



The Prayer Practice

- 01 Talking to God
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**Based on the Book "*Practicing the Way*"
by John Mark Comer**

01 Start small

Start where you *are*, not where you “should be.” If 30 minutes a day is too much, start with 10. If daily is too much, start with weekly.

02 Think subtraction, not addition

Please do not add a daily prayer rhythm into your already overbusy, overfull life. Think, “What can I cut out?” A morning glance at the news? A lunch break scroll through social media? An evening TV show habit? Formation is about less, not more.

03 You get out what you put in

The more fully you give yourself to this Practice, the more life-changing it will be. The more you just dabble with it and the more shortcuts you take, the less transformation you will experience.

04 Remember the J-curve

Experts on learning tell us that mastering a new skill tends to follow a J-shaped curve; we tend to get worse before we get better. If you currently enjoy your times of prayer, don't be surprised if some of these new types of prayer feel awkward and difficult. Just stay with the Practice and see what it has to offer you.

05 There is no formation without repetition

Spiritual formation is slow, deep, cumulative work that takes years, not weeks. The goal of this four-session experience is just to get you started on a journey of a lifetime. Upon completion of this Practice, you will have a map for the journey ahead and hopefully some possible companions for the Way. But what you do next is up to you.



Talking to God

May Jesus teach you to pray — to commune and communicate with **Him** — and lead you into a deeper life of union with **His** Spirit.

SESSION 01

Overview

In Session 01, we explore the first stage of prayer: talking to God. When the disciples asked Jesus, “Teach us to pray,” in Luke 11, Jesus replied, “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...” He gave them a pre-made prayer, or what some call a liturgy, to pray to God.

Liturgies can look like praying the Lord’s Prayer, singing through the Psalms or using a prayer app on your phone. This way of praying can be incredibly helpful in various seasons of our lives: when we’re learning to pray, when we’re exhausted or sick, when we’re traveling and find it hard to focus, or when we’re living with grief and doubt, searching for the right words to talk to God. “The prayers of the saints,” as we call them, can carry us through.

So we start our four-session journey simply, by praying pre-made prayers to God.

This session’s Practice will focus on the pragmatics of prayer. One of the single most important tasks of discipleship to Jesus is starting, habituating, and fine-tuning a daily prayer rhythm. Your daily prayer can be simple and brief. And as essential as sleeping, eating, and drinking. This is what will keep you praying in the days, months, and years to come.

Ronald Rolheiser writes:

“What clear, simple, and brief rituals provide is precisely prayer that depends upon something beyond our own energy. The rituals carry us, our tiredness, our lack of energy, our inattentiveness, our indifference, and even our occasional distaste. They keep us praying even when we are too tired to muster up our own energy.”

Here are a few questions to hold in your mind as we enter this session's Practice.

When will I pray? First thing in the morning? After my workout? At night? On my lunch break? When the kids are napping? Many people find first thing in the morning to be best, but not always. As a general rule, give God your best time of day, when you are most awake and aware.

Where will I pray? Most of us find it incredibly helpful to choose a dedicated space for prayer — a room in our home, a corner in our bedroom, a park bench near our house, or a literal prayer closet. This place can become a kind of modern-day altar, where you go to open to God. Not because God hears us better at an altar, but because we hear God better!

How should I pray? What posture is best for me? Sitting on a chair, a couch, or the floor? Kneeling? Standing? Walking? Lying down? Out loud or quiet? Does it help to begin with deep breathing first? How do I get my body to work with my heart's desire for God, not against it?

How long should I pray? There's no "right" answer (to this or any of the other questions), but as a general rule: long enough to become present to God. And that may take a bit longer than you expect. If you have a newborn child or some other extenuating circumstances that make 30 minutes too hard, that's fine. Start where you are and take the next step forward in your journey.

In general, if we can't pray for 30 minutes a day, we're simply too busy. And we need to take a serious life audit of what we believe is most important to us. After all, we're not trying to layer on more Christian busyness to our already over-maxed lives; we're trying to slow down and simplify our lives around what we most deeply desire — God.

Opening Questions

- 01 What emotions does the word “prayer” elicit in your heart?
- 02 What challenges do you face in prayer?
- 03 What invitation do you sense from God to go deeper in prayer?

Notes

As you listen the teaching as a group, feel free to use this page for notes.

What are some key ideas? Or what really resonates with you?

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

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

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

—Luke 11v2-4

Discussion Questions

- 01 What stuck out to you from that teaching?
- 02 Are pre-made prayers a part of your life with God, or not?
- 03 What support do you need from this community as we go on this journey with God?

Practice

SESSION 01: TALKING TO GOD

Transformation takes more than knowledge—it takes practice. Take a moment to consider what steps the Spirit might be inviting you to take before the next session in response to what you've learned.

01 Create a daily prayer rhythm

Decide on a time and a place to pray, if possible, every day this week.

Decide on and commit to a time duration. Don't overreach. Start where you are. If you don't pray daily, aim for 10-15 minutes. If you pray for 10-15 minutes, consider upping it to half an hour. Just take the next step.

Create routines or rituals you actually enjoy to make your daily prayer habit something you look forward to all day long — light a candle, make yourself coffee or tea, sit by a window you love, go outside, savor the quiet, or put on worship music.

Those of you who are more kinesthetic may find it helpful to pray while walking, inside or in nature, or with something to keep your hands busy, like knitting or drawing.

Ultimately, work with your personality, not against it.

Write your plan here.

02 Pick out a pre-made prayer and talk to God

Try using one of the sources we mentioned earlier.

- **The Lord's Prayer**
- **The Psalms** — See below for recommendations
- **Scripture** — Find a passage that resonates with your heart and pray it back to God
- **Singing** — Sing acapella, put on a worship album, or play an instrument
- **Liturgy** — *The Book of Common Prayer*, *The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle, or *Every Moment Holy* by Douglas Kaine McKelvey
- **Apps** — Echo, Lectio 365 from 24-7 Prayer, Pray as You Go from the Jesuits, or Hallow

If you don't have a strong preference, we recommend you start by praying the Psalms or one of the prayers in this Guide.

You can start in Psalm 1 and pray through the book. Or you can pray a psalm based on your emotional or spiritual state that day.

Here are some recommendations.

- **To begin your day with God:** Psalm 5, 19, 20, 23, 25
- **When you are sad:** Psalm 13, 22, 42, 77
- **When you are in distress:** Psalm 57, 60, 86
- **When you are scared:** Psalm 27
- **When you are hurt:** Psalm 10
- **When you ache for more of God:** Psalm 63, 84
- **When you want to repent:** Psalm 51
- **When you are grateful:** Psalm 9, 103
- **When you want to worship:** Psalm 8, 148-150

Whatever you decide, pray at least once a day.

Circle or write what you feel led to try.

Reach Practice

SESSION 01: TALKING TO GOD

We all learn differently. Some of us prefer reading, others listening, and others doing. If you'd like to go deeper, choose what resonates with you and give it a try! Even if you don't try a Reach Practice, remember to journal in the Prayer Reflection section before your next session as a group.

Reach Practice

SESSION 01: TALKING TO GOD

To begin, find somewhere quiet. Put away your phones or any other distractions, and get into a comfortable, but alert position.

Take a few deep, slow breaths. Become aware of your surroundings, the sounds, how your body is today. Open up to God in this present moment.

Then, praying from what you imagine or feel is a deep place within you, pray like this:

“Our Father”

Think about the idea of God as your loving Parent, one who has good and kind intentions toward you. If you like, imagine him embracing you, or smiling at you. Picture his face. Make eye contact with him.

“In heaven”

Think about the idea that God is all around you. Like oxygen, he surrounds and soaks your body, his Spirit abiding within you like oxygen. As you breathe, imagine that each breath invites God deeper into you, remembering that God loves living here, in you.

“Hallowed be your name”

Sit with your 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. You may just want to imagine your whole being caught up into his, and what it feels like to be mingled with the God of love.

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”

As we experience God's heart, allow it to inspire prayer for your city/church/community/life. Pray from this place of parental love. Allow the Spirit to lead you towards people, places, and situations that he longs to deliver, heal, and provide for. This type of prayer is referred to as intercession.

If you don't have a sense of God's leading, that's okay, think of specific things you're aware of in your life and others to pray for.

If you're in a group, one at a time, spend time as a 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”**

Now spend some time asking God for things you need. Remembering that God is your Father, bring to him the provision, healing, and understanding you need, asking him to intervene. Your daily bread may be physical, relational, financial, emotional, or spiritual. Think of all the places you need him, inviting him to arrive there.

If you are in a group, do this with each person praying silently, out loud one at a time, or all together at once.

**“Forgive us our
debts, as we also
have forgiven
our debtors”**

Knowing that God sees you and longs to heal every part of you, spend a few minutes now in quiet asking God for forgiveness in specific areas in your life. You can do that by speaking out loud the specific areas of sin and shame in your life, or by asking the Spirit to search your heart and reveal them to you.

Once you're done, ask the same for those who have sinned against you, asking the Spirit to help you to continue to forgive them, releasing them to God.

If you are in a group, break into groups of 2-3 to confess sin to each other, only as you feel comfortable, or sit in a few moments of silence together.

**“And lead us not
into temptation, but
deliver us from evil”**

Ask for God's strength and resolve to resist temptation in the three enemies of your soul: the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.

The World: its ideologies, consumerism and materialism, promiscuity, escapism, addiction, and greed. The Flesh: its pride, self-gratification, lust, and prejudice. The Devil: his lies, shaming, hatred, violence, and accusing.

Ask for the Spirit to save you from giving into the temptation of all three, even from what you're unable to see in your life. Ask for God's positive blessings in these spaces, inviting his goodness to lead the way and make itself evident in your every moment.

**“For yours is the
kingdom, the power
and the glory, forever
and ever. Amen”**

Take a moment to verbally declare the reality of this in your own language. Attributing with love all glory to God in your body, your life, and the world around you.

Finish with a prayer of thankfulness and gratitude for God's presence with you during this time.

Prayer Reflection

SESSION 01: TALKING TO GOD

Reflection is a key component in our spiritual formation.

Millenia ago, King David prayed in Psalm 139v23-24:

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Trevor Hudson, a scholar on Ignatian spirituality, has said, “We don’t change from our experience, we change when we reflect on our experience.”

If you want to get the most out of this Practice, you need to do it and then *reflect* on it.

Prayer Reflection

SESSION 01: TALKING TO GOD

Before your next time together with the group for Session 02, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

01 Where did I feel resistance in prayer? Internally or externally?

02 Where did I feel delight?

03 Where did I most experience God's nearness?

Note: As you write, be as specific as possible. While bullet points are just fine, if you write it out in narrative form, your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.