

Learning to Pray

You will need: your Bible, journal, and a pen

Over the past couple of weeks, I have felt a deep desire to pray into everything that is happening in our world as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, but when I do pray, I find myself a loss for words. How are we supposed to pray into this uniquely difficult time? Do we lament, mourning with those who mourn? Do we ask for wisdom and perseverance as we all seek to navigate this together? Or, do we travail in prayer until the dawn breaks and God pours out healing on the earth? Of course, I know that the answer is that we pray all of these things, but is anyone else having a hard time holding all of these things in tension like I am? If so, maybe you'll join me this week in starting where the disciples started when they were struggling to pray: "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1). It seems to me that Jesus probably knows how to pray into this season. Let's learn from Him together.

Prepare (10 minutes)

Read Matthew 6:9-13 aloud. Invite the Holy Spirit to come and teach you pray: "Lord, teach me to pray like you would pray during this coronavirus crisis." Then, sit in silence listening for His voice. Don't beat yourself up if your mind drifts; it happens to everyone. When you notice it wandering, gently draw it back by repeating your request: "Lord, teach me to pray." Briefly journal anything you think or feel.

Approach (10 minutes)

Read Matthew 6:9 aloud. One of the most important things we can do when we pray is remember who we're talking to. Often, we rush to our thoughts or request, putting ourselves at the center rather than acknowledging Him who is the center of all things. Especially in a time like this, we may rush to all of the things we want God to do, the ways we want Him to intervene in this time, but may miss God in the process. Jesus got this order right: "Our Father in heaven, holy is your name." This is not a token salutation. Jesus clearly and succinctly reminds us who God is: *our Father*, one who loves us and is with us, *in heaven*, who sits enthroned above all creation, *holy is your name*, there is no one like you. It is important that we begin our prayers in a similar place. Remember who you're talking to. Think of all the names you've heard God called (if you need inspiration why not read: Genesis 21:33, Exodus 3:14, Judges 6:24, Deuteronomy 7:9, Deuteronomy 10:17, Isaiah 5:16, Psalm 136:26, Isaiah 7:14 & John 8:58.) Write the names that stand out to you in your journal.

Lament (10 minutes)

Read Matthew 6:10-11. In a moment, we will begin intercession, praying for the coming of God's kingdom and the accomplishment of His will in and through this crisis, but first let's start by recognizing the ways in which the world is out of alignment with God's will. We know that disease and death are not a part of His Kingdom, so we, who are citizens of His Kingdom mourn what's happening in the world today. Allow yourself to reflect on the pandemic, the devastation, the fear. And, rather than try to process or resolve the feelings that arise, pray them. Don't ask God to fix anything; just tell Him how you feel. If you haven't had a lot of experience with lament, read Psalm 42 aloud. Use the words of the Psalm to express your own emotions.

Ask (10 minutes)

Read Matthew 6:10-11 again. Ask God who/what/where He would have you pray for. On a new page, write those people, situations, and places that God brings mind, that you want God to move in. As the page fills up, ask God to teach you to pray His will for His kingdom in each of these situations. Spend some time listening and praying on behalf of those things.

Examine (10 minutes)

Read Matthew 6:12. These times are trying for all of us, and as we struggle cope with the stress of this pandemic, we all miss the mark in many ways. Think back through your last 24 hours, the things you've done, the interactions you've had. Ask the Holy Spirit to highlight any places where you might have missed the mark, things you have done and said that you shouldn't have, times you should have acted but did not. Don't get bogged down in over-analysis or shame. On a new page, write everything that has come to mind. Confess these things to God, and then rip that page out of your journal, tear it up, and throw it into the trash (if you don't want to rip a page out of your journal, just draw a big X over the whole page, like you're voiding a check). Thank God for forgiving you and ask Him if there is there someone you need to forgive today.

Extol (10 minutes)

The traditional ending of the Lord's Prayer doesn't appear in most modern translations but was a later add-on to the prayer. Nevertheless, it is a beautiful and fitting way to end our time. Pray it aloud now: "Yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever." You may want to listen to a worship song of gratitude. Write prayers of praise and thanksgiving on a page in your journal.

Close your time by saying the Lord's Prayer aloud again.