

THE WHYS AND HOWS OF PRAYER

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Prayer is one of God's greatest gifts, but it's too often neglected or misunderstood.

The Bible answers both the **whys** and the **hows** of prayer.

1. WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

The main reason we should pray is simple: **God commands us to pray.**

The Bible tells believers to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17 ESV) and to "continue steadfastly in prayer" (Col. 4:2 ESV).

Jesus taught us to keep praying instead of giving up. He said to keep asking, keep seeking, and keep knocking (Matt. 7:7–8). He also gave the Parable of the Persistent Widow to teach that we "ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1 ESV).

Prayer shouldn't be something we do only when life goes wrong. It should be a regular part of the Christian life. We pray because we trust God, depend on Him, and want to obey His Word.

2. IF GOD ALREADY KNOWS EVERYTHING, WHY DOES PRAYER MATTER?

Yes, God already knows everything. Jesus said, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:8 ESV). David also wrote that God knows our thoughts and even our words before we speak them (Ps. 139:1–4).

So why should we pray? Not only because God tells us to, but also because one of the ways God carries out His plans is through the prayers of His people. The Bible says, "You do not have, because you do not ask" (James 4:2 ESV).

Prayer also reminds us that we depend on God, not ourselves. Prayer draws us closer to God and helps us desire His will instead of our own. That's why Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done" (Matt. 6:10 ESV).

We'll never fully understand how God's complete knowledge and our prayers fit together. But the Bible teaches both truths. God knows everything, and He commands us to pray. That's enough for His people to obey Him with confidence.

3. HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

Jesus didn't leave us to guess how to pray. When His disciples asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1 ESV), He gave them what we now call the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4).

The Lord's Prayer isn't just a prayer to repeat. It's also a pattern to follow. Jesus began by honoring the Father: "Hallowed be your name" (Matt. 6:9 ESV). He then prayed for God's kingdom and God's will before asking for daily needs (Matt. 6:10–11). He also prayed for forgiveness and protection from temptation (Matt. 6:12–13).

One helpful way to remember how to pray is by using the **ACTS** method:

- **Adoration** – Praise God for who He is.
- **Confession** – Admit your sins and ask for His forgiveness.

- **Thanksgiving** – Thank God for His goodness and blessings.
- **Supplication** – Bring your needs and the needs of others before Him.

The ACTS method summarizes the kinds of prayer we find throughout the Bible. As Paul wrote, “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6 ESV). Prayer is much more than asking God for things. It’s an opportunity to worship, confess, give thanks, and seek His help every day.

4. TO WHOM SHOULD WE PRAY?

The normal pattern in the New Testament is to pray **to the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit**. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Our Father in heaven...” (Matt. 6:9 ESV). He also said, “whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you” (John 16:23 ESV).

Praying in Jesus' name doesn't mean simply adding the words "in Jesus' name" to the end of a prayer. It means praying as His followers, trusting His authority, and seeking His will (John 14:13; Col. 3:17).

We pray through Jesus because He is our only mediator with the Father (1 Tim. 2:5). The Holy Spirit also helps us pray, even when we don't know what to say (Rom. 8:26–27).

The New Testament also records prayers offered to Jesus. As he was being stoned, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59 ESV). Because Jesus is fully God, we can also pray directly to Him.

Whether we pray to the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, our prayers are directed to the one true Triune God revealed in Scripture (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14).

5. WHY DOESN'T GOD ALWAYS ANSWER MY PRAYERS THE WAY I WANT?

God always hears the prayers of His children, but He doesn't always answer them the way we expect. Sometimes His answer is “**Yes.**” Sometimes it's “**No.**” Sometimes it's “**Wait.**”

God's answers are always guided by His perfect wisdom, love, and will. John wrote, “if we ask anything according to his will he hears us” (1 John 5:14 ESV).

God promises to answer prayer, but He never promises to give us everything we ask for.

Jesus Himself showed us this in the Garden of Gethsemane. Facing the cross, He prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42 ESV). The Father's answer wasn't to remove the cross but to give His Son the strength to endure it.

The apostle Paul had a similar experience. Three times Paul asked God to remove his “thorn in the flesh.” Instead, the Lord answered, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:7–9 ESV).

When God says “yes,” thank Him. When He says “wait,” trust His timing. When He says “no,” trust His wisdom.

Our heavenly Father always knows what is best, even when we don't understand His answer. God may not always give us what we ask for, but He always gives His children what they truly need (Rom. 8:28–32).

6. HOW CAN PRAYERS BE HINDERED?

The Bible teaches that some things can hinder our prayers. This doesn't mean Christians lose their salvation. But it does mean that sin can affect our fellowship with God.

For example, David wrote, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18 ESV). James warned that some prayers go unanswered because people ask with selfish motives (James 4:3). John wrote that God answers those who seek to obey Him and do what pleases Him (1 John 3:22).

The good news is that God invites us to confess our sins and return to Him. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 ESV).

None of us prays perfectly. That's why we come to God through Jesus Christ, not because we've earned the right to be heard, but because He has.

As we walk with Christ, confess our sins, and seek to obey God's Word, we can pray with confidence, knowing that our heavenly Father welcomes His children into His presence.

Effective prayer also grows out of a close walk with Christ and His Word. Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7 ESV).

7. CONCLUSION

Prayer is one of the greatest privileges God has given His people. Through Jesus Christ, we can come boldly before God's throne of grace, knowing that our heavenly Father hears us and cares for us (Heb. 4:16; 1 Pet. 5:7).

Don't wait until life falls apart before you pray. Make prayer a daily part of your walk with Christ. Praise God for who He is. Confess your sins. Thank Him for His blessings. Bring your needs and the needs of others before Him.

If you've never repented and trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, begin there (Mark 1:15; Rom. 10:9–13). Through Him alone we have access to the Father (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5).

"Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2 ESV).