

The Messenger

PRAYER

By: Pastor Martin Feltz

What is the best way to pray? Should I stand, sit, kneel, or bow down? Are there certain words I should say to ensure that my prayers are received? Is it more appropriate to keep the eyes open or closed, which might vary based on the situation (such as driving)? Should the hands be clasped or open, or is it better to raise them in surrender to God? When is the best time to pray, how do you start praying, and how do you end it? Numerous questions can arise when considering the practice of prayer. I guess if I were to think about it, the real question is, does any of that really matter?

Prayer is not a mystical incantation to manipulate circumstances. Some people may think that rituals are necessary in order to get God to listen to them, but there is no scriptural basis for this belief. God does not respond to our prayers based on the timing, location, physical posture, or the way we phrase our prayers.

In the scripture found in 1 John 5:14-15, we are encouraged to approach God with assurance during prayer, having faith that He listens to us. It reassures us that our requests will be fulfilled if they align with His divine purpose and will.

According to the words in John 14:13-14, it is stated that prayers made in the name of Jesus will be granted so that the Son may glorify the Father. These verses, along with numerous others, emphasize that God responds to prayers that align with His divine will and are offered in the name of Jesus, ultimately aiming to bring honor and glory to Him.

There are instances when we feel the need to pray but not sure about what.

The Lord Jesus taught His disciples the Lord's Prayer as recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. We use it every Sunday before communion. In Matthew 6:9-13, it states, "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 have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.'"



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Prayer1
- Prayer2
- Prayer3
- Congregational Report4
- The Congregationalists.....5
- The Creeds6
- The Creeds7
- The Creeds8

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- The third Sunday of every month is the Church Business meeting. Everyone is allowed to stay, but only Voting Members receive the privilege to vote.
- Want to submit an article or idea? Email the church and we will put it into the news letter!
- The Church has decided to buy two more bags of cold patch to get the road repaired completely.

PRAYER



While some view the Lord's Prayer as a script to recite verbatim, it is important to recognize that it is a model prayer. Misinterpretations sometimes treat it as a magical incantation, attributing special powers to its words when communicating with God.

The Lord's Prayer serves as a template for prayer, guiding believers on the key elements to include in their conversations with God. It emphasizes acknowledging God's holiness, submitting to His will, seeking provision, asking for forgiveness, and seeking protection from temptation and evil.

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WHY PRAY?

Why pray? This is a common question of new Christians when they come to the faith. After all, if God knows everything then God already knows what we are going to pray for, right? It is true that Christians attribute omnipotence to God (that is the quality of being all knowing), but what if prayer was less about telling God what we want and need and more about a conversation with the Creator? In that light, prayer is seen as a dialog which seeks to change us, not God as the quote from Kierkegaard on page three notes. To that end, every encounter with God changes us. As Christians, we look within to find the God who made all things just as Jesus did. Who knows what we will find when we spend a little time in prayer

be a heartfelt expression of our faith and reliance on God rather than a mechanical repetition of words. When prayed sincerely, it serves as a powerful tool for connecting with God and aligning our hearts with His purposes.

The Bible conveys a different perspective on prayer, emphasizing that God values the sincerity of our hearts over the mere words we speak. In Matthew 6:6-7, Jesus instructs believers to pray privately, away from public view, directing their prayers to the unseen Father who observes what is done in secret and rewards accordingly. He warns against empty repetitions, as the pagans do, thinking that verbosity will ensure their prayers are heard.

When we approach God in prayer, the Bible encourages us to express the depths of our hearts rather than relying solely on rote recitations. Philippians 4:6-7 shows the importance of pouring out our hearts before God, highlighting the significance of genuine and heartfelt communication in our relationship with Him. This highlights the idea that prayer is not about reciting memorized words but about engaging in authentic conversation with God.

PRAYER CONTINUED

The Lord's Prayer should be understood as an example, a pattern, of how to pray. It gives us the "ingredients" that should go into prayer. Here is how it breaks down. "Our Father in heaven" is teaching us whom to address our prayers to—the Father. "Hallowed be your name" is telling us to worship God, and to praise Him for who He is. The phrase "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is a reminder to us that we are to pray for God's plan in our lives and the world, not our own plan. We are to pray for God's will to be done, not for our desires. We are encouraged to ask God for the things we need in "give us today our daily bread." "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" reminds us to confess our sins to God and to turn from them, and also to forgive others as God has forgiven us. The conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" is a plea for help in achieving victory over sin and a request for protection from the attacks of the devil.

Therefore, once more, the Lord's Prayer is not meant for us to mechanically recite without thought to God. It serves as a guide for how we should approach prayer. Is there any harm in committing the Lord's Prayer to memory? Absolutely not! Is there any issue with offering the Lord's Prayer to God verbatim? Not if it comes from a sincere heart and a true intention behind the words spoken. It is important to remember that in prayer, God values our genuine communication and heartfelt expressions more than the specific phrases we utter. Philippians 4:6-7 reminds us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

We can personalize our prayers using this template as our foundation, aligning our requests with each section of Jesus' model prayer.

While this model prayer is valuable, prayer is really a continual conversation with God. We are encouraged to pray about everything throughout the day (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and draw inspiration from Scripture, particularly the Psalms, to guide our prayers even when we are unsure of what to say.

FOOD

FOR THOUGHT

"The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays." —

Soren Kierkegaard

(Christian minister, philosopher, writer, and professor of Religion)

"Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one's weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart" —

Gandhi

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." — **James 5: 16 NIV**

"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

—**Philippians 4:6 NRSVue**

HOW DO I PRAY, AND WHAT FOR?

Are there limits for what we can ask for in prayer? Should I pray to be wealthy? How does prayer work? All of these questions are valid; they show they we earnestly want to know how to pray. In Luke 11, Jesus teaches his followers to pray and the prayer Jesus says is one which is recited in churches around the world every week. Christians know this prayer as the “Lord’s Prayer” or “The Our Father”. The Lord’s Prayer serves as a template for all Christians when we construct our own prayers, as the Lord’s Prayer asks of God that God’s will be done in all things no matter what our wants and desires are. This is strange; I mean, isn’t prayer suppose to be a magic wish list? Not at all! Prayer is a conversation with God where we encounter and seek God’s will for our life. Prayer, just like worship, is never about us. It is about our Creator who made us, sustains us, and whose promises will see us all the way home no matter how lost we feel. Those promises then bloom in the greatest promise of all:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who
trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.



CONGRAGATIONAL REPORT

The congregation of Grace Christian Church sat in open session on March 17, 2024 and these were the decisions which were rendered:

- 1) The Church—through unanimous vote— authorized the purchasing of 5 more bags of cold patch so Bryan can help complete the job he started.
- 2) The Church moved forward on a bid to seal the roof without any structural alterations at this time. This will cost the church only \$325.00 as the professional roofing company is only charging us for supplies to seal around the pushed out screws and the steeple.
- 3) The Church has decided to start holding an every-other Wednesday night potluck starting in April! Just fix what you have, and bring it in; after dinner, we will have a movie night on the first Wednesday Night of every month and a Christian Education & Faith Formation on the third Wednesday night where we will discuss Christian history, Evolution of the Church, different Christian Traditions and Denominations as well as anything else you’d like to learn about. Should you like to submit a request for study, please email it to: gracechristian-churchinc@gmail.com, or you can let Marty, Esther, or

Daniel know.

- 4) The menu for the spaghetti dinner has been made! We will be serving: salad, roll, tea, and a cupcake for a donation. All of this will come with the spaghetti! Tell your friends!

Here are some general things the Church should know about and/or remember

- 1) Our 501(c)(3) is currently assigned to an auditor. We should know something about the determination in a few more months.
- 2) When you leave a room, please make sure that the lights are off. Our biggest operating expense are utilities, so we are trying to save as much as possible.

A HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATIONALIST MOVEMENT

By: Daniel Coffey

You might know that Grace Christian Church claims heritage in the Stone-Campbell Movement, but did you know that Grace also has another heritage? Not often spoken about, this secondary heritage is older than the Stone-Campbell Tradition by nearly 200 years, and is called Congregationalism. Congregationalism was developed in England in the 1600's as a rejection of the Church of England's requirement for churches to have bishops and the Church of Scotland's requirement that all churches be overseen by a regional power called a presbytery which controlled the local church from afar. Congregationalists—who are the fore-runners of all Baptists, Unitarians, nondenominational Christians, and members of other Free Church Christians— believed that the best expression of the church is found in a local body of believers who come together every week for worship. The Congregationalist puts an extremely high value on the idea of the Priesthood of the Believer, a doctrine which openly taught that all competent and earnestly seeking Christians had the right and responsibility to go directly before Christ in prayer, read and interpret the Bible, as well as decide how the local church would govern itself, order its worship, and decide matters of faith. To this end, the Congregationalists were very radical for their time; they believed in democracy and employed it when they came to America as the first English settlers in the Massachusetts Bay Colony (the folks we call the Pilgrims), even as Europe had kings, queens, and Bishops which often meddled in church affairs for their own nefarious reasons.”

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the Massachusetts Bay Colony (the folks we call the Pilgrims), even as Europe had kings, queens, and Bishops which often meddled in church affairs for their own benefit. The Congregationalists served as a middle ground in the Protestant Reformation, which had only happened 90 years earlier in 1517, between Presbyterians on one hand and the Baptists on the other. For example, Congregationalists (like Presbyterians) valued educated clergy, ordered worship, and they extended the Sacrament of Baptism to both infants and adults alike regardless of age or means seeing sprinkling, pouring, and immersion as all valid forms. Like Baptists, Congregationalists put a heavy emphasis on the priesthood of the believer, the autonomy of the local congregation (all churches which are not grouped in a regional jurisdiction that has direct control over them are often referred to as Free Churches), the importance of personal holiness in an individual's life, a tolerance to a diversity of beliefs of the worshipers, and an Open Communion policy where anyone was allowed to share in the elements of the Lord's Supper regardless of church affiliation or baptismal status (but they preferred someone having been baptized to receive the bread and cup). Some Congregationalists would go forward to make an official denomination (like the United Church of Christ), other would remain independent, free of any denominational label, with membership in loose association of churches such as The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, or small local regional collections of churches. Some famous Congregationalists in America include: Walt Disney, John Adams, Calvin Coolidge, Laura Ingle Wilder, and the Obama Family.



THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

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THE CREEDS

By: Daniel Coffey

Have you ever heard about Creeds? No, I'm not talking about the band Creed (good music though) but I am talking about the ancient statements of faith which early Christians wrote to give definition to their newly found ideas, practices, and beliefs that are sometimes read aloud in worship. The word "Creed" comes from the Latin word "Credo" which translates to "this I believe". So, at their most simplistic, creeds are statements about what we believe. At first these were very informal personal statements which believers wrote down and used in public worship, and we find some of them in the Bible. The very earliest, and probably most simplistic Creed, is found in Romans 10:9 written by the Apostle Paul which says, "Jesus is Lord". This would evolve outwards and over the 2000 year history of the church, there have been about 230 different Christian Creeds written over the years, based on the Bible, which help worshipers define what they believe. In this end, Creeds serve as "guidrails" which keeps us within the limits of the Christian tradition so that we do not read something into scripture which is not there. Creeds also provide a central uniformity which all Christians can agree on regardless of denominational stance, even if there are disagreements on how literal something should be interpreted. Included in this news letter are a few copies of different Christian Creeds. Like all documents, Creeds speak to the important issues that Christians of that time and place were facing much like how different books of the Bible address different issues in the time and place in which they were written. What is interesting is that all churches use Creeds even if a church says they are "noncreedal". For example, Baptists and Campbellites are a noncreedal people, but at their core they still bind themselves with the ideas put forth in the Apostles' Creed (see column to the left). Churches which are noncreedal see the Creeds as testaments to faith as opposed to statements of faith, with the difference being that if there is a disagreement which arises love is to be the grounding principal in which to rest. At Grace Christian, we have not taken an official stance on the usage of Creeds. Much like early Christians, we openly teach that the Bible is superior to the Creeds but that does not diminish the beauty, simplicity, and usefulness of statements of faith and testaments to faith when we need to remember who we are and where we have come from. In the following pages, you are going to find a few Creeds. Read them over and ask some questions: where was this written? what were the issues surrounding the writing of this document? Is it still relevant for us today? Who knows? A Creed might show up in worship to be read aloud together, like the Lord's Prayer.

THE NICENE CREED

Written in 325 A.D., the Nicene Creed sought to define the Christian Faith in one standardized text. It was written in the city of Nicaea which is in modern day Turkey. Notice that the Creed is based upon the Apostles' Creed; this is because the Apostles' Creed is much older and probably served as the statement of faith Christians had to memorize and recite before being Baptized up until the writing of the Nicene Creed which replaced it.

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy christian and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

AN INTERESTING NOTE:

As you are reading these Creeds, take note every time you see the word "Christian". In the original Greek, this work is *katholikos* (καθολικός). Usually we translate this word as "catholic", but it confuses people so it is often rendered simply as Christian. You see, "catholic" with a lower case "c" means "universal" or "worldwide". When the "c" is capitalized to "Catholic" it refers to the Roman Catholic Church. In this way, all Christians are catholic as we belong to the universal, worldwide, covenant community called the church!

TRY THIS AT HOME:

Sit down in your spare time and write a personal Creed! You can start this process by writing down the answer to these questions below before you put it all together. It might be helpful to study how some of these other creeds are organized to get an idea of how to draft your own!

- What is important to me?
- Who is Jesus to me?
- What do I believe deep down at my core?
- What actions and rituals does my faith require?
- What do I think are the core beliefs of a Christian?
- What do I want the world to know about my faith?

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH

Written in 1983, this Creed was written by Presbyterians but they wanted to write a creed all Christians could use. Notice how the Creed is intentional. It is grouped in a Trinitarian structure which testifies to the universal nature of this Statement of Faith. Notice how much more expanded this Creed is and how the movements of the 50-80's shaped its writings as all Creeds seek to speak to the Christian Faith in context of time and space.

In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune* God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.

We trust in Jesus Christ, Fully human, fully God. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God: preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives, teaching by word and deed and blessing the children, healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted, eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners, and calling all to repent and believe the gospel. Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition, Jesus was crucified, suffering the depths of human pain and giving his life for the sins of the world. God raised this Jesus from the dead, vindicating his sinless life, breaking the power of sin and evil, delivering us from death to life eternal.

We trust in God, whom Jesus called Abba, Father. In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation. In everlasting love, the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people to bless all families of the earth. Hearing their cry, God delivered the children of Israel from the house of bondage. Loving us still, God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant. Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home, God is faithful still.

We trust in God the Holy Spirit, everywhere the giver and renewer of life. The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church. The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and calls women and men to all ministries of the church. In a broken and fearful world the Spirit gives us courage to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior, to unmask idolatries in Church and culture, to hear the voices of peoples long silenced, and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives, even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth, praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

With believers in every time and place, we rejoice that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*Triune is a word referring to the trinity meaning "three-in-one and one-in three."