

Lord, Teach Us To Pray

- Is there a form/pattern we must follow in prayer (like asking forgiveness after adoration)?
- Do we have to start our prayers with "Dear God" or some equivalent expression?
- Does it have to end with "in Jesus' name. Amen."?
- What does "pray without ceasing" mean?

I am truly more than happy to use our time today in God's word regarding this question. No question is a bad one. We read about one of Jesus' disciples asking for guidance in prayer as well in [Luke 11:1](#), "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.'" There's nothing new under the sun. However, I'd like to answer them quickly so we can spend some time on what I would consider deeper points on prayer. I hope you understand what I mean. We want to have a basic knowledge of prayer, but we don't want to stay there or spend most of our time on the basics. You can know the fundamentals of prayer, but that doesn't mean we'll understand the power behind communication with God. It doesn't mean we'll be encouraged to do so. That's my practical concern for most of us in the body. It's not so much understanding how to pray but encouraging one another to pray. At least for me, that's more of a challenge.

So, let me quickly answer these questions. We don't want to think of prayer as a formula. It's understandable how we teach our kiddos about prayer (like the A.C.T.S. of prayer), but we should want to move past that as adults. I have no desire to give a technical definition of prayer. We know what prayer is - our speaking to God (though He's not physically visible). A cursory view of scripture does not seem to reveal any rigid pattern.

Generally speaking, we see prayers addressed to God (the Father). Not to be disrespectful, but I'm not totally interested in diving into the "addressing prayer to Jesus" question. While a few passages deserve some thought and attention, I believe the pattern is consistent with reason. Jews would not have thought to pray to Jesus because they didn't know about Him. After all, He had not yet been revealed. When you come to Jesus' own prayers, you'll find Him addressing His prayers to the Father, and Paul or other Christians didn't seem to stray from that pattern either. Not because of a rigid formula but because they're simply addressing God and Jesus pointed others to Him. It's not uncommon to address someone by name when you're talking to them. However, I don't believe God won't listen to us unless we say, "God/Father/Lord," etc."

We had a lesson over a year ago surrounding the phrase "in Jesus' name." Again, as you study this phrase, you'll learn that it's not a formula. You don't have to say "in Jesus' name"

after you do ("do all in the name of the Lord"). Jesus didn't end His prayers with "in God's name. Amen."

While asking for forgiveness is always good if you've sinned, you'll find prayers that do not ask for forgiveness.

Finally, I understand Paul's statement "to pray without ceasing" means we're not to stop praying. I'm sure you're thinking, "thank you, Captain obvious." What I mean is it's not that we have an open-ended prayer all day long. You can't talk to God and man at the same time. Jesus wasn't praying non-stop. But He did give a parable to encourage His disciples to always pray and not lose heart, for example. It simply means that we need to have a habit of prayer. Pray to God. Don't stop praying to Him.

Here are a few passages that sufficiently represent the principle and pattern:

- **Matthew 6:9-13** Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."
 - Take note that prayer is addressed to the Father.
 - Jesus doesn't include what we would typically categorize as "thanksgiving."
 - He didn't teach them to end it with, "in Jehovah's name, Amen."
- **Luke 18:13** But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'
 - It's a short prayer, but we're confident Jesus wouldn't have used an improper prayer to illustrate His point of what a justified servant of God looks like, would He?
- **Nehemiah 2:3-5** I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it."
 - Here's a great example of a man who "prays without ceasing." They don't have to be long. They can be very brief, in fact!
- **Nehemiah 5:19** Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.
 - That's it! No formal end. No pattern to follow. He had a simple request for His God.
- **John 12:27-28** "Now is My soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."
 - It was very impromptu. It was a short prayer. No "amen" at the end. He quickly spoke to His Father.

- **Romans 1:8** First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.
 - Paul addressed his prayers to God the Father.
- **Acts 4:24** And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,
 - The context clearly identifies God as the Father because they later mention His "servant Jesus." It did not end with "in Jesus' name, either. Nor did it include any confession of sin.

However, knowing how to pray doesn't ensure you will pray or have faith in prayer. It's sad that a passage such as **Philippians 4:5-7** ("The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.") could cause us anxiety. A beautiful and comforting NT passage is found in **1 Peter 5:6-7**, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you." So, do you cast your anxieties on Him in prayer? Again, what good does knowledge do if it's not practiced?

With this in mind, before we complete our study of "how to pray," I'd like to point out a few reasons why Jesus instructed His disciples to do so.

- It reminds you of God's kindness - **Luke 11:1-13**
- It reminds you of God's justice - **Luke 18:1-8**
- It reminds you of God's forgiveness - **Matthew 6:5-14**

Let's remember some of Jesus' last prayers to God on the cross:

- **Luke 23:34** And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
- **Luke 23:46** Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!" And having said this He breathed his last.