

THE POWER OF PRAYER

HOW TO PRAY. WAYS TO PRAY. WHY WE PRAY.

PRAYER 02/03: **WAYS TO PRAY**

There are dozens of ways to pray, so it's pivotal that you find the practice that works best for you. "Wait, you're telling me there is more than one way to pray?" Of course! Prayer is defined as consistent communication with our Creator. Just like there are dozens of communication styles, there are dozens of prayer methods. Today, we will investigate four practical ways to pray, then explore three tips to help us engage deeper.

Preparing for Your Talk:

- Tell a story that shows when something seemed to not be "for you" but you just had to try a different method.
- Print the small Group discussion guide (or text it to leaders).

Sources & Suggested Study Materials

- NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible by Zondervan.
- The Expositor's Bible Commentary by Frank E. Gaebelin, John H. Sailhamer, and Walter C. Kaiser Jr.



BIG IDEA:

At the end of the day, the best prayer method is the one you do.



SMALL GROUP OBJECTIVE:

We will work through the different practices and tips to our students engage with prayer.



SCRIPTURE USED:

Ephesians 6:18-19
Hebrews 4:16

ILLUSTRATION

- ILLUSTRATION: Tell a story that shows when something seemed to not be “for you” but you just had to try a different method.
 - “What was I thinking?” I asked myself while lying on the ground catching my breath. The sweaty people around me were dropping heavy steel plates, jumping onto really high boxes, and screaming intensely. This wasn’t a nightmare—I had found myself in my friend’s CrossFit gym. If you are not familiar with the movement, let me explain. CrossFit combines intense weightlifting and community support to create a captivating way to work out. Their following is fanatical, and my friend is one of those fanatics. He attends multiple classes a day, wears the merchandise, and casually uses phrases like “no pain, no gain.” The gym is his happy place. While rolling on the ground in agony, I didn’t see the appeal.
 - During my free class, the instructor had us squat nearly 100 pounds thirty times, run half a mile, do these things called burpees, and rehearse jumping jacks between each movement. My heart pounded like a jackhammer. I couldn’t catch my breath. I couldn’t stand without stumbling. I began writing my final will and testament in my head. Then, the instructor announced, “That was a good warm-up, everyone. Let’s get started.” I let out an audible groan.
 - After my free trial class, I never went back. “The gym just isn’t a place for me,” I explained to my friend. I get it—working out is extremely important. However, I assumed it wasn’t for me after that class tried to send me to the morgue. Something amazing happened a few months later, though. I went to the gym and loved it. I met up with a couple of friends, and we started a program called HIIT. The pace pushed me. The movements strengthened me. The community supported me.
 - Turns out I didn’t hate the gym; I just needed to find a method that worked for me.

TENSION

- The same principle plays out in our spiritual lives, too. I’ve met so many people who claim they have a hard time praying regularly.
 - We assume we can’t pray because our minds wander, our thoughts zig-zag, we fumble over our words, or we find it hard to get into the routine.

- Like my embarrassing frustration in a CrossFit gym, you may just need to find something different.
 - There are dozens of ways to pray, so it's pivotal that you find the practice that works best for you.
 - Why? Because prayer is like exercise for your soul. It's both healthy and necessary.
 - Take a look at how the Apostle Paul described his overarching expectations of prayer lives.

BIBLE STUDY

Ephesians 6:18-19

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.”

CONTEXTUALIZING THIS PASSAGE

- This passage takes place directly after Paul’s popular discussion on spiritual warfare. Ephesians 6 demonstrates that your life is going to be a fight. Circumstances will get challenging.
 - The enemy will wage war daily. You will occasionally feel as though life is attacking you from every direction.
 - Paul’s closing charge is simple: if you want to win in life, prayer is the only way.
 - Every believer is called to stand firm in prayer. Prayer is not just something we practice; it’s designed to be our core source of energy and longevity.
 - Martin Luther explained, “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than being alive without breathing.”
 - In our spiritual life, prayer is like our breath.
- Paul clearly agrees. Take a look at his universal language in verses 18 through 20.
 - How are we supposed to pray? All ways.
 - When are we supposed to pray? At all times.
 - Whom are we supposed to pray for? All people.

- “Wait, you’re telling me there is more than one way to pray?” Of course! Prayer is defined as consistent communication with our Creator. Just like there are dozens of communication styles, there are dozens of prayer methods. Today, we will investigate four practical ways to pray.

Praying With Writing

- Have you ever heard of the learning styles? These are practices that help individuals engage with ideas.
 - For example, some people are kinetic learners, which means they learn by doing.
 - Others are auditory learners, which means they prefer to listen.
 - Many people are visual learners, which means they engage with the ideas they see.
 - Interestingly, over half of all humans are visual learners.
 - That’s the beauty of prayer journaling. It allows us to combine an auditory practice with a visual prompt.
- How do you do it? Simply dust off a journal and start writing to God.
 - Think of your prayer journal as a letter to the Lord. As you write out your prayers, you will notice that you pay closer attention, organize your thoughts better, and are far less likely to get sidetracked.

Praying While Walking

- One of the most common barriers to prayer is boredom. Just sitting alone in a room and talking takes a lot of focus.
 - For most of us, our minds wander, and our eyes get tired. Before you know it, prayer time has become nap time.
 - How do we stop repeating that mistake? Take a prayer walk.
- It’s exactly what it sounds like. Walk around your city, community, school, or workplace while praying.
 - As you enter a new area, ask God to reveal something to you, renew your faith, and bring revival.
 - You will become more aware of the deep interconnectedness of your world and God’s work.

Praying with the Bible

- Some early Church leaders practiced *Lectio Divina*, a Latin phrase that translates to “Divine Reading.”
 - This is the practice of slowly working through a short section of Scripture, focusing on every single word, and asking the Holy Spirit to reveal specific concepts that resonate with you.
- When you don’t have the words, flip through your Bible to find some.
 - There are thousands of prayers written out on the pages of Scripture.
 - Let’s learn from them and do the same. How do you make it more personal?
 - Consider writing Psalms out and personalizing them to your own context.
 - Go through a section of Scripture that you know well and ask God to show you something.
 - The author of Hebrews teaches that “the word of God is alive and active” (Hebrews 4:16).
 - Since God’s Word is alive, ask God to breathe new life into your prayers.

Praying with Your Imagination

- St. Ignatius of Loyola coined and cultivated a powerful prayer practice called imaginative prayer. Simply put, this is when you envision yourself inside a Bible story.
 - How do you incorporate imaginative prayer into your life?
 - Did you ever play pretend as a child? It’s that simple.
 - Contemplatively close your eyes, ask God to work in your heart, and open your Bible to a narrative passage.
 - While studying, imagine the sights, sounds, smells, and sensations brought on by God’s stories.
 - Personally, this practice has really helped the way I engage with the Gospels.
 - Every story in Scripture is a real scene from history. Imagine yourself as an observer or a participant in the moment.
 - Here are two examples.
 - First, try to imagine yourself at the feeding of the five thousand. Marvel at the miracle. Smell the bread. Feel the grass beneath you.

Sense the compassion and power of Jesus. Let God speak to you through the unique way you imagine the scene.

- Second, hold onto a prop that sparks a scene from Scripture, whether it's bread and juice from the Last Supper, a wooden staff from the parting of the Red Sea, or palm branches from the triumphant entry into Jerusalem.
 - Hold onto that prop and ask it to help you imagine whatever moment that item represents. As your imagination sparks, God's prayerful work starts.
- Now, God doesn't move through props; He moves through people. Everything we just mentioned is a mere practice.
 - There is nothing supernatural about a prop, a walk, or an old journal. They're just ordinary things.
 - All of these ordinary concepts are designed to spark an extraordinary encounter.
- **What steps can we take to get the most out of our newly-formed practices?**
- **Be Creative.**
 - Feel free to express yourself to Jesus in creative ways. While journaling and using imagination, you can draw pictures, bullet out your requests, write a poem, or turn your prayers into personal Psalms.
 - Jesus has given you unique talents and approaches to processing your thoughts that can be used to praise God and pray to Him.
 - However, you can best search your heart, mind, and emotions. Start there.
 - Then pray what you have written to God.
- **Be Contemplative.**
 - Every single way to pray requires contemplation. Contemplation is an invitation to slow down with your thoughts and the Spirit's work.
 - As you contemplate, ask yourself these questions:
 - How am I feeling?
 - What am I thankful for?

- What Bible story speaks to my current moment?
- Whom do I need to pray for?
- What am I struggling with?
- Where do I need clarity?
 - It's amazing how you tend to look at life from a healthier perspective when you contemplate everything in the presence of God.
- **Be Candid.**
 - There is no need to edit or censor your prayers. Jesus knows all your thoughts and feelings already, so don't hold back.
 - Get it all out. Learn to be direct and articulate when you pray.
 - So often, being open with God helps you to process, learn, heal, and grow as you spend time with Him.
 - Paul commanded us to **“pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”**
 - Landing: Pray every day. Pray in different ways.
 - There are so many different methods of prayerful meditation.
 - This list is hardly exhaustive. It barely scratches the surface. Start trying new things today.
 - Write in your journal.
 - Walk around your school.
 - Imagine yourself at the feet of Jesus.
 - At the end of the day, the best prayer method is the one you do.

BREAK FOR SMALL GROUPS

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week and the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What's one thing that stood out to you from today's message?

Q2: What is your favorite way to communicate with your friends?

Q3: Why do you think it's sometimes hard to feel close to God?

Q4: Of all the ways to pray, which of these stuck out to you? Which of these will you try this week?

Q5: What are some ways you can bring your own creativity into your prayer life?

Application: Try 1-2 of these ways to pray this week. Give it your attention and intentionality. As you do, note if any method comes more naturally to you than others. Decide which ones you'd like to incorporate into your spiritual routine.

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Hebrews 4:14-16

Luke 18:1-8

Luke 18:9-14

Matthew 18:20

Mark 11:24-25

John 15:1-11

Luke 22:39-44

Psalm 46

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.