightly understood that it was important to pray according to the will of God if I wanted to be certain of an answer (1 John 5:14). In practice, this translated to adding, "If it is Your will," to every random request. This approach didn't build confidence in my heart that God would answer. Instead, how could I be sure what His will was and which prayers He was committed to answering? Without confidence that

we are praying God's will, prayer can become discouraging. If we have no assurance of His commitment to answer prayers, we may draw back from a place of prayer when we don't see immediate answers.

GOD'S WORD, GOD'S WILL

To understand God's will, we should turn to the Word of God, not our own agendas. Just as worship is agreeing with the Bible about the character of God, intercession is agreeing with the Bible on what He wants to do. There are many prayers and prophetic promises that give language to what He wants to do. A good place to start is by praying the prayers of the apostles (Acts 4:24-30; Eph. 1:17-19; Phil. 1:9-11; 2 Thess. 1:11-12; 1 Cor. 1:4-8).

YOUR TURN:

Pray the "apostolic" prayers of Scripture during your own prayer time or while praying with a group. Keep a record of how this changes your outlook on prayer. Watch for answers to your prayers and journal them.

It's perhaps surprising that most of the prayers of the New Testament are focused neither on specific social and political issues nor on asking for God's blessing for individual ministries. By contrast, they are focused on praying for God's anointing, blessing and favor on the church as a whole in a specific geographic area. Though God's desire is indeed to release justice and righteousness in every area of society, it is through the prophetic witness of the anointed church that He means for the breakthrough to come.

As we join with the prayers of the apostles and agree with what God wants to do, our hearts begin to connect with the will of God for His church. From that, faith is released for the breakthrough of His Spirit in our cities and the nations.

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