

Improving Our Spiritual Habits



Adult Bible Class
March 8, 2020

Prayer – The Spiritual Dialogue



So how's the Fast going? Are you experiencing any success with avoiding words of criticism or complaint? Or have you given up? Has the process netted any surprises for you? Any new learning? _____

The Spiritual Dialogue

Prayer is ubiquitous to the Christian Faith. All of us supposedly pray on a regular basis. When we think of spiritual habits, prayer is probably the first thing you put on the list. And maybe it's the first thing you feel badly about because you don't do it as much as you would like.



Regardless of how good or not so good your own personal prayer life is, there are always ways to make improvements. Today we're going to examine three levels of prayer, seeing how we might grow in each of them.

Dialogue – it takes two

Noun → conversation between two or more people

Verb → take part in a conversation or discussion

The Developmental Stages of Prayer

For most of us, prayer is a monologue – or at least that’s where we started when we learned to pray.

Stage 1 → Monologue

First, as new believers, we think of prayer as “talking to God,” with the emphasis on *to*. Prayer at this level is a one-sided conversation. We inform God of our needs and the needs of others. The main content is request driven. We may also be inclined to tell God how to answer the prayer.

Jesus’ Model Prayer – And it was a monologue!

- ✚ Our Father Who art in heaven – “We must not conceive of prayer as overcoming God’s reluctance, but as laying hold of His highest willingness.” Archbishop Trench
Not only is God close enough to care, He is great enough to help.
What limits might I have put on God?
- ✚ Hallowed be Thy name – It is always appropriate to give God praise and worship.
- ✚ Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven – God determines my agenda. Have I sufficiently surrendered to His plans for me?
- ✚ Give us this day our daily bread – God is ready and able to give us whatever we need. If we spend time in analyzing our prayers, we will probably find that 90% of our prayer time is spent on this petition. Perhaps we should think about that.
- ✚ And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us – Our prayers must contain confession! If I cling to bitterness or grudges, my hands and heart are not free to receive God’s grace and mercy
- ✚ Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil – God never leads us into sin, but always provides a way out. He gracious gives us full Spiritual Armor. Part of our prayer life might be to put it on! (Ephesians 6:10ff)
- ✚ For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Other monologue prayer models:

Adoration _____

Confession _____

Thanksiving _____

Supplication _____

Praise _____

Repentance _____

Absolution _____

Intercession _____

Supplication _____

Exaltation _____

Stage 2 → Dialogue

A deeper level of prayer comes when we began to realize that prayer is meant to be a two-way exchange of thoughts and ideas. In other words, prayer includes *listening* to God.

Why do you think we falter when it comes to listening for God's side of the conversation? What might be some important considerations when we expect God to speak?

Who heard God speak in the Bible?

How do we get into a place of being receptive to God's voice?

1. Quiet yourself. Remember the bobber OR have a note pad available. Write your distractions down.
2. Ask God, "*What do You want to say to me right now?*" Then just wait. Have a journal or piece of paper ready so that you can write down what you hear. (This is similar to the process

we learned in Lectio Divina.) You may hear a word, a phrase, or just an impression.

✚ In my experience, God is rarely verbose – in fact never has He been particularly wordy. He doesn't need many words to get His point across, like we do.

3. If you don't hear anything – that doesn't matter. Enjoy the stillness! It can be quite refreshing and invigorating. Stillness in the presence of God is amazing.
4. If you are struggle, perhaps ask God (or even yourself), *is there anything that is standing in the way of my hearing from God*. The answers to that might surprise you.
5. Apply what you hear or learn. Don't disregard what God says to you. That is foolish and in many cases, disobedient.

How do we know what we are hearing is actually from God and not just our own internal voice?

1. These experiences are NOT in par with the Scriptures.
2. Test what you hear by holding it up to the Scriptures. If there are disparities, you didn't hear from God. He will never contradict His Word.
3. Hold what you've heard up to your experiences
4. Consult with trusted Christian friends to verify what you've heard
5. Be extremely careful if we think we've heard something for someone else

Always Remember: God answers big prayers and small ones too!

Stage 3 → Unceasing Prayer

1 Thessalonians 5:17 – *Pray without ceasing!*

Matthew 6:7-8 – *And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

What is the purpose of unceasing prayer?