

HOW AND WHAT TO

PRAY

PRAY

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If you want to humble a man, ask him
about his prayer life.

Alexander Whyte / Robert Murray M'Cheyne

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INTRODUCTION

We all need help when it comes to prayer.

We wish we prayed more and better.

We hope to become people whose prayers are powerful and effective.

We want to be a church that communes with God, understands him and enjoys him.

This short guide, written mostly by others but collected and edited by me will hopefully be a means by which we all grow in prayer together.

The first section contains historic recommendations for building habits of prayer (Thanks to Tim Keller who collected these teachings from our theological heroes in his book Prayer).

The second section focuses on each petition of the Lord's Prayer, offering an explanation and teachings from the Westminster and Heidelberg catechisms.

Included in every part of the guide are suggestions on how to practice this on your own or in a small group setting.

Thanks to all of you at Resurrection Church who have prayed with me and for me. Thanks to Franky Garcia for editing help.

With hope,

Ben Jolliffe

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AUGUSTINE

Augustine's Method on Prayer is taken from a letter he wrote to a woman named Proba.

First Principle: Become a 'desolate' person.

Understand that nothing outside of Christ will bring you lasting peace, happiness or consolation. Understand that your heart is disordered and things that ought to be third or fourth are first in your heart. Get comfortable with the truth that what you need most is Christ.

Second Principle: Pray for a Happy Life.

If you have embraced the first principle, you will have realized that your heart can only rest in Christ. Therefore the prayer of the second principle will be in line with Christ's work, character and desire for you.

For instance, if God is your highest and greatest pleasure and goal, it will be a shield against greedy prayers, envious prayers, lustful prayers. It helps you out on the level of motivation, not just words.

Third Principle: Pray by Studying the Lord's Prayer

Look at the order and form of the petitions. Look at the different types of requests (adoration, petition, thanksgiving, confession). If you find yourself praying for things that have no connection to the Lord's Prayer, you should reconsider what you pray for.

Fourth Principle: How to Pray in Tribulation(s)

Even godly Christians don't know how to pray in trouble, for on the one hand, trouble does us good, matures us, drives us to God. But on the other hand, trouble is hard and painful and we want it to be removed. Augustine says that Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane should be your guide, pouring out your heart's desire ("let this cup pass") but submitting to the Father ("your will be done").

In Conclusion: Understand that your life circumstances are given to you that you might learn to pray in them. Your children, job, spouse, living situation are not stopping you from praying, they are the context in which you learn to pray better.

AUGUSTINE APPLIED

Suggestions and recommendations for using Augustine's Method:

1. Answer the questions: Where is my heart disordered? In what areas do I currently feel helpless?
2. What seems like a happy life to me? What does that reveal about the disorder of my heart? What does it reveal about what Christ has offered me in the gospel? What can I confess or take hope in based on my answers?
3. Write down five to ten things you pray for regularly. Compare the list to the Lord's prayer. Where do you see overlap? What parts of the Lord's Prayer are missing in your usual rhythm?
4. What in your current life situation feels difficult? What are the various aspects of your life leading you to pray for?

"Pray in hope, pray in faith, pray in love, pray earnestly and patiently, pray as a widow belonging to Christ."

- Augustine

LUTHER

Luther's "A Simple Way to Pray" is taken from a letter he wrote to his barber, a man named Peter Beskendorf.

First, think of prayer as a habit.

Luther tells Peter that prayer will not be easy but will require discipline. He advocates for morning and evening prayer, whether we feel like it or not.

Second, focus your attention through meditation.

Do your best to "warm" your heart to God by reading some part of the Scriptures. Don't read a large section, but a small passage and meditate on it. To meditate, Luther says that you should choose a verse or short passage and consider how it could be a thanksgiving, a confession, an instruction or a prayer to God. He works out these truths and writes them down.

Third, "riff" on your meditations.

Like a musical improvisation, use your meditations to fuel your prayers. Paraphrase and personalize to God what you have been thinking about. Luther recommends against recitation of biblical prayers, but use the sections of the Lord's prayer primarily (and others as needed) as a way of voicing your own needs, aspirations, joys and sorrows.

Fourth, pray from the heart.

Once you have concluded your spiritual exercise, pray whatever comes to mind, whatever is bothering you, whatever seems pertinent to the moment.

Fifth, keep a lookout for the Holy Spirit.

If, in the midst of meditation, "an abundance of good thoughts comes to us, we ought to disregard the other petitions and make room for such thoughts." In this last section, Luther makes sure that we realize that prayer is no mere intellectual exercise but a communion with God himself and we should expect God, by His Spirit, to show up.

LUTHER APPLIED

Suggestions and recommendations for using Luther's method.

1. What does your habit of prayer look like? How can it change? What can you pray about right regarding your habits?
2. Choose a short passage of Scripture as a warmup (3-4 verses from a psalm work perfectly). Either along or in a small group write or discuss how these verses can be a thanksgiving, a confession, an instruction and a petition. If that feels intimidating, just choose one category.
3. After you finish meditating on the scripture passage, do you find scripture pulling you to think about your life differently? Are there any insights from it that should direct your prayers?
4. What else is bothering you right now? What is pertinent to this season of your life. Pray about these things.

"I shall do my best to let you know how I go about praying. May our gracious Lord help you and others do it better than I."

- Luther

CALVIN

Calvin's "Rules for Prayer" are found in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*.

First Rule of Prayer: Joyful Fear

Embrace a sense of the magnitude and seriousness of prayer, a personal audience with the God of the universe. Expect this to produce attentiveness and elevation of the heart.

Second Rule of Prayer: Insufficiency

Otherwise known as spiritual humility, this is a strong sense of dependence on God, recognition of your own faults and shortcomings. Drop pretense, flee phoniness, turn eagerly from your sin and watch your prayers get deeper and richer.

Third and Fourth Rules of Prayer: Submissive Trust and Confident Hope

Often considered together, trust in prayer sounds like, "Here is what I need -- but you know best." At the same time, we expect that our prayers will be heeded and answered because of who God is. Trust and hope appear contradictory but are not because God commands both in us. Held together, the third and fourth rules offer enormous incentive to pray because God knows you will sometimes ask for the wrong things and he will always answer with wisdom.

The Rule Against Rules:

Calvin's fifth rule is a qualification of the word 'rule.' His fifth rule is the rule of grace, which emphasizes that no following of rules makes our prayers worthy to be heard, but also the confidence they are heard because God is a good father.

CALVIN APPLIED

Suggestions and recommendations for using Calvin's "Rules for Prayer."

1. What attributes of God come to mind that you are thankful for (faithfulness, omnipresence, omnipotence, goodness, love, kindness, fatherliness, etc.)? What part of God feels most impressive to you right now? Take a moment to praise God for this.
2. Be specific about where you have fallen short since the last time you confessed your sin. Search through your calendar or think through your day to find moments where you sinned in thought, word, or deed.
3. What do you need right now? Tell God about it.
4. Next, acknowledge that you don't always know what you need or what the right solution is. Entrust yourself to God.

"What I have set forth on the four rules of right praying is not so rigorously required that God will reject those prayers in which he finds neither faith nor repentance, together with a warmth of zeal and petitions rightly conceived."

- Calvin

OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN

Westminster:

This petition teaches us to draw near to God with confidence in his fatherly goodness, with reverence and other childlike attitudes, and with due consideration of his sovereign power, majesty and gracious condescension.

Heidelberg:

This petition awakens us to childlike reverence and trust toward God which is fundamental to prayer. God has become our Father through Christ and will much less deny us what we ask of him than our fathers would refuse us earthly things.

Explanation:

The "in heaven" phrase teaches us not to think of God's majesty in an earthly way, but to expect from his power all things we need for body and soul.

Technically not a petition, this is called "the address." This section of the prayer reminds us not to plunge unthinkingly into prayer but to spend a moment recollecting our standing and situation before God.

Suggestions:

- thank and praise God for his fatherly care of you
- praise him for other attributes that come to mind
- think of your own father, or your own actions if you are a father and how they reflect God or make God even more wonderful in light of our weakness

HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME

Westminster:

In this petition, we acknowledge our utter inability and desire to honour God rightly while also praying that God would help us acknowledge him and esteem him rightly. We acknowledge and esteem God in his names, attributes, ordinances, word (Scriptures), works and every other way we know him. We glorify him in thought, word, and deed. We ask that he would prevent and remove atheism, ignorance, idolatry, profaneness and anything else that dishonours him. We ask that he, by his providence would direct all things to the glory of his name.

Heidelberg:

This petition asks that God would grant that we might know God rightly, that we would glorify and praise God in all his works which display his wisdom, goodness, righteousness, mercy and truth. We ask that God would direct our whole lives (thoughts, words and actions) so that God's name is always honoured and praised.

Explanation:

The word 'hallowed' is somewhat mysterious to modern readers. It is rarely used outside of the candy-themed holiday. But we also don't really know what holiness means. Plus, isn't God holy and hallowed without us asking for it?

Christians have God's name on them and as such, we are praying that God would keep us from dishonouring his name and would empower us to be good and holy.

But this is also a prayer that God's name would be glorified among new people, that more and more people would honour God and call on his name.

Suggestions:

- ask God to help you know him rightly, in his 'otherness' and how unlike us he truly is
- ask him to remove doubt, atheism and cynicism from your heart
- ask God to direct your whole self to him

YOUR KINGDOM COME

Westminster:

In this petition, we acknowledge that we ourselves and everyone else to be under the rule and reign of sin and Satan by default. We pray then, that God would destroy that evil kingdom. In its place, we ask for the gospel to be spread throughout the whole world, to all cultures and peoples. Also for the church to be led well, to be purged of corruption, and not to be persecuted by worldly governments. We also pray for the gifts of Christ to be freely dispensed, leading some to convert to Jesus and to confirm, comfort and build up those already converted. We pray for Christ to rule in our hearts as king, and that he would soon return so we could reign with him forever.

Heidelberg:

This petition asks that God would rule us by his Word and Spirit and that we would gladly submit to him. We also pray that the Church would increase and be preserved, that the works of the devil and sinful men would be destroyed, and that God would help us to endure until the fulness of his kingdom comes.

Explanation:

Even though God currently reigns now as king, it is still possible to refuse God's rule. This rebellion is the cause of all human problems. Which means, we need God's kingdom to come, for his rule to extend over every part of our lives. We want to be so fully "ruled" that we want to obey God in every way, with joy, not grudging obedience.

We also look toward the future in this petition, looking forward with hope to when God will rule fully and all injustice, suffering, poverty and death will end. To pray for God's kingdom to come is to yearn for that future day.

Suggestions:

- pray for anything that seems under Satan's control and ask that God would re-establish his rule
- pray for spiritual good to be done in your heart, the hearts of others and in culture and creation
- ask God to make his kingdom come in our church and city
- ask God to extend his good rule to other people, in Canada and beyond
- pray that Christ would soon return and complete his rule and reign

YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Westminster:

In this petition, we acknowledge that by nature we and all people are not only utterly unable and unwilling to know and do the will of God, but prone to rebel against his word, to murmur against his providence, and wholly inclined to do the will of the flesh and the devil. We pray then, that God would take away from ourselves and others this blindness, weakness, indisposedness, and perverseness of heart and by his grace make us able and willing to know, do and submit to his will in all things. We ask that he would give us humility, cheerfulness, faithfulness, diligence, zeal, sincerity and constancy, just like the angels in heaven.

Heidelberg:

This petition asks that God would grant that we and all people might deny our own will and without murmuring obey God's will, for it alone is good. We also ask that God might grant that everyone carry out the duties of their calling willingly and faithfully.

Explanation:

When we pray this petition, we ask that God will give us grace to bear all sorts of things, good and bad, recognizing that all of it is part of God's divine will. The fact is, we couldn't pray this prayer unless we trusted God's fatherly care. After all, fathers are somewhat inscrutable to their children. Children may not understand their father, but they trust them.

Praying this prayer also protects us from what Martin Luther called the "horrible vices of character assassination, slander, backbiting." If we can trust God with his will, we are freed from the need to control others and our environment. We are not only submitting our wills to God, but our feelings and desired responses as well.

Suggestions:

- ask forgiveness for all the places you have rebelled against God's will
- ask for strength to obey God's will in the future, taking away blindness, weakness and other things that hinder us
- ask for the fruit of the Spirit to fill you as you obey God
- ask that God would help you and others fulfill their duties that have been given them (family, job, friendships, etc.)
- ask for the strength to trust God when his will is difficult to understand

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

Westminster:

In this petition, we acknowledge that we have forfeited our right to all outward blessings of this life and deserve to be deprived of them by God, and to have them cursed to us in the use of them. We also acknowledge that such blessings are not able to sustain us, that we cannot get them on our own, but instead are prone to desire, get, and use them unlawfully. So we pray for ourselves and others, that as we wait on God's providence, that by the use of lawful means or by free gift enjoy a competent portion of them and be content in what God gives us. Finally, we pray that we would be kept from all things that are contrary to our support and comfort.

Heidelberg:

This petition asks that God would provide all our bodily needs, so that we can acknowledge God as the fountain of all good and that our own labour and even God's gifts will not do us any good without his blessing. We also pray that we would withdraw our trust from all creatures and place it only in God.

Explanation:

Daily bread is a metaphor for necessities rather than luxuries. In the first three petitions, we acknowledge God as true food, wealth, happiness and we bring that mindset into this fourth petition. We come asking for what we think we need, but also hoping to be changed in our trust of what he does provide.

But, as we pray for daily bread for our neighbours, it means that we also pray against exploitation, greed, and other systems and practices that crush the poor and deprive people of bread. We pray for a prosperous and just social order.

Suggestions:

- ask forgiveness for when you have coveted the blessings of others or gotten the things of earth in unlawful ways
- ask for patience when you are waiting for your needs to be met
- acknowledge God as the true source of not just biological needs but also our true food, true drink and true wealth
- pray for those who are deprived of daily needs: the hungry, homeless, friendless, hopeless; that God would provide for them
- pray for the systems and events that lead to deprivation, that God would be just and merciful
- ask for trust in God, not in the things of earth

FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS

Westminster:

In this petition, we acknowledge that we, along with all others are guilty of original and actual sin and therefore are debtors to the justice of God, unable to make the least satisfaction for that debt. We pray for all, that God, of his free grace, because of the work of Christ would acquit us from the guilt and punishment of sin and accept us in the Beloved. Moreover, we pray for continued grace and favour, pardon our daily failings, fill us with peace and joy, give us more assurance of forgiveness. Finally we pray that we are able to forgive others from the heart.

Heidelberg:

This petition asks that God would, for the sake of Christ's blood, not impute to us wretched sinners any of our transgressions or the evil that still clings to us. We also ask that this grace would work in us a fully determined heart to forgive our neighbours.

Explanation:

This petition is a challenge to our pride and a test for how deeply the gospel has gone into us. If we find confession and forgiveness of others intolerable, something has gone wrong in our hearts. Jesus tightly links our relationship with God to our relationship with others.

Calvin puts it bluntly, "If we retain feelings of hatred in our hearts, if we plot revenge and ponder any occasion to cause harm, and even if we do not try to get back into our enemies' good graces, by every sort of good office deserve well of them, and commend our selves to them, by this prayer we entreat God not to forgive us.

Suggestions:

- confess all known sin by thinking through the different aspects of your life (relationships, work, hobbies, spiritual life, etc.) and confess any sin that comes to mind
- ask God for forgiveness and then thank him in faith for his forgiveness
- ask that the good news of Jesus' death in our place would sink deep into your own heart
- forgive anyone who has harmed you
- ask that any feelings of bitterness or lovelessness would be removed from your attitude towards others

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

Westminster:

In this petition, we acknowledge that our wise, righteous and gracious God for holy and just ends may so order things that we may be assaulted, foiled and for a time be made captive by temptations. Also, we acknowledge that Satan, the world and the flesh are working powerfully to draw us aside, and that we, even after being pardoned, are because of our corruption and weakness subject to be tempted and willingly move toward temptation. In and of ourselves, we are unable to resist temptation or recover from it. So we humbly ask God to overrule the world, subdue the flesh, restrain Satan, order all things, bestow and bless the means of grace and make us more watchful that we would be kept from temptation. If tempted, that God would, by his Spirit, powerfully support us and enable us to stand.

Heidelberg:

This petition realizes that we are so weak that we cannot stand even for a moment. Also, our enemies, the devil, the world and our own flesh do not cease to attack us. So we ask God to uphold and strengthen us by the power of his Spirit, so that in spiritual battle, we would not go down to defeat but always firmly resist our enemies, until we obtain complete victory.

Explanation:

This petition is not a prayer for freedom from all temptation (the Bible in other places makes it clear that it is inevitable). Our trials and temptations can be used by God to strengthen our faith. Rather, this petition asks to be spared from entering into temptation, that is, the entertaining and considering the prospect of giving into sin. Deliverance from evil has a slightly different connotation, suggesting deliverance from evil outside the body, forces and people that would threaten harm to us.

Suggestions:

- take a moment to list some of the trials, temptations and hardships you are facing right now
- ask God for the strength to bear up under each hardship and the wisdom to escape from every temptation
- ask God to work powerfully that you might be filled with his Spirit and desire sin less and less
- ask that God would return soon and rescue his people

Are you struggling to form healthy habits of prayer? Do you need some direction on what sorts of things you should be praying for?

This short, easy-to-follow booklet is packed with insights from theological heroes of the past and the historic catechisms of the church.

Use it on your own or with a small group.

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for its neighbours.

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