

doesn't affect God's ability to hear, but it is hopeless as a contribution to public worship.

5. Apply scriptural promises

The Scriptures are filled with God's principles for God's people. God's will is often summed-up in a promise. Only by knowing the promises of God can you use them. Reminding yourself of them frequently, and claiming them with humility, joy, and expectancy is a great boost to faith. A notebook with scriptural promises written under subject headings will be a great help. Many Christians of the past have found it helpful to keep such a spiritual diary.

Some examples of texts you might find helpful are

Philippians 4:6 - useful at the beginning of a prayer-session.

James 4:8 will build your faith. When praying for those who are leading sinful lives

1 John 3:8 is always God's will for them.

I cannot remember the source of the quotation beneath but it is a marvellous truth. *"The power of prayer cannot be diminished by distance. It is not limited by age, infirmity, or daily duty. Political changes and restrictions cannot alter prayer's effectiveness; for the word still stands, "If you shall ask anything in My name I will do it"*

Help! I'm stuck

Sometimes prayer is difficult. Distractions come in various guises, & may be caused by tiredness, minor ailments, lack of concentration - & lack of enthusiasm! Sometimes you may get bored & need to vary your routine. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a well known preacher in the 20th century, & wrote *"Learn how to start yourself off. Start by reading something that will warm your spirit. You need to learn to use a spiritual choke...always respond to every impulse to pray, such must never be regarded as a distraction, always respond to it immediately and thank God that it happened to you frequently."*

All believers know discouragement from time to time. Don't worry when discouragement comes. It's a sign you're normal! 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 gives an insight as to how the Apostle Paul also experienced difficulty. Effective private prayer never just happens. Experiment to find out what works for you.

Spiritual carelessness can lead to problems in praying. These include wasting time, failure to plan, boredom, daydreaming, and sin.

The story of David's adultery with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11 is a classic picture of spiritual carelessness, resulting in decline & finally sin. The pull of the "old" life ought to drive us to be more humble, watchful, & dependent on God.

Times of dryness come to all believers occasionally. When life is like a desert, with few oases, remember the God who sustained His people supernaturally in a desert for 40 years. He'll do the same for you - & for as long, if necessary. Rooted in God you will survive, & be victorious in the most testing experiences, Psalm 1:1-3 guarantees this. Your life will be kept fresh by God's hidden springs. Learning to pray will help!



Learning to pray



You will need a Bible handy as you read this leaflet.

Christians have been brought into fellowship with Jesus and are now friends with God! This is an amazing privilege, the effects of which are felt in several ways. Each Christian has been made a new creation - or new being - by being joined to Christ. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Now find 1 Peter 2:2. If a baby is to grow, it needs a proper diet. Part of the diet for a new Christian is prayer. That is what this leaflet is mainly about. Other parts of the "spiritual diet" are reading the Bible, and becoming friends with other Christians.

What is prayer?

Basically, prayer is talking with God, and it can be wonderfully joyful and intimate to the Christian because God is our friend. Yet prayer is also serious and awe-inspiring because we talk with the infinite, Almighty One. Hebrews 10:22. declares: *"Let us come near to God with a sincere heart and sure faith."* When we approach God in prayer the sense of God's holiness will expose areas of sin in our lives. (Verses such as 1 John 1:9 and Psalm 66:18 can help with our sense of uncleanness).

Four reasons why you should pray

1. Jesus did

God's aim is to make us like His Son (See Romans 8:29), & Jesus prayed! In fact, He made sacrifices in order to invest time in conversation with His heavenly Father. Mark 1:35 illustrates this, but it is only one of several examples.

Another example is found in Luke 6:12. The day had come for Jesus to choose His first disciples. It was an important day, & an important decision. This verse shows us how Jesus prepared to make the choice.

2. Jesus tells His followers to pray

Part of the teaching of Jesus on prayer is found in Matthew 6:5-14. You may recognise this as "The Lord's Prayer." Whilst it is possible to use this prayer exactly as it stands, it is in fact a "guideline" prayer - a series of "pegs" upon which to hang prayers of all kinds - an aide-memoire.

What are the most important points of the Lord's Prayer that affect you and your praying?

Some other sayings of our Lord about prayer are found in Matthew 7:7-11, John 14:13-14 & John 15:16.

3. God answers prayer

Yes, He really does. Remember, though, that what is best for us is not always what we ask, & God who has become our loving Father, will only do us good. John 16:23-24 & Ephesians 6:18 give helpful insights about prayer as does Luke 18:1-8. God does answer prayer! So let's believe that God will answer our prayers. It is a good idea to keep a spiritual journal or notebook. Then, in times of doubt, or when the devil puts us to the test, our notes will be a source of encouragement.

Over the years you will learn of God's faithfulness towards you. He is for you, & will never let you down. The apostle John knew something of this, & recorded it in 1 John 5:14-15.

4. Praying will help keep you from sin. See what Jesus says to Peter about this in Matthew 26:41.

As we pray we draw near to God - & as we draw near to Him we become more like Him, for we shall come more & more under His influence. Therefore, "*Come near to God, and He will come near to you*" (James 4:8).

Five ways to get started in prayer

You may never have prayed before in your life, & you don't know where to start. You have to learn as you go along; I can only give you guidelines to get you started. No-one learns to pray by talking about prayer or reading about it, but by praying.

The first thing is to come to God as you would to a friend, and ask Him, as His disciples did, "*Lord, teach us to pray*" (Luke 11:1).

1. Just the two of you

In Acts 2:42 we discover Christians meeting together for prayer. Such activity helps the spiritual life to grow. A priority in prayer will always be to do as Jesus did in Matthew 14:23. You need to find spare time to be alone with God. Prayer is a two-way affair. So don't do all the talking! Listen as well. Many find it helpful to set aside a specific time each day. You might start with only five minutes, & as you appreciate God's presence more, you will find your prayer time gets longer. So, what's the best time to pray? Jesus prayed early in the morning (Mark 1:35), & you might find this your best time. Jesus used it to prepare for the day ahead. You will need to discover your own "best time".

Jesus wants to be our best friend & we will grow to want to spend much time with Him. For a clue as to how to do this see 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18. The words "at all times" here do not mean that we must be on our knees all day long! It means that in every situation we are conscious of the Lord being with us. We must be careful not to fall into the trap of spending half an hour in prayer at the beginning of the day, and then saying "goodbye" to the Lord until the same time tomorrow. Some people also find it helpful to pray in particular places.

2. The prayer of faith

Jesus promises that our prayers will be answered. Therefore, we believe Him, and expect answers. Read Matthew 21:21-22 and ask yourself: "Is this the kind of faith exercise?" If it isn't, ask Him to help you in this. Verse 22 is worth learning by heart.

3. Find out God's will

Earlier we looked at 1 John 5:15. Did you notice that God hears us when we ask for anything that is according to His will? Our prayers ought therefore to be similar to those of Jesus, & in the same spirit as He prayed when He said, "not what I want, but what You want" (Matthew 26:39).

4. Try it with a friend

A glacier is a river of ice, frozen at its source, & frozen at the mouth. Tragically, many believers are also frozen at the mouth! They never pray aloud, & therefore miss out on one of the great privileges of the Christian life — leading others to the Lord in prayer. Church prayer-meetings and homegroups are greatly impoverished by a lack of willing prayer-participants. The only way to begin is to open your mouth and talk to the Lord! It will help you to pray in a small group that meets together regularly. Then move on to pray in the larger church gathering, & when there is opportunity, with unconverted loved-ones and friends.

Never be long-winded when praying with others. It's true that in the past prayers of twenty minutes were not unusual. Today, however, such long prayers are likely to cause loss of attention.

Do speak up, especially in large gatherings. Mumbling towards the floor