

# How Do I Develop a Consistent Prayer Life?

## Key Thought

“For many years I was bothered by the thought that I was a failure at prayer. Then one day I realized I would always be a failure at prayer; and I’ve gotten along much better ever since.”

Brother Lawrence

“What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer.” E.M. Bounds

“Prayer is the way to both the heart of God and the heart of the world—precisely because they have been joined through the suffering of Jesus Christ...Praying is letting one’s own heart become the place where the tears of God’s children merge and become tears of hope.” Henri Nouwen

I engage in the discipline of prayer in order to make myself aware of God’s presence in my life and allow him to change my life. Through prayer God heals me and speaks to me. Through prayer I recognize that I tap into the power of God, and join the heart of God for the world. As a result, my prayers can be, as James writes, “powerful and effective.”

## Key Questions

1. How do I view prayer as a thing to do or a relationship I am in?
2. What have been my methods of prayer in the past? Have they been varied or have I found myself in a rut?
3. Do I consciously experience the presence of God everywhere I go? How do I “pray” when I am at work or in the rush of life?
4. Where have I seen the fruit of prayer in my life?
5. What specific times during the day or week do I have set aside for prayer?
6. Do I really believe that prayer works or is it just a spiritual thing to say? If I do, how does my life currently reflect that reality?
7. When I pray do I listen for God? Do I praise God? Do I confess sin to God?

## How?

### *Write your prayers*

This may sound intimidating at first, but it does not have to be. Writing your prayers does not have to mean writing each word (it could even be bullet points!) but allows you to focus during prayer. If it is very easy to have, as Henri Nouwen describes, a “hundred different monkeys” jumping around in our heads during prayer. More importantly, it allows us to see how God is

working in our lives and how our prayers have been answered as we look back on these prayers later.

### ***Set a specific time aside to pray***



While prayer is a constant state of being where you are always in “conversation” with God, it is also obvious in Scripture that God expects us to set specific time aside for concentrated prayer. If this is an area of struggle for you, or you are new to a prayer life, start small. Decide that you will spend 10-15 minutes a day in prayer. When you pray, make sure you are in a place where there is little distraction (an office is generally not an easy place to pray). Once you have developed a pattern in your life, you can vary the type, length, and place of prayer.

### ***Prayer is not just about me!! (The role of intercession)***

It is easy to make prayer just about ourselves, but Scripture is clear that one of our main responsibilities is to “stand in the gap” for each other. Throughout his letters, Paul constantly reminds his readers that he is praying for them. (To the church in Ephesus-“I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers”, Eph. 1:17; To the church of Philippi-“In all my prayers for you,” Phil. 1:4; to the church at Colossae-“since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you”, Col. 1:9) We are to do the same. But it is not just our Christian friends and family that we are to pray for-we are instructed throughout Scripture to pray for our pastors, our governmental leaders (whatever we think about them), our families, non-Christians, and even our enemies.

With this in mind, it is helpful to have different people or people groups (such as leaders) that we pray for on different days of the week. Keep the schedule in front of you where you pray each day, or else it is easy to forget. While you won’t be able to pray for everybody, you can pray for some.

### ***The First Step: A Helpful Formula***

As you enter into prayer, an easy acronym of PRAY can help you focus on the right things. It is very easy to write out your prayers under each of these four categories

#### **Praise**

Thank God for who he is and what he has done in your life. Focus on his character and what you have learned about him. It might help to take a Psalm or passage of Scripture that describes him or what he has done and pray it back to him. Change the pronouns where necessary to help you pray it back to him.

#### **Repent**

One of the most important components of prayer is to confess the sins that we have committed. Think through your struggles and bring them to God in repentance. Don't be afraid to write them down specifically. You will be amazed at the freedom you will experience by simply saying them and writing them down before God. Since prayer is all about intimacy, this is where you will lay yourself before God, stripped down to the ugliest part of you. It's ok. Spend some time in silence, asking God to search you and know you. Ask yourself these questions,

1. What unhealthy habits are in my life?
2. Where do I feel distant from God? Do I feel bored with God? Why?
3. How are my relationships? With my spouse? My kids? My boss? My friends?
4. Where am I having a hard time trusting God? In my career? My family? Other places?
5. As I look at the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control) how am I doing?
6. Where have I not intentionally done what I sensed God was asking me to do?

Take time to think through this and allow God's spirit to convict you, but as He convicts ask for forgiveness and know what Paul meant when he said, "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp, how wide and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-18)

### **Ask**

This is where you bring your own requests as well as the prayers for others to God. You will most likely have a sense as to how to pray, but if not take time to simply listen to God. Prayer is not just about us talking to God, it is about intimacy, of hearing his voice, as Elijah did, in the "sound of silence." If you still are not sure how to pray, tell God that, and know that the Holy Spirit is working on our behalf. "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." (Romans 8:26-27)

### **Yield**

Simply listen. Know that prayer is not about what you say, as much as your willingness to trust in the God who can change lives, including yours. "Be still and know that He is God."

### ***Taking the Next Step: Practicing the Presence of God***

Another part of the spiritual discipline of prayer is to, as Brother Lawrence called it, "practice the presence of God." It is the belief that what Deuteronomy 30:14 says is true, "The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it." Rob Bell puts it this way, "God is always present, we are the ones who show up."

This practice includes recognizing God's presence in every situation (when you wake up, getting dressed, making breakfast, driving to work, while in meetings, etc.). During such times you actually speak to God (albeit not always "out loud", especially if there are other people in the room!) about the situation you are facing. Likewise, you talk to God about the people you are with, and you pray for them. It also helps to have symbols or other reminders around you to cue you into God's presence.

Frank Laubach was a sociologist, educator, and missionary to the Philippines in the early twentieth century who laid out some practical help with this discipline.

In a social setting, whisper “God” or “Jesus” quietly as you glance at each person near you. Practice double vision as Christ does-see the person as he is and the person as Christ wants him to be.

At mealtime, have an extra chair at the table to remind you of the presence of Christ.

While reading a book or magazine-read it to him! “Have you ever opened a letter [email] and read it with Jesus, realizing that he smiles with us at the fun, rejoices with us in the successes, and weeps with us in the tragedies? If not, you have missed one of life’s sweetest experiences.”

When problem-solving at work, instead of talking to yourself about the problem, develop a new habit of talking to Christ.

Keep a picture of Christ or a cross or a word from Scripture someplace where you will see it just as you’re going to sleep. Allow God to have the last word of the day. And when you open your eyes in the morning and see the picture ask, “Now Master, shall we get up?”

Whisper to him our every thought about washing and dressing in the morning, about brushing our shoes and choosing our clothes. Christ is interested in every trifle, because He loves us more intimately than a mother loves her babe.

### ***One final thought on Prayer***

Prayer is one discipline that can be done in a variety of ways in different settings. It is important for your own growth to explore these different ways. Experiment with other types of prayer activities such as prayer walks, praying Scripture, reading liturgical prayers, etc. For more ideas on prayer see Adele Ahlberg Calhoun’s [Spiritual Discipline Handbook](#).