

A simple guide to prayer

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What is prayer?

Prayer is often described as a conversation with God. Imagine sitting down with an empty armchair opposite you. Picture that God is sitting there and you are having a conversation with Him, just God and yourself. Like all conversations, it is a two-way thing. You will speak, or pray, but you also have to listen. God will speak to you in different ways. Things may happen to you, or a thought may appear in your head, or others may point you in a particular direction. God responds to prayer but not always in the way we would imagine.

How to pray?

There is no *right* way to pray. We should pray as we can, not as we can't. This is all part of *your* personal relationship with God. We all use different words and different ways to pray to God.

When to pray?

Everyone has a favourite time (or times) in the day to pray. Some will set space aside in the morning and evening to sit and spend time with God. Others may stop in the middle of the day. Many simply pray when they feel that it is the right moment. You might be in the middle of a country walk when you feel like praying! Saying all that, it is helpful to make it a regular part of your life because spending time in prayer enriches your Christian life and sustains it. Remember, when we go to a church service, we all join together in prayer, though these prayers are often read out aloud or printed in a service booklet.

Different ways of praying

People have their own favourite ways of praying. Actually, we learn about prayer all the time. We may see a church pray in a particular way and want to try it at home.

When the followers of Jesus asked him how they should pray, Jesus answered, "Pray then in this way, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen." (*Matthew 6:9-13*)

When we pray, we pray about different things. The Lord's Prayer starts by praising God, then leads on to prayers for food, for forgiveness, and to keep us on the right path through life. Saying the Lord's Prayer is good starting point when you are learning how best to pray.

A list of things we often pray for (not necessarily in this order):

1. Adoration – there is much to praise God. God is awesome and we should be in 'awe' of him for the great things he has done. He created our world. God sent Jesus to save us.

2. Thanksgiving -there is much to thank God for in our lives. For example, there is love, health, friendship.

3. Confession – an opportunity to say sorry to God and ask him for His forgiveness. A moment to face up to something we have done wrong.

4. Petition – a time when we can bring to God our worries, our concerns, and a time when we can ask God to guide and help us in a particular situation, perhaps when we are having to make a difficult decision.

5. Intercession – we should not only pray for our own needs but for others. This is called intercession. We may pray for a friend's safe journey, or that God is with a loved one about to have an operation. We may find that God ends up asking us to do something to help a particular situation. There are five fingers (including the thumb) on your hand. You can perhaps hold a finger each time you say a particular type of prayer.

Suggestions

In time, you will find the best way that *you* find for praying. It can be formal by reading out prayers from a book, or from a web-site. You may use your own words to pray. Others find that repeating a phrase over and over again is a good way to pray, too.

A famous one is known as the 'Jesus Prayer':

"Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

Some people feel it is helpful to make their prayers aloud, but others find it better to keep them silent. It is often helpful to find a quiet place, and just sit with God. There may be times when it is really easy to pray, and other times when it can seem like the most difficult thing in the world. Don't *worry* about it. God knows what is going on in our hearts and understands our difficulties.

You will find the best way for *you* to pray *yourself*. It is all part of the journey. Feel free to talk to the clergy if you want further guidance.