



practicing the way

prayer

The Basics

How do we meet with God?

Prayer is the center-point of life with God. It should be woven into the fabric of our morning routine and our weekly schedule. We should make time for prayer every single day. Prayer is our opportunity to interact with God the Creator and participate in His work of bringing redemption to earth. This practice will explore areas of prayer like contemplation, intercession, lament, unanswered prayer, imaginative prayer, and listening prayer.

Overview

Let's be honest, for most of us, prayer is a weak point in our apprenticeship to Jesus. Most of us don't really enjoy prayer. We feel bad, even guilty, about how little we pray. When we finally do make time to pray, we often don't know what to say. Or we're so distracted we can't focus.

Yet for Jesus, prayer was central to life with God. Most people define prayer as simply, "Talking with God." Prayer is a back-and-forth conversation that comes out of a depth of relationship. But at an even more basic level, prayer is a junk-drawer word for all of our relationship to the Father.

That's why prayer was such a huge part of Jesus' life. We read he, "often withdrew into lonely places and prayed." (Luke 5v16) And for Jesus, prayer wasn't a drag or a duty. He seems to genuinely enjoy his Father's company.

That's why the disciples asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray." (Luke 11v1) Jesus' answer was "the Lord's prayer," which wasn't a liturgy to recite, as much as a template to follow when you pray.

Our practice of prayer will start there. This week, we'll just set up a time and place to pray, do a little breathing prayer to center our mind and body, and pray through the Lord's prayer. It's an easy exercise that you can do in two minutes, or over two hours. The main point this week is just to get into the rhythm of daily prayer.

Practice

1. Put away your phones or any other distractions, and get into a comfortable, but alert position.
2. Invite the Holy Spirit to come...
3. Pray through the Lord's prayer, like this...

"Our Father..."

- Take a moment and think about the idea of God as your Father, with good intentions toward you. If you want, imagine God in your mind's eye. Picture his face. Make eye contact with him.

"In heaven..."

- Take a moment to think about the idea that God is all around you. As you breathe in and out, imagine yourself breathing in and out more of the Holy Spirit.

"Hallowed by your name..."

- Spend a few minutes just sitting with the Father in joyful, grateful, worship. You might want to sit in silence for a few moments. Or sing a chorus. Or rattle off a list of things you're grateful for. Or praise God with specific things you love about him.

- If you are in a group, encourage people to make their expressions of praise and gratitude out loud, one at a time. (e.g.,

"Father, thank you for your kindness." "Father, thank you for loving me."

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..."

- Spend a few minutes asking for God's will to be done in your city/church/community/life.
- Think of specific things to pray for.
- One at a time, spend time as group verbally giving to God specific things in your life that you're wrestling with control over. A simple prayer of, "Your will be done in _____," is a great place to start.

"Give us each day our daily bread..."

- Spend a few minutes praying for specific needs and wants in your life or that of your community (this is a great time to pray through your "prayer cards"!).
- This is also a great time to pray over specific people in the community who need something: a job, healing, wisdom to make a decision, etc. Get them in the middle of the room and pray over them.
- If you are in a group, consider splitting into groups of 2-3 and having each person share one area of need in their life. After each person has shared, pray for one another, asking God to meet that need.

"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors..."

- Spend a few minutes in quiet asking God for forgiveness for specific areas in your life and releasing others to forgiveness.

"And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

- Spend a few minutes praying against temptation (the word can also be translated trouble) in your life.
 - Pray against specific sins....
 - Pray against any kind of evil - spiritual evil (demonic), human evil, natural evil, etc.
 - Pray against bad things in your life or community, and for God's blessing - the divine flow of good things into your life and community.

4. Close in a prayer of gratitude to the Father for hearing you. Read over this week's practice before you call it a night.

- Basically, this week's practice is just to do the exact same thing as above. It's that easy.
- You can do this in two minutes or over two hours - it's up to you. Go as fast or slow as you want.

As you begin your Practice, here are two quick exercises that can help you get the most from your time in prayer throughout the week:

Exercise 1:

- Get out your calendar or journal and set a time and place to pray that is quiet and distraction free. For most, the mornings are a good time. But you might prefer an afternoon walk or evening
- Set a modest goal - daily is ideal, but if that's too much, shoot for three times a week, for 10-15 minutes, or something that feels a little challenging, but doable.
- Fill in 1-3 prayer cards. At the top put the name or subject, then write out a few bullet points of Scriptures, dreams, or requests you have. Remember, be specific!

Exercise 2:

- If you have a hard time with distraction, here's a little breathing exercise you can begin with, before you start into the Lord's prayer:
 - Take long, deep, slow breaths (if you want, count 4 seconds in, 4 seconds wait, 4 seconds out, repeat). Inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth.
 - Start to pay attention to your breathing. Just "watch" your breath go in and out.
 - Release the constant chatter in your mind. Let each thought go as quickly as it comes, and just focus on your breathing.
 - Your mind will seize this opportunity to run wild with thoughts, feelings, memories, to do's, and all manner of distractions. That's okay. Don't judge yourself, feel bad, give up, or worry. When you notice your mind start to wander, just recenter with

a quick prayer word, like, "Father..." or "Jesus, have mercy" or "Holy Spirit," and come back to your breathing.

- In the beginning, just 1-2 minutes of this is a huge win, and 10 minutes is a home run. When you feel like you're ready, move from breathing to praying.

Closing Questions

1. What do you think about meditating and memorizing Scripture? Is this something you already do? Have you ever done this before? When?
2. Any thoughts, creative ideas, or feedback on this coming week's Practice? Is there anything new you want to try? Or something that has been helpful to you in the past that you'd like to share?
3. What does it normally feel like when you spend time just "being" with God?