

LESSON 7

Communicating with God: Prayer

As we've learned, one of the most important things we can do as Christians is get to know God as much as we can. Only by getting to know God can we discover God's love and seek God's plans for our lives and for the world. And only then will we know how to follow God! There are lots of different ways we can get to know God – through our church, our families, our friends, our ministers, etc. There are two ways, though, that we hear from God directly. We've already talked about one of them – reading the Bible. The Bible is God's Word straight to us, so we can trust it to guide our lives. The other way we can hear from God directly is through prayer. Prayer lets us communicate with God any time we want to and ask God to guide us and help us in our every day lives.

Remember what we learned in the last lesson? We thought about our friends and how we know them. We don't rely on other people to tell us about them. We communicate with them directly. In the same way, we find out about God by God's Word to us, not just by what others say about God or even how we feel about God. When we pray, we are also finding out about God. We are getting to know God by talking and listening to God.

Who can pray?

What pictures do you associate with prayer? Do you picture a nun with her head bowed? Do you see a monk? What about a pastor? Lots of people think that only super "religious" people can pray. They think that you have to be a minister, a chaplain, or one of the most active teenagers in Student Life to lead a group in prayer because only they have the "right words."

Think about your times at church or Youth group. Have you ever heard your leader ask for volunteers to pray? Have you ever felt you were a bad "pray-er" or that only one of the leaders should pray? A lot of us are uncomfortable praying because we see it only as a "religious" thing, and well - sometimes we just don't feel very "religious!" Other times we feel like our faith and prayer time is "private;" we don't think there's any need to share it with others.

God never said we have to be a certain kind of person to pray. God would never create all of us and then only want to talk to a few of us, would He? There's no fancy language, age requirement, or "spiritual level" needed to talk to God in prayer. *Anyone* can pray to God!

Why do we pray?

"Religious" or not, God wants us to pray to God. To God, prayer is not about being religious - it's about being in a relationship. God simply wants to communicate with YOU! God wants to spend time with YOU! Think about Creation... do you think God would've created you and then just wanted to leave you alone? No way! God created us to be in a loving relationship with God and with each other.

Lots of people in the Bible were praying men and women. Isaac prayed (Genesis 24:63). Jehoshaphat prayed (2 Chronicles 20:3). Hannah prayed (1 Samuel 1:9-20). Jesus prayed (Mark 1:35). All these men and women knew it was important to pray if they wanted to be in a relationship with God, their Creator.

When do we pray?

Sometimes when we think of ourselves praying, we see ourselves in our beds struggling to keep our eyes open. It's the end of a long day, and all we want to do is go to sleep. We begin our prayers, and say things like, "God thank you for..." and our eyes close. Then we pop them open and try to stay awake. We try to continue saying, "Please God, help me to..." and our eyes close again. Our third try might go like, "Lord, please bless..." Finally, we drift off to sleep, and the next morning we wonder if we ever finished our prayers!

If this is you, don't worry - this is a lot Christians! The good news is that it's OK to fall asleep in the middle of prayers. (God is probably happy you chose God as the last person you talk to that day!) The other good news is that there are other ways to pray – even *better* ways to pray – if before bedtime doesn't work for you. We can pray as we eat our breakfast or in the middle of our morning shower. If we're still too sleepy, though, we can pray throughout the day. Every time the bell rings at school, we can pray for someone we love. Every time we go to our locker, we can thank God for something. Every time someone makes us mad, we can ask God to help us love that person. Every time we get jealous of someone else, we can talk to God about how we're feeling. Any time we're really giddy, we can tell God how happy we are! Get the picture? There's no "right" time to pray. The best time is probably a time when you feel awake, alert, and ready to talk and listen to God, but you can pray to God *anytime*!

Check out what the Bible has to say about prayer:

- *"Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord."* James 5:13-16
- *"...in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God."* Philippians 4:6
- *"Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication."* Ephesians 6:18
- *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing..."* 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Hopefully you get the point. We can pray anytime! Remember, what God wants is to be in a *relationship* with us, which means God wants to communicate with us. Go to God when you're happy, sad, frustrated, goofy, mad, sick, tired... *anything*!

What happens when I pray?

James 5:15-16 says this:

“And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” The Gospel of Matthew says, *“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened,”* (Matthew 7:7,8).

God tells us very clearly that when we pray, God is listening! Big things happen when we go to God in prayer. People with cancer are suddenly healed. Our bad attitude towards school changes. Our hatred towards our enemies disappears. God tells us that the prayer of a righteous man (or woman!) is “powerful and effective.” When we have faith, lives are changed as we give them to God in prayer!

What if God doesn’t answer our prayers?

That’s a great question because more than likely, you’ve felt like God has not answered one or more of your prayers. Remember the Scripture above from Matthew? (“Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find...”) Think about this: If God doesn’t answer your prayer, “Keep on asking... keep on searching...” God is happy when we continue to put our requests and needs in front of God. It shows God every day that we trust God with every detail of our lives, and it gives those details to God on a daily basis. If your answer still doesn’t come, ask yourself how God could have answered your prayer in a different way. Then consider how God, in all of God’s goodness, could make a huge blessing out of God’s different answer to your prayer!

What are the different ways to pray?

Prayer is talking. This means we just tell God all that’s on our hearts and minds. Why not?! God already knows it anyway! Talking to God is better than sharing things with even your closest friend. God is always available and 100% attentive. God listens to everything we have to say and receives us in love. Here is a good formula for talking in prayer... the acronym **ACTS.**:

A – Adoration (telling God how cool He is)

C – Confession (telling God what you’ve done wrong and that you’re sorry)

T – Thanksgiving (thanking God for all the blessings you have in your life)

S – Supplication (telling God what you need and want for yourself and for others)

Sometimes words can’t express exactly what we are thinking. During these times, it is good to look to the Bible for help. The Psalms help us express our love, fear, devotion, anger, joy, sadness, guilt, thanksgiving, and other stuff to God (basically, they tell God how we’re feeling in the midst of life.). Some great Psalms that you can pray are:

To give God thanks: Psalm 40: 1-5, 95: 1-7; 105: 1-6; 23; 92; 98; 150

To ask God to be close: Psalm 42; 141

If you need forgiveness: Psalm 32; 51

In time of fear: Psalm 27; 23; 46

If we're *really* stuck, we can look to words like those in Romans: *"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God,"* (8:26,27). When life is stinky, and we can't even begin to explain how sad we are or how much we hate what's going on in our lives, we can just ask God to let God's Spirit speak for us. The Holy Spirit will actually pray *for us* so that God will know just how we're feeling! Cool, huh?

If you don't like any of these ways to pray, you can always start with the good ol' Lord's Prayer, which Jesus taught his disciples. The Lord's Prayer is (you can also find it in Matthew 6:9-13):

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

Prayer is listening. This is a tough one because most of us would much rather talk than listen. Listening to God means that we stop whatever we are doing and concentrate on God around us. We can listen to God as we sit in silence. We can listen to God as we listen to the sounds of nature and God's creation around us. We can listen to God as we read Scripture and understand that God is speaking to us. We can listen to God when we listen to other people encourage us, give us advice, or set us back on the right path. Listening to God means we stop thinking about what *we* want to do or be, and we focus on what *God* wants.

Prayer is waiting. Waiting is never easy, but it reminds us that our lives are in God's hands, not ours. We can wait for God to answer our prayers, show God's love to us, meet our needs, the list goes on! However long the wait, it is worth it when we see God in an even bigger and better way than we did before!

Praying is saying, "Yes!" This means that when we pray to God, we are continuing on in our relationship with Christ. We are saying "yes" every day to our commitment to God. We are saying "yes" to growing, sharing, witnessing, loving, etc.

Remember that as we pray, we are limited by *nothing*! If our hearts and minds are open, God is there to do the rest! The Holy Spirit changes our lives each moment we pray and seek God. We don't have to be super "religious," and we don't have to have perfect bedtime prayers. God wants the little details of our lives. God wants our praise and thanksgiving. God wants our time – even if it is only 3 minutes every day. As you pray more and more as a Christian, you'll see that God *will* change your life, your perspective, and your attitude, and God *will* become your very best friend. Enjoy your time with God and know that God LOVES God's time with YOU!!

* Go The Extra Mile!

Find a psalm you like in the Bible and rewrite it in your own words OR commit to praying for 10 minutes every day this week.



