

# Prayer is Simply Divine Conversation.

## A. What is prayer?

Most people define prayer as ‘talking to God’. I prefer to define prayer as a **two-way conversation** between us and God. The important thing is not the definition, but the practise. If you want to define prayer as ‘talking to God’ and use a different word (eg. ‘quiet time’) for the time you spend talking *and* listening to God, that’s fine. The important thing is that you do both! If you’ve ever had a friend that just talks to you and never listens then you’ll know why. And the Bible is clear that God wants us to talk to Him and to listen to Him.

[Jeremiah 33:3] \_\_\_\_\_ upon me and I will \_\_\_\_\_ you  
and \_\_\_\_\_ you great and unsearchable things that you do not know.

## B. Prayer is simple! (Any old nobody can pray!)

### 1. Nobody knows how to pray perfectly

Some people feel embarrassed to pray because they feel that they don’t know ‘how’. The truth – according to the Bible – is that when it comes to prayer, no-one really knows how!

[Romans 8:26] For we do \_\_\_\_\_ to pray as we ought...

### 2. Nobody is ‘worthy enough’ to pray

What’s more, although we often feel like we need to be in ‘a good place with God’ before we can pray – or at least experience *enjoyable prayer* – this is entirely mistaken. Only Jesus is worthy of coming before God (Rev. 5:4-10) —this is why we have to pray “in Jesus’s name” (John 14:14). This means we should never try and fix ourselves before coming to God—we have to come to God first.

This is well illustrated by Jesus’ parable about the ‘Two Ways To Pray’ (Luke 18:9-14):

*‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed on his own: “God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”*

*‘But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”*

*‘I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.’*

### 3. Nobody has to pray without the Spirit’s help

After telling us that “*We do not know how to pray as we ought...*”, Romans 8:26 goes on to say, “*but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us*”.

All Christians have been “*baptized into one body and made to drink of one Spirit*” (1 Cor. 12:13) – in fact, “*no-one can [sincerely] say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit*”. So no-one who has sincerely prayed a ‘Sinner’s Prayer’ needs to worry about whether they have the Holy Spirit or not – but we should ask to “*be continually filled with the Spirit*” (Eph.5:18). Jesus encouraged us to ask for more of the Holy Spirit’s help: “*If human fathers, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Spirit to those who ask Him!*” Lk.11:13.

## C. Learning to Speak in the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22)

### 1. Praise: "Rejoice always."

To 'rejoice' means to renew our joy by declaring who God is:

[Psalm 9:2] *I will be glad and **rejoice** in You; I will sing **praise** to Your name, O Most High.*

(If you want to get someone's attention, then call out their name!)

Some names of God: Father (Matt. 6:9), Lord (Rom. 10:9), Saviour (Ps.42:5), Healer (Ex. 15:26)...

### 2. Prayer: "Pray without ceasing"

How can we sustain continual prayer? Paul goes on to tell us how: by '*giving thanks in everything*'.

There are two sorts of thanksgiving:

i. **'We thank you for what you've done--'**

(Even in suffering Rom. 5:3-5; for "what do you have that you did not receive" 2 Cor. 4:7)

ii. **'--and we thank you for what you're going to do!'**

(Don't try changing God's mind Matt.6:8; just ASK perseveringly Lk.11:9; and wrestle with Him Gen.32:28 until you obtain His promise through faith Heb.11:33 -- that is, faith in Christ 2 Cor.1:20)

### 3. Persevering: "Don't quench the Spirit"

Keep praying – even when the words run out! It is when we don't know how to pray that "*the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words*". 'Tongues' is just the sound of a child of God calling out to the Father like a newborn baby: "*You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry 'Abba! Father!'*" Rom. 8:15. Speaking and singing in tongues (1 Cor.14:15) "builds up the spirit" (1 Cor. 14:4). Paul says he wants "all to speak in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:5). But it must be "orderly" (1 Cor.14:40) – so if you are distracting someone, better to "keep quiet" (1 Cor.14:28).

### 4. Prophecy: "Don't despise prophecy, but test everything"

'Prophecy' simply means speaking out what the Spirit is saying. People sometimes 'despise prophecy' because

- i. they are afraid that it will lead to manipulation ; and
- ii. they think that believing in prophecy is the same as adding to Scripture.

In response:

- i. *Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom* (2 Cor.3:17) – not control.
- ii. We are 'Scriptural Cessationists' AND 'Supernatural Continuationists'. Certainly, the writing of the Scriptures has ceased (Rev. 22:18-19). But Scripture encourages us to "eagerly desire to prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:1), and since God does not change (Mal. 3:6) he must still desire (1 Cor. 12:11) to continue giving the church the supernatural Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Consider also Acts 21:1-15, and Paul's response to prophetic advice.

### 5. Purity: "Abstain from all evil"

Not immediate perfection – but a lifestyle of repentance! 4 R's: Repent/Receive/Resist/Replace.

Repent: *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."* 1 Jn 1:8-9

Receive: *"Let us come boldly before the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy"* Heb.4:16

Resist: *"Resist the devil and he will flee from you."* James 4:7

Replace: *"Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."* Ephesians 4:22-24

## D. Learning to Listen to the Spirit

### 1. Foundational Truth: We can all hear His voice

Hearing God's voice isn't anything to boast about – it's the birth-right of every Christian.

Jesus ("the Good Shepherd") said '*my sheep hear my voice--I know them and they follow me*' Jn.10:27

### 2. God Speaks In Various Ways (eg. Matthew 1:18-2:23)

#### i. Supernatural Signs

Angels (1:20; 2:13; 2:19); Dreams & Visions (1:20; 2:12,13,19,23; 2:9?); Prophecies (2:23)...

#### ii. Surroundings

Creation (2:2); Names (1:21); Gifts (2:11); the News (2:21)...

#### iii. Saints, Sinners, Strangers

Saints ("all the chief priests and scribes", 2:4); Sinners (Herod 2:8); Strangers ("the Magi" 2:7)

#### iv. \*Scripture

"This was to fulfil..." (1:23; 2:15; 2:18); "for so it is written..." (2:6)

#### v. \*Son of God

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name JESUS" Matt. 1:20

#### vi. \*Still, Small Voice of the Spirit

Conscience ("being a righteous man and unwilling to put her to shame..." 1:19); Emotions (2:3; 2:22)

### 3. Test Everything – 'Is that really you, God?'

Test what you think God is saying by ensuring that is lines up with:

i. the Clear Teaching of Scripture; ii. the Character of his Son Jesus; iii. the Conviction of the Spirit.

### 4. 'How do I do it?' – 4 keys

i. Surrender completely to Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3); ii. Still your heart (Ps. 46:10, Ps. 131:2);

iii. Spontaneously start speaking/singing (Ps.149:1); iv. Scribble down what God is saying (Rev. 1:11)

## E. 'Harp and Bowl': Music is the oil of prayer

Revelation 5:8 "[They] fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints, and they sang a new song..."

The phrase 'Harp and Bowl', popularised by IHOP, emphasises the role of music and song in enabling spontaneous Spirit-filled prayer (cf. Elisha—2 Kings 3:15; NT exhortations Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:19).

## F. Physical Posture

The traditional image of someone praying is with their head bowed and eyes closed:

Exodus 4:31 "They bowed their heads and worshipped". But the Bible actually describes a range of different physical postures that we should use in prayer: falling facedown (Ezek. 1:28); lifting hands (1 Timothy 2:8); even dancing (Psalm 150:3). Of course, **we can pray whatever we happen to be doing, without adopting a 'posture of prayer'** as we see Nehemiah do in Neh. 2:4-5.

Nevertheless, sometimes our physical posture can be even more important than the words we say – as when Moses' hands were held up in prayer for Israel's protection in Exodus 17:11-13. We therefore want to have a culture in which people are free to engage with God "with all their strength" (Mk.12:30) just as "David danced before YHWH with all his strength" (2 Sam. 6:14).

## G. “In Jesus’ name”: Praying with Bold Assurance

John 14:12-14 *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.”*

Hebrews 10:19-20,22a *“Therefore brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh [cf. Mk. 15:37-38]... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...”*

Hebrews 4:14,16 *“Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God,... let us then come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may find mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

**FAITH = Full Assurance In The Heart.**

**GRACE = God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.**

## H. “AMEN”: The Importance of Agreement

Psalms 133:1,3b *“How good and pleasant it is when brethren dwell in unity... for there YHWH has commanded the blessing, even life eternal.”*

It is common to conclude prayers by saying ‘Amen’ (eg. Ps. 72:19), which is Hebrew for ‘Let it be!’

The importance of this sort of agreement in prayer is highlighted by the fact that Paul gives it as a specific reason why it is better to pray intelligibly—*“otherwise how can anyone say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving”* (1 Cor. 14:6). In fact, “the Amen” is even one of the titles of Jesus (Rev. 3:14).

There’s no reason though, why we should wait until someone has finished before agreeing with what they’re praying. Just as it is encouraging for a preacher to ‘get an Amen’—note that interjecting with (Neh. 5:13) and even asking for (Rom. 1:25; 1 Pet. 4:11) an Amen is Biblical!—so it is encouraging for someone praying to have others agree with them *as they pray*, not just *after*. **Let’s make it our practise to immediately say ‘AMEN’ whenever someone prays something we agree with**—rather than waiting until the end to decide whether we agreed with enough of the prayer!

## I. Commitment: Pray Twice Daily

Psalms 92:1-2 *“It is good to give thanks to YHWH, to sing praises to your name, O Most High, to declare your covenant-love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night.”*

While our aim is complete and continual communion with God, in every moment of every day, I encourage everyone to **commit to pray twice daily, morning and evening** (cf. Ex. 29:39).

## J. One Prayer To Start You Off: The Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6/Luke 11)

When asked about how to pray, Jesus said to his disciples, *When you pray, say:*

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name.**

**Your kingdom come, your will be done – on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours, now and forever. AMEN.**