

10 Practical Steps in Following Jesus

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Step 5: Prayer - Two-Way Communication

Why do we Pray?

Prayer is simply talking with and listening to God. We need to set aside time in each day to seek God and pray to Him. This will enable our relationship with God to develop because we will be spending time communicating with Him. God wants us to talk to Him. He wants us to ask for His help and He wants to speak to us. God loves us and cares for us. In fact, He has promised never to leave us or forsake us (see Hebrews 13:5). As your relationship with God grows through your prayer life, you will wonder how you ever managed before without Him.

Where does Jesus fit in?

The Son of God, Jesus, was a man just like us, and He went through all the same problems and temptations that we do. Therefore, He does understand what we need (see Hebrews 4:15). He is also now at God's right hand interceding (or praying) for us (see Romans 8:34). Jesus wants to be a friend to us and help us to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Wherever we go, Jesus goes with us by the Holy Spirit. He is always there to pray to for guidance and help. We can share our problems, our joys, and in fact, every aspect of our lives with Him. We are now God's children and co-heirs with Jesus (see Romans 8:17).

How should we pray?

As new Christians, God knows that we have very little knowledge of Him and He wants to help us. He will be pleased if we simply pray to Him and ask Him for things that we need. However, we need to grow beyond this and begin to pray for other people and situations (see

Ephesians 6:18). God eventually wants us to learn how to be directed and led by the Holy Spirit in our praying. The Holy Spirit is our guide and counsellor (see John 14:16,26) and He will teach us how to pray (see Romans 8:26,27). God not only hears and answers our prayers; He helps us to pray them! The Bible urges us to,

“Devote yourselves to prayer; being watchful and thankful.”
(Colossians 4:2)

In fact, we should,

“...not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”
(Philippians 4:6)

This verse also points out that as part of our prayer life we should be thanking God for all He has done and especially for prayer that has been answered.

Right motivation

When you pray, do it to please God and not just to please yourself. In James 4:3 we read,

“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

God wants us to pray with the right motivation. It doesn't matter if we pray hesitatingly or with faltering words. God will still hear us and act

if we have the right motives. We certainly don't need to use a special religious language when we pray, and we do not have to use special prepared prayers (see John 16:24). To check your motives, ask yourself whether what you pray is for God's glory and the extension of His Kingdom.

Pray with a clean heart

When we pray we need to be clean before God so that we can come before Him with confidence and look Him in the eye (see Hebrews 4:16). If you have sinned then confess your sin and ask God to forgive you (see I John 1:9). God also tells us to forgive others no matter how wrong they are, because He forgave us so much in Jesus (see Matthew 6:14,15). Once we have done this we can come before God with confidence, because we will no longer have hearts that condemn us. If we live as God wants and obey Him, we can ask and receive anything (see I John 3:21-24).

Should we pray with others?

"For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."
(Matthew 18:20)

We should pray to God alone on a daily basis. However, the Bible also mentions groups of Christians praying together to great effect (see Acts 4:23,24; Acts 12:12). Ask your local church for details of their prayer meetings.

Prayer suggestions:

- Prayer can be accompanied by a daily Bible reading.
- You should spend at least five minutes praying each day. As your relationship with God grows you will find that five minutes of prayer is not enough. You will want to go to God in every situation because you will only want to do His will.

- You should find somewhere for your prayer time that is quiet and where you will not be disturbed.
- In our times of prayer we should leave room for God to speak to us.
- We should pray to God the Father in Jesus' name. This helps us to keep our motivation for prayer correct and also the Bible teaches us to pray this way (see John 14:13; John 16:23).
- Within our prayers it is good to praise God for who He is and to thank God for what He has done for us and others.

Questions and tips:

1. Read Mark 11:22-25 and then answer the following questions:
 - a. Who do these verses apply to?
 - b. What can we do through prayer?
 - c. What should be the attitude of our heart when we pray?
 - d. What should we do before we pray?
2. What will you receive in prayer if you believe? (Matthew 21:21,22)
3. How may we be certain that God hears our prayers? (I John 5:14,15)
4. To what extent is God able to answer our prayers? (Ephesians 3:20)
5. What simple failure can often be the reason for us not receiving from God? (James 4:2)
6. How should I respond when I feel that I am praying according to God's will and yet my prayers seem to be unanswered? (Hebrews 10:35,36)
7. What sorts of things can we pray for? (Matthew 9:38, I Timothy 2:1,2; James 1:5)
8. Read Matthew 6:5-15 which is a passage where Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray and then answer the following questions:
 - a. Where should we pray? (verse 6)

- b. Are long prayers necessary? (verse 7,8)
- c. Does God know our needs? (verse 8)
- d. To whom should we pray? (verse 9)
- e. When we pray should we exalt and lift up our Father in heaven? (verse 9)
- f. Does God want us to ask for our daily needs? (verse 11)
- g. Should we ask God to forgive us for our sins? (verse 12)
- h. Should we ask God for help to resist satan and temptation? (verse 13)
- i. Should we forgive others? (verse 14,15)

Prayer

Almighty God, thank you for making yourself known to me. I want to get to know you more and for the relationship between us to grow. Help me to learn how to pray to you and to be disciplined in the setting aside of my time to do this. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.