

LEARNING TO PRAY

Some people think prayer is an intimidating thing. For one, it's often done in public or in small groups, which adds the whole public speaking challenge into it. We think that our prayers need to be eloquent and spiritual and profound. If people aren't stating their "amens" we feel as if we're failing.

The disciples of Jesus were intimidated too. So one day they came to Jesus and asked him to teach them how to pray.

And the gist of what he taught them was to let their prayer be an honest conversation between themselves and their heavenly Father. Invite him into every activity of your day, talk to him about the mundane, tell him how you're feeling about driving to work in this traffic, ask him for wisdom on how to deal with your boss, tell him about your anxiety and fear and celebrate with him when life is working well.

The reason this seems odd for a lot of people is because most people have a notion that God is far away when in reality, God is present beside you. How would you converse with the person that most cares for you if they sat beside you in your car as you were driving or that sat next to you at the dinner table or they sat beside you in the waiting room at the hospital? You'd probably at times ask questions. You'd tell them how you are feeling about your current situation. You'd ask for advice. You'd listen. You'd probably, sometimes cry and yell and curse. God wants all of that and because he's beside you, he can hear it all and take it all.

Here is what Jesus instructed his disciples to focus on while praying:

The Father's Character

First, acknowledge the Father's character. He is what we (secretly sometimes) long to be. He is close to us, yes, but he is different. He is holy and set apart from corruption and brokenness and chaos and sin.

The Father's Kingdom

Second, ask for the Father's reign and Kingdom. Not only do we long for his character but we long for his kingdom. We want what he wants. We want his rule to supersede our rule (because that doesn't end well) and for his ways to advance through us and through our world.

The Father's Provision

Third, ask him for what you need. You have physical needs, emotional needs, spiritual needs so this is where we pull up the chair to the Father's table and ask that he feed us.

The Father's Forgiveness

Fourth, ask for forgiveness. You know that you have been wrong and you need to find some humility to admit it. Come before the God of mercy and lay your confession before him. His grace and love will meet you and embrace you and (this is all important) empower you to extend forgiveness to others.

The Father's Guidance

Fifth, ask that He guide you. Every day you're met with thousands of choices. Many of these choices are for your own advancement and self-promotion. This isn't bad but it can tempt us to live selfish lives. We've already prayed for God's reign to rule, not ours, so pray God will guide you through the daily temptations you encounter.

The Father's Protection

Sixth, ask that He protect you. We have an enemy that is looking to kill and destroy and he is prowling like a lion waiting to pounce and attack. Pray that as you seek after God that he will surround you with an army of protection and empower you to be armored with his Spirit.

This teaching can be found in Matthew chapter 6, verses 9-13. When he teaches on prayer in Luke 11 (very similar to what he says in Matthew) he continues with a story about prayer. The point is that we are to be desperate in prayer. Desperate prayers are not formal prayers, they are not prescribed prayers or rehearsed prayers. They are prayers that arise out of everyday life and everyday scenarios. They are prayers that acknowledge our need for the Father and rely on all he provides us.

Jesus concludes his teaching by stating that when we ask with persistence, we will receive, when we seek in this manner, we will find; when we knock with audacious need, the door will be opened to us.

The reason all this is true is because God is a good Father who wants your best. And the great and powerful gift provided those who ask for it: His Holy Spirit.

I encourage you to read Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6 and Luke 11:1-13

The best you thing you can do right now is to begin to pray. Don't worry about what you say and if it's "right" or not. Simply begin to talk to God, invite him in to your everyday life and take time to listen to what he says.