

Patterns of Prayer

Luke 11:1-4

John Breon

After listening to Jesus pray, one of his disciples made this request: “Lord, teach us to pray.” If that expresses your desire, today’s message is for you. We may ask the Lord, “Teach us *to* pray”—help us be praying people. Or we may ask, “Teach us *how* to pray.” How do we pray effectively? Are there methods or handles that can assist us in our praying?

Jesus gave his disciples content for their prayers—the kinds of things to ask for. And he gave them a pattern for prayer. The focus of this message is on patterns for praying—models to help people who want to pray, to pray more effectively, with greater focus and attention on God in prayer. Using a pattern for prayer is like learning the fundamentals of a sport or learning musical scales. It’s a foundation that we build on. After we practice it for some time, we’re not always conscious of it but it helps us play or perform or pray more naturally and more effectively.

First, remember that prayer starts with God. We want to pray because God stirs the desire in us. We then offer prayer back to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 2:18).

The outlines I’m using come from Maxie Dunnam’s *Workbook of Living Prayer*. He adapted them from W. E. Sangster, a British Methodist pastor who was prominent in the middle twentieth century. Sangster suggested these as patterns for morning and evening prayer.

I first heard Sangster’s pattern in a sermon at ORU Chapel. I’ve seen the ACTS model of prayer in various places over the years. Greg Tolle used it in his study about grace and practices of discipleship. Over the years, I’ve used these patterns off and on in my own praying.

There are many outlines and models and patterns for praying. These are only suggestions. We’re not laying some legalistic bondage on ourselves. If these models help you pray better, then use them. If they don’t help, use something else. The important thing is that we pray.

Watchman Nee was a Chinese Christian leader through much of the twentieth century. He compared prayer to the rails that a train needs to

move. A locomotive is powerful and can move great loads, but only if it has rails to run on. God is powerful and has many gifts and great work he wants to do. Generally, God chooses to work through people, through our prayers that are like the rails for God's locomotive (Nee, *Let Us Pray*, <http://www3.telus.net/trbrooks/LetUsPray.pdf>). The patterns we're looking at today can help us lay rails for God's work in and through us.

And though they're recommended for morning and evening, you can use them any time. I remember praying according to these patterns when our children were babies and I took my turn rocking them in the middle of the night. On a long drive alone, you can turn off the music or the news and spend some of that time praying.

Ideally, you'll have some quiet time when you can spend several minutes moving through the pattern. Sometimes you may simply think through it quietly on the run. You may find that you can't do it every day and there will be times when you can linger in prayer.

Let's get on with it and talk about each of these stages of prayer.

Adoration Remember, prayer starts with God. Not only does God give us the impulse to pray, but God is the focus of our attention in prayer and we begin by praising God.

Adoration is our desire to worship, honor, and praise God. In this stage we seek only to magnify and exalt God. Think of the best things you know about God—and praise God for who he is. You might want to choose one attribute or characteristic of God and give praise that that's the kind of God God is. For example, you could think of Holiness, Majesty, Love, Mercy, Faithfulness. Choosing a different aspect of God's character to praise him for each time gives some variety to your prayer time and stretches your thinking about you and your experience of God.

If you have a hard time getting started with this, use a psalm or hymn to focus your attention and move you in the direction of praise. The scriptures listed under Adoration on your bulletin insert can help with this. The first section of hymns in the *UM Hymnal* is about "The Glory of the Triune God." Read one or two of those to get started adoring the Lord.

Thanksgiving In adoration we praise and honor and give glory to God for who he is in himself. In thanksgiving we give glory to God for what

he has done for us, for the gifts we've received from him. This is where we count our many blessings, name them one by one, and thank God for them.

Health, home, love, work, friends, family, fun, church, life, peace, salvation—thank God. Even when we're suffering or ill or misfortunate we can find something to be grateful to God for—how about God's promise always to be with us?

Dedication Even though we gave our heart to Jesus or dedicated our life to God at some time, every day gives us a new opportunity to renew our dedication to God.

Someone has said that being a Christian means giving all I know of myself to all I know of God. Every day I can know more of myself to give and every day I can know more of God to give to.

When I made my first conscious commitment to God, I was about eleven years old. Since then, I've grown and changed a lot: married and had three children, and now a grandchild; completed several stages of education; served a number of churches. I've grown in my self-understanding and my understanding of God. My commitment to God now involves things my commitment as an eleven year old didn't.

Mouzon Biggs relates a story from the days of Queen Victoria and the British Empire. The queen once visited the Punjab in India. A young prince from a minor province wished to make a presentation to the queen. She invited him in.

The young man—really, just a boy in his teens—knelt before the queen. Then he stood, reached into his pocket, and held out a small cloth bag. The queen's attendant opened the bag. A brilliant, polished diamond fell into his hand. The audience gasped and whispered about the size of the stone.

Queen Victoria thanked the young man and promised him that his gift would become a permanent part of the Crown Jewels in London.

Years later, the young prince made a trip to England. He asked to see the aging Queen Victoria. She was reminded of his gift and granted him an audience almost immediately. After proper introductions, the man asked if he might see the diamond he had given to the queen. It was brought from the vault and handed to him. He said, "Your Highness, years ago when I was

still a boy, I gave this diamond to you with all my heart. Now I am a man. Now I know how much this stone is really worth. May I give it to you again, with all my heart?" (*Moments to Hold Close* 36-37)

In dedication, we give ourselves again and again to our Lord.

Guidance We need to seek God's guidance for the day. Hold yourself before God as if reporting for duty and waiting for your orders.

Sangster suggests thinking through your whole day slowly with God. As far as you know what will happen—where you'll be, whom you'll be with, what you'll do—see God in those situations. Also, see God in the unknown and unexpected situations. Try to be aware of how God is calling you. Pray to be aware of and able to grasp the opportunities God gives during the day.

Intercession Much of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples involves asking. In intercession, we're asking on behalf of others. This is praying for other people.

Because God chooses to work through people—people who pray—our intercession makes a difference.

We're not alone in our intercession. The Bible says that Jesus is at God's right hand interceding for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). It also tells us that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us (Rom 8:27). Seek to listen and overhear the intercession that's already going on. Then pray what Jesus prays; pray as the Holy Spirit guides.

We pray in the name of Jesus. This means, first, that we pray in full assurance of the great work that Jesus accomplished. We don't approach God on our own merits or in our own adequacy. We come to God on the basis of what Jesus did for us at the cross. To pray in Jesus' name also means to pray according to the way and nature of Jesus. We pray what Jesus would pray.

Petition This is asking on our own behalf. We pray for ourselves and our needs and concerns. Again, the prayer Jesus gave his disciples is mostly petition. God is pleased with our asking and wants to meet our needs as we ask.

Meditation Spend some time thinking about what you've been doing, what it means, and any new insight you've gained. Give your mind to God and learn to think with him.

The pattern for evening prayer is spelled out ACTS. The "acts" of prayer are *adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication* (that's another word for asking; it combines intercession and petition).

The new element here is confession. At the end of the day, go back over the day, reviewing it with God. Admit where you blew it. Confess the sins of the day. Dunnam says,

Review the day, look at your life, make your confession of failure, pretense, exaggeration, lack of love, dishonesty, callousness, or shallowness in relationship. ... Accept God's forgiveness. If there is a chance for restitution, some action necessary for you to be reconciled to someone, make a plan to get at the reconciliation or restitution at the earliest possible time. (*Workbook of Living Prayer* 103)

Lloyd Ogilvie tells about being in Israel studying in preparation for writing one of his books. On the Mount of Beatitude, where tradition says Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, he was sitting in a garden studying. He became aware that someone else was in the garden—a woman who was obviously distressed. As she walked about, her face showed strain and tension. Lloyd prayed that if the woman's need was on the Lord's agenda he was ready and willing to help.

Later, she walked by Lloyd's makeshift desk. He smiled and said, "Hello." Her cautious response was in a lilting Irish brogue. She was from Belfast, Northern Ireland and was the head of pediatric nursing in a hospital that cared for many victims of bombing and sniping incidents in that city. It was during the time when Protestants and Catholics were killing each other, a time the Irish refer to as "the troubles".

Lloyd began a conversation with the nurse. She noticed his Bible and books and asked what he was studying. He said he was searching for Jesus' secret of true happiness, spoken there on the mount so long ago.

"Happiness?" she exclaimed. "That's one thing I doubt I will ever know again." Then she began to tell her story. She had come to Israel to rest and regain her courage. The suffering of the children in her ward had completely drained her. She told about their mangled bodies and broken spirits. She and Lloyd discussed her hatred of the I.R.A., her confusion about the complex issues of unrest in her country, and, most of all, her bone-tired weariness.

Lloyd asked why she thought she could never be happy again. She told how one day she was walking down a corridor of her hospital and was called in to help turn a critical patient. The doctor told her that the patient had massive fractures in his spine and neck from bullet wounds. Turning him on his side was necessary, but dangerous. The nurse was to turn his head as the doctor and male attendants turned his heavy body. One false move of the head would end the man's life.

She said, "I put my hands cautiously around the patient's head and then looked into his pain-ridden face. The man was none other than one of the leaders of the I.R.A. underground who was responsible for the suffering of the children I care for every day! I've never felt such hatred. With one move I could have killed him. And for a moment I wanted to! No one could have blamed me. It could have been an accident—easily explained, but never justified. Finally, the nurse in me overcame my burning anger, and I turned the man's head with skilled caution and care. When we were finished, I walked out of that ward, down the hall, and out of the hospital, determined never to go back. I realized that all that hatred had gotten to me. That's why I had to get away. Now you know why I'll never be free to be happy again. When I realize what I almost did, or even that the thought could press through my mind, how could God forgive me? I'm no better than all the rest on both sides of the conflict. The cancer of hatred is eating me alive!"

Lloyd had been studying the beatitude, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." He realized that this woman was mourning over the whole mess—the suffering of children, remorse over what she was capable of considering, and soul-sickness over what was happening in her country.

Then he sensed God giving him a word for her, and for all of us when we need forgiveness. He developed the thought into four brief requests for forgiveness. The first is, "Lord, forgive me." Praying that is the beginning of life in Christ and it continues to be a vital part of our walk with Christ. Then we move to, "I forgive myself." That's a tough one, but we need it. Then we can pray, "Lord, forgive them." Finally, we identify with others and we're free to pray, "Lord, forgive us" (*Congratulations, God Believes in You!* 34-37). I've found those four movements of confession to be very helpful.

Now, with the assurance of forgiveness, thank God for his mercy and grace. Thank God for being with you through the day and for all that God has done.

Pray for any new needs you've become aware of or repeat some urgent requests from earlier in the day.

Will you accept God's invitation to pray, to be a person of prayer, to be a praying church?

Patterns of Prayer

Morning

Adoration

Psalms 8; 95; 100; 103; Romans 11:33-36; Revelation 4, 5

Thanksgiving

Psalms 28; 30; 107; Luke 10:21; Colossians 3:15-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Hebrews 12:28

Dedication

Joshua 24:14-24; 1 Kings 8:54-61; Psalms 31; 37; Mark 8:34-38; 1 Corinthians 15:58

Guidance

Exodus 13:21-22; Psalms 25; 43; Proverbs 3:5-6; 4; 6:20-23; John 16:13-14; Acts 10; 16:6-10

Intercession

Exodus 32:30-32; Luke 22:28-32; John 17; Isaiah 53:12; Romans 8:26-34; Hebrews 7:24-25

Petition

Psalms 4; 5; 12; Jeremiah 33:1-3; Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4; Matthew 7:7-12; Luke 11:9-13; John 15:1-8; Philippians 4:6-7; James 1:5; 4:1-3

Meditation

Joshua 1:8; Psalms 1; 19; 48; 77; 145; Philippians 4:8-9

Evening

Adoration

Confession

Psalms 32; 66:16-20; Luke 18:9-14; 1 John 1:5-2:2

Thanksgiving

Supplication (Combination of Intercession and Petition)

Resources for Developing in Prayer

Maxie Dunnam, *The Workbook of Living Prayer*

Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*

Philip Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?*

<http://www.bookofcommonprayer.net/>

<https://www.prayerpointpress.com/>

www.upperroom.org