

WHEN AND HOW SHOULD I PRAY?

Introductory prayer thanking God for privilege of access to Him, Lord of creation. Pray he would speak into our hearts, in Jesus name.

UK is mainly secular but surveys show over 75% of population pray. Many are not Christians or other adherents of other religions.

Before I was a Christian I had prayers of two types: one the childish Christopher Robin one, bless relatives and make me good, taught by mother. Many people continue if habit or fear something terrible would happen. Second emergency prayer when other ways have failed. Rabbi Lionel Blue, man falling over cliff catch grass 200 foot drop. In desperation God if there help me. Heard, yes I am here let go and trust me. Is there anyone else up there? In my case it was fear of flying that led to many prayers as the plane took off. Positive outcome seen as coincidence at the time – forgot about it.

What is prayer, see Jesus words in Matthew 6:6-8 ““When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” It says “when” - prayer is not an option. It says pray to your father. Prayer is not a ritual but relationship with God, where we speak to him and he speaks to us. Not reciting, babbling, but conversation to Father. Not to selves, or so anyone else can hear (child who prayed loud please give me chocolates for birthday – God not deaf but grandfather is).

Our Father God is personal. That’s why Jesus told us to **call Him Father.** We have privilege of intimacy with God – speak as child to father. God is very close. That is why Paul said to the Athenians in Acts 17:27 “God.... is not far from each one of us.” But also God is vast and awesome – heavenly power, creator of universe. “He also made the stars” as a throwaway line says in Genesis.

We pray to the Father **through Jesus.** See Eph 2:18 “For through him (Jesus) we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.” No right ourselves to come to God – as all have done wrong causing barrier with God. Because of his sacrifice, Jesus is a mediator making relation to God possible. Name of Jesus has great power, not just an add-on to a prayer. See cheque for £10 m, which with own name would not carry weight, would with Bill Gates name. We have no credit in Bank of Heaven but Jesus’ is limitless.

We also prayer in the Holy Spirit as Ephesians says. Holy Spirit is like Jesus, comes to live in us when we invite him in and become Christians. Paul in Romans 8:26 “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express”.

Why pray? Especially if God already knows everything. First, **prayer helps us to develop a relation with God.** When praying we worship, we thank, we spend time, we discuss, get to know, as we would with a family and friends. We were made for relation with God, those without one feel empty – we all have a God shaped hole as it’s sometimes called. Romans 8:15 says “you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father.". Abba in Hebrew means Daddy. As Christians we are God’s children, and we have an ongoing relation like a child to a parent. We are no longer orphans.... Second, we pray because **Jesus prayed and taught us to pray.** In

Gospels Jesus often prayed, mentioned 25 times. He taught the disciples how and when to pray, as we have already heard. Third, there are **rewards to prayer**, as Jesus said in Matthew 6 “your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” Rewards as long as what we are asking for is appropriate.

Fourth, **results of prayer**. Prayer changes us and changes events. Deist – believe God set universe up and left it to run. Theist - thinks God still active in his creation. If God knows future fixed so no point praying? But if God lives in eternal present, outside time hears all prayers simultaneously. God has all eternity to answer split second prayer of crash driver – own story of crash and my call to Him, and consequences. Wrote off three cars but no one injured. Cynics can always say that it’s all coincidence. But evidence of Christian experience is that God does answer faithfully. Prayer diary (Men’s breakfast, house group). So we know God answers prayer.

Does God always answer? Matt 7:7-11. ““Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened”

But do all who ask receive? Not a blank cheque and some prayers not answered even if all heard. Or not granted in way we like. Reasons, first **unconfessed sin** – Matthew 6:14-15 said “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Unforgiveness for example as a barrier. May be reason do not get through. Isaiah 59:2 “your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” Prayers hit the ceiling. Second could be **due to disobedience**. Deduce from 1 John 3:21-2 “Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.”.

Third **wrong motives** James 4:3 “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” If ask God for Porsche, yacht, 3 wives etc he may ask whether motives are right and if not will not receive. 18th century prayer of John Ward of Hackney “O Lord, thou knowest I have nine estates in the City of London, and likewise that I have lately purchased one estate in fee simple in the County of Essex; I beseech thee to preserve the two counties of Middlesex and Essex from fire and earthquakes, and as I have a mortgage in Hertfordshire, I beg of thee likewise to have an eye of compassion on that county; and for the rest of the counties thou mayest deal with them as Thou art pleased. O Lord, enable the Bank to answer their Bills, and make all my debtors good men. Give a prosperous voyage to the Mermaid sloop, because I have insured it. Preserve me from thieves and housebreakers, and make all my servants so honest and faithful that they may attend to my interests, and never cheat me out of my property night or day.”. His motives not entirely unmixed.

Fourth **may have misunderstood God’s will**. When we make a request of God we can have 3 replies – as in cricket yes no wait. Similar for God. We ask for things we are sure God wants us to have but answer was no – not right thing to ask. Sometimes, grateful in retrospect if God shut some doors in face. Ruth Graham – if God had answered my prayers would have married wrong man several times. God knows what is best for us as us with children – 5 year old and carving knife or matches.

How to pray. As we have a relationship to God, there is **total freedom**. I pray as I drive along, or on the train. A friend of mine was angry with God since she wasn’t getting job and

shouted and yelled at him on the way home – when she got there, a phone call came with a job offer...But that might not be the best method. **Patterns** can still be helpful, One pattern is **ACTS adoration, confession forgiveness, thanksgiving** looking back, and supplication asking things for others. Or could **use Lords prayer as a pattern for prayer:**

“Our Father in Heaven” Thank God for who he is that he is – our father

“Hallowed be thy name” May your name be honoured, often dishonoured in our society, pray people see how great God is, work of his kingdom raised up

“Thy Kingdom come” Rule and reign will come in future but we also pray that his kingdom will come now in people’s lives, they will come to Christ, get healed, filled with spirit.

Moody prayed for 100 people not Christians and 96 converted, other 4 converted at his funeral. Own anecdote about Catherine. 1984-97. Anecdote about Augustine also, attributed conversion to prayers of his mother.

“Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” Not resignation but may not know what is right e.g. in relationship, job. Very liberating as frees from responsibility that many carry.

“Give us this day our daily bread” Communion possibly, bible but also just food. Luther, all necessary for preservation of life Jesus says OK for material prayer if ask for other things first. Men’s breakfast and business difficulties. Anything matters to us matters to God.

“And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us” We are eternally forgiven via Christ but we also need daily foot washing, as Jesus washed the disciples feet from the dirt of the day. Don’t earn forgiveness but sign are forgiven if forgive others. Realise how much God has forgiven, then see cant hold anything against others.

“And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” God doesn’t tempt people but we have weaknesses (James) so Jesus says we can pray for protection in these areas and against Satan.

When to pray. Good to **do it with others.** Matt 18:19 “...if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” Praying out loud is hard especially for new Christians. Don’t worry if find it hard. Don’t feel have to but great when do it. Time to develop skill. **Praying alone** – as Matthew 6 in room. Add 5 minutes praying to 5 minutes of Bible. More do, more want to do. And pray always – not give up job but be aware that are with God – as with wife/husband. Also set aside time to be alone together.

Encourage that **if pray this way, amazing things can happen.** Anecdote (Ellie and healing, desperate week when hitting hospitalisation thresholdm turned when church fasted and prayed? Martin and healing, doctor’s bafflement of recovery from stroke) We have so much to thank him for. Is anything to hard for the Lord?

Prayer: to thank Him for the way he answers prayers, such a great God, privilege beyond understanding that can call maker of universe father. Thank that forgive apologise for neglect of gift, pray all can step forward in prayer field tonight. Amen